Social Justice Issues Identified in Scoping

In the summer of 2004, the Puget Sound Regional Council’s Executive Board (comprised of locally elected officials from throughout the four county region) made a decision to update VISION 2020. By the year 2040 the region is expected to grow by another 1.6 million residents and have 1.1 million more jobs. The Executive Board made the decision after an eight-month public outreach and comment phase that shaped the scope of the work of the update. During this public scoping process, the Regional Council conducted a wide variety of outreach activities. These efforts generated 1,200 comments addressing 25 topical areas. The results of this process were published in a scoping report and in the August 2004 Regional View. The Regional Council encourages and welcomes public participation and comment at every stage in the update.

Social Justice emerged as one of the 25 topical areas in which the Regional Council received comments during scoping. Specifically, comments encouraged the update to address the social implications of the region’s growth strategy. The VISION’s core objectives of concentrating growth within urbanized areas has and will continue to have impact on existing populations. Urban infill and the redevelopment of central city neighborhoods may contribute to gentrification, and will likely impact minority and low-income communities. Comments urged the update to acknowledge these issues, and discuss how they might be addressed.

The remaining 24 topic areas also have relevance for and may affect minority and low-income communities in a manner that may be different than for the region as a whole. Where these differences are identified, specific strategies should be developed:

- Agriculture and Food
- Data and Technical Issues
- Education
- Funding and Finance
- Health and Physical Activity
- Leadership
- Sustainability
- Urban Growth Areas
- Centers
- Demographics
- Environment
- Green Development
- Housing
- Marketing and Public Involvement
- Transportation
- Utilities and Energy
- Coordination
- Economy
- Freight Transportation
- Greenspace, Parks, and Open Space
- Land Use
- Regulations
- Urban Design
- Implementation

Regional Council staff also met with a leadership forum convened by El Centro de la Raza. The attached summary contains specific comments from that meeting.
VISION 2020 Update Scoping

Outreach Meeting with El Centro de la Raza
Tuesday, March 23, 2004

In attendance: approximately 24
– in attendance were El Centro de la Raza Board members and staff, including lawyers, university professors, business people, a superior court judge, a state representative, students, and a representative from the Mexican consulate

Rocky Piro and Ben Bakkenta began with a brief overview of the Regional Council and its planning responsibilities. The VISION 2020 Update video was then shown, and Estela Ortega, El Centro de la Raza Director of Operations – and recent presidential appointment to the Economic Development District board - facilitated questions and comments. Comment forms were distributed and information was provided for submitting material to the Regional Council. One set of written comments was received and is attached.

The following comments were provided by individuals attending the meeting:

➢ In the past, the Chicano, Latino, Hispanic community has not been included in processes like this – it is welcome that the Regional Council is reaching out. The Hispanic population is now a fast-growing part of the region.

➢ Urban development projects sometimes result in people of color being forced out of neighborhoods and districts into other areas – this is a concern.

➢ There has been a tremendous growth in wealth in the region in the last several decades; yet this wealth is not well distributed. Don't just discuss property and development – also discuss workers, communities and their needs.

➢ The update should address the social crisis of political discrimination. Racism continues to be a crisis in urban regions and throughout the United States. Find opportunities to address how to stop social divisions. The update should address social justice and include social equity statements.

➢ When looking at the urban region, also consider urbanized Indians – this group is often overlooked. This group is subject to inequities in education and random arrests. The Puget Sound region has one of the largest urban Indian populations among U.S. metropolitan areas.
The VISION 2020 material appears to be "hopelessly global." More needs to be done with housing issues. The update should address inclusionary housing, non-market incentives, and subsidies. There is an over-reliance on the market to provide affordable housing.

Lower-income individuals have been displaced downtown and persons of color are being displaced in Seattle's Central District. Minority groups are being forced from desirable locations that are close-in into less desirable areas further out.

A question was posed regarding the status of the Regional Transportation Improvement District.

More needs to be done to find less regressive funding sources for transportation-related improvements.

Clarification as asked regarding the relationship of the Economic Development District to the Regional Council's policy boards and Executive Board.

A question was posed regarding the minority composition of the Regional Council's staff. In the discussion that followed, comments were made that when an organization is not reflective of the larger community, it makes it problematic for outreach with minority groups. It was also noted that organizations such as the Regional Council must make extra effort to recruit minorities so that diverse interests and perspectives are institutionalized and considered on a daily basis as the agency makes public policy decisions. Minority communities may not trust or embrace public policy that was developed by an organization in which they were not an integral part of the decision-making process.

Is the Regional Council doing enough to ensure that contracts to women- and minority-owned businesses are being pursued with the federal dollars the agency manages? Citing CFR 49.26, the person making the comment stated that agencies applying for and/or managing federal dollars have a fiduciary responsibility to look at contracts to such businesses.

Institutional racism needs to be addressed.

Gentrification is a concern to minority communities. Certain planning concepts, such as encouraging urban infill and redevelopment of central city neighborhoods, may actually contribute to problems related to gentrification.

The Regional Council should encourage mixed income housing. Funding guidelines for siting transportation projects should take into account housing issues, especially the provision of mixed housing.

There is nothing in the VISION 2020 material about persons of color.
Past transportation projects, including mass transit projects, have not been healthy for the Hispanic/minority community. When major infrastructure is built, it has often adversely affected the local community.

The views of minority communities must be at the table in developing the update if it is to be respected and embraced. Otherwise it appears to be top-down. Minority views must be heard and incorporated.

Concentrating development can exacerbate economic and urban disparities if what results is a concentration of poverty.

Programs are needed in response to linguistic diversity. Programs should be offered bilingually. There is a need for more localized linguistic support and education in order to provide more economic and social opportunity.

A question was posed regarding the control the Regional Council has in funding different types of transportation projects.

Messaging is an issue – the current VISION 2020 language is generic and does not relate to people of color.