

# Rural Town Centers and Corridors Project



November 2003

Puget Sound Regional Council  
**PSRC**

Makers Architecture & Urban Design – The Transpo Group – The Langlow Associates

# Acknowledgements

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## **PROJECT ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

Greg Cioc, *Kitsap County Public Works - Transportation Planning*  
Don Ding, *Metropolitan King County Department of Transportation*  
Mike Erkinen, *Pierce County Planning & Land Services*  
Jesse Hamashima, *Pierce County Department of Public Works & Utilities*  
Charlie Howard, *Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) - Strategic Planning and Programming Division*  
Julie Matlick, *WSDOT, Highways & Local Programs - Context Sensitive Solutions*  
Chris Picard, *WSDOT - Urban Planning Office*  
Tina Rogers, *Snohomish County Public Works*  
Roger Wagoner, *Berryman & Henigar + Seattle Chapter of AIA*  
Renee Zimmerman, *WSDOT - Urban Planning Office*

## **PUGET SOUND REGIONAL COUNCIL STAFF**

King Cushman, *Project Manager*  
Norman Abbott, *Growth Management*  
Stephen Kiehl, *Regional Systems*  
Rocky Piro, *Growth Management*  
Karen Richter, *Program Implementation*

## **CONSULTANT TEAM**

John Owen, *Makers Architecture & Urban Design, Team Leader*  
Kristie Langlow, *The Langlow Associates*  
Larry Toedtli, *The Transpo Group*

Additional copies of this document may be obtained by contacting: Puget Sound Regional Council - Information Center - 1011 Western Avenue, Suite 500 - Seattle, WA 98104-1035 - 206-464-7532 - FAX 206-587-4825 - [infoctr@psrc.org](mailto:infoctr@psrc.org) Sign language and communication material in alternative formats can be arranged given sufficient notice by calling Grace Foster at 206-464-7090. TDD\TTY: 206-464-5409. Funding for this document provided in part by member jurisdictions, grants from U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, Federal Highway Administration and Washington State Department of Transportation. PSRC fully complies with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and related statutes and regulations in all programs and activities. For more information, or to obtain a Title VI Complaint Form, see [www.psrc.org/about/titlevi/index.htm](http://www.psrc.org/about/titlevi/index.htm) or call 206-464-6175

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# Executive Summary

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*Figure 1. Rural town centers and the corridors that connect them are a critically important part of the Puget Sound region.*

When it comes to the region's transportation problems, over the past few years the region's state and local leadership, along with the media, have focused on ways to deal with the most highly congested freeways and roads. This focus on major-priority highways has resulted in a corresponding lack of attention to quite a number of other highways that connect the region's rural communities, both to each other and to the urban area. These other state highways are outside the core urban area and not only serve to connect communities such as Granite Falls, Duvall, Enumclaw, Graham, and Kingston to the urban area, they also serve as the main streets in these towns.

These rural corridors have a little-recognized but critical relationship to the economic health and quality of life in our region. They link the region's rural land areas—84% of the region's total land—to the core urban area and serve as lifelines for the 14% of the region's population that live in these smaller communities. These rural highway corridors are also essential freight routes for resource-based industries that provide gravel, timber and agricultural products to the urban area. And these same routes link us with the majority of our region's open and green spaces and get us to our ski resorts, hiking trails, waterfront retreats and U-pick produce fields. If we value our rural communities and the wilderness areas beyond, then we must care for the rural corridors that connect us to them. We must work strategically to meet personal safety and regional mobility needs, and, at the same time, support local community and corridor improvements that protect environmental quality and preserve the unique rural character.

Despite their importance to our region, rural corridors and town centers are not receiving the attention they deserve. Funding proposals for critical safety and congestion improvement projects in rural communities just cannot compete with large urban transportation projects. Even though most rural projects typically cost a fraction of their urban counterparts, they still require efficient coordination between local, state and county governments. Smaller communities with limited staff and overextended county and state transportation departments

## Executive Summary

just do not have the resources to initiate the much-needed corridor project planning that should be integrated with town center planning and project implementation.

To explore what can be done to alleviate these difficulties, the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC), along with Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and each of the four counties, undertook an examination of the challenges confronting transportation planners and local governments in their efforts to upgrade rural corridors and the town centers they pass through. In late winter of 2003, the study team, comprised of staff from PSRC, WSDOT, participating counties, and consultants (MAKERS, Transpo and Langlow Associates), first administered a preliminary survey to identify initial perceptions among planners and designers most involved with rural corridors and town centers. Next, in May and June the team conducted a series of workshops with local community participants, county staff and WSDOT staff. The participants identified the challenges and concerns they faced when trying to upgrade their town centers and corridors and offered a variety of potential solutions to more effectively address them. The planning team compiled the workshop results and, in concert with the Project Advisory Committee (PAC), distilled them into the set of five broad recommendations summarized below. The Regional Councils Executive Board formally approved these recommendations on October 30, 2003, to establish this new, rurally oriented regional program. Greater detail regarding the overall project, the project findings and specific recommendations for this new program is found in subsequent sections of this technical report.

## Summary of Recommendations

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### ■ Create a Rurally Focused Program and Get (Better) Organized

- Establish a Rural Centers and Corridors Development Program
- Provide financial incentives and assistance to get rural corridor interests together
- Develop communications announcing the new program

**Background:** Experience of the past decade—good and bad—has made it clear that close cooperation between local governments, community centers, counties and the state Department of Transportation is critical to successful improvements for rural town centers and corridor projects. There is currently no specific model or program to help address concerns or organize the various parties in the rural areas in a productive way to leverage and combine various scarce public funding sources.

This study recommends that the Regional Council support local and state agencies by establishing a Rural Centers and Corridors Development Program to provide a modest amount of on-going financial support. The program would also perform several organizing functions that may include, as needed, facilitating interested parties to set up comprehensive corridor planning efforts. This program would provide financial incentives to assist local communities, the counties and WSDOT to get together for cooperative planning and implementation of rural center and corridor projects. Once this program is established, a concerted outreach effort is proposed to communicate this new program to interested local jurisdictions.

For the purposes of this program, “rural planning areas,” as defined in support of local Growth Management Act (GMA) planning, is used rather than the much smaller federally defined “urban-rural boundaries.”

### ■ **Develop Criteria and Coordinate Funding for the Program**

- Establish criteria for evaluation and award of project funds
- Coordinate with partner agencies handling other sources of state and/or federal revenues for possible rural applications and combine project funding opportunities

**Background:** Rural communities find it difficult to compete for most regional and state funding sources for a number of reasons. Many rural highways are not designated as highways of statewide significance, which means they receive low-priority consideration when it comes to WSDOT funding. Complicating this, small local governments do not often have the staff or expertise available to prepare and apply for grants. This combination makes it difficult for local

governments and WSDOT to plan and construct corridor improvements.

It is recommended that the new program support both planning and project implementation activities for rural centers and corridors. The initial planning would include collaborative development of an overall corridor plan and a package of prioritized project improvements to address rural center and corridor developments.

Assembling funds for implementation of corridor or town center improvements often requires filing grant applications with a number of different agencies that have different schedules and award criteria. Putting together a funding package for the construction of corridor or town center improvements can take many years and much staff time. A lot of effort is required to develop grants for each individual agency and funding source. It is proposed that the Regional Council work with the many agencies with potential funding programs for rural centers and corridor projects to coordinate activities and combine project grants in order to reduce project delivery schedules by as much as one year.

### ■ Coordinate Corridor Planning and Clarify “Rural Preservation” Policy

- Integrate and coordinate state route development planning with local comprehensive plan updates
- Clarify policies on “Preservation of Rural Character”

**Background:** Creating an effective rural corridor through highway improvements alone, without sound land use planning, is like trying to clap with one hand. Without coordinated growth management efforts, improving rural corridors will only lead to more sprawl and additional congestion while destroying the rural character we wish to protect. For this reason, the study supports additional WSDOT efforts to develop route improvement plans. It offers a number of suggestions and ideas for WSDOT and local governments to increase coordination between local comprehensive planning or town development efforts and state highway corridor planning. The upgrade of our rural corridors need not lead to undesirable growth if decisive, well-coordinated measures are taken.



*Figure 2. Improved roadways do not necessarily diminish rural activities.*

The interpretation of regional and countywide policies calling for “preservation of rural character” needs to be clarified. Such policies have mistakenly been interpreted to mean that no roadway capacity improvements should be made in rural areas. In reality, state highway improvements in rural areas employing access management in combination with local zoning controls can assure improved roadway capacity that meets safety and mobility objectives without generating unintended or unplanned development.

### ■ **Conduct a Case Study to Test the Improved Coordination Process**

- Select the SR 203 highway corridor from Monroe in south Snohomish County to Fall City in east King County to conduct a pilot case study that also includes the town centers of Duvall and Carnation in order to explore and evaluate application of the above recommendations using innovative and locally sensitive solutions

**Background:** There is a national initiative in highway design that endeavors to better incorporate local aesthetic, preservation, environmental and community development objectives into roadway improvements. This movement explores and tests new roadway design ideas (called “context sensitive solutions”) that include elements such as roundabouts, bypasses, driveway reduction, traffic calming, “main street” improvements and speed management.

The Regional Council has budgeted \$100,000 in the 2003-2004 work program for a consultant-assisted study to test a small-scale example of how to conduct an enhanced and well-coordinated corridor and rural town center planning process, one that mutually benefits the traveling public, freight, and growing local communities. The objective is to work through and learn from a more integrated multi-party planning process in a rural corridor using context sensitive solutions (CSS). Even if this modest funding effort will not fully enable development of detailed design options, conducting a case study is recommended to demonstrate how to best engage several communities, counties and WSDOT in a manageable corridor study. This case study could lay out a roadmap showing how to conduct successful future studies in the region’s many rural corridors once full federal funding is made available through a new federal transportation act.

One of the consultant team's tasks this past year, while helping conduct the workshops and working with the PAC, was to assist in reviewing and recommending an appropriate rural state highway corridor with one or more town centers for this pilot study. The consensus recommendation (staff, consultant team and PAC) is that the SR-203 highway corridor offers an excellent opportunity to study and, if needed, help refine the above set of recommendations. This case study involves WSDOT, Snohomish County, King County and the cities of Monroe, Duvall and Carnation.

### ■ Continue Research, Development and Application of Context Sensitive Solutions

- Publish and periodically upgrade the new "toolkit" prepared as part of this study to serve as a reference guide for parties interested in conducting rural centers and corridor planning, design, and implementation efforts.
- Support WSDOT's current effort to prepare a companion document to its *State Highway Design Manual* for more flexible highway designs in cases where state highways are also major local arterials.

**Background:** Many communities are beginning to incorporate "context sensitive solutions" in their local towns and roadways, and the rural workshop participants identified a need for more information regarding these concepts and applications. As part of this study, the consultant team has developed an "Options and Innovations Toolkit: Context Sensitive Solutions for Rural Town Centers and Corridors" that briefly describes different context sensitive solutions and provides direct links to more detailed resources for interested readers. Local governments and some WSDOT participants in this study also identified the need for greater flexibility in the state's own highway design standards, especially when applied to local main streets. A substantial benefit can be achieved with modest resources by supporting and encouraging WSDOT's current efforts to prepare a companion document to the current *Highway Design Manual* that will provide WSDOT and local communities greater flexibility when improving state highways that also serve as local main streets.



Figure 3. The "Options and Innovations Toolkit" contains useful rural town center and corridor improvement ideas.

# Introduction

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## Purpose and Organization of Report

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This report describes the purpose of the Rural Town Centers and Corridors project and the project's varied activities that resulted in a set of proposed action recommendations. There are two additional chapters beyond this **Introduction**. The second chapter, **Findings: Common Themes and Issues**, documents and summarizes the principal ideas arising from a number of sources—surveys, WSDOT work session, rural area workshops, and discussions among the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) and consultant team. These findings are a distillation of the common themes and issues, without the assumption of any order of priority. The third chapter, **Recommendations for Action**, contains a focused set of recommended actions that were refined by the PAC and subsequently approved after policy discussions. These subsequent discussions helped determine how the region should proceed to achieve project objectives. The proposed recommendations are a synthesis of all previous efforts. They offer an opportunity for the Regional Council and other interested parties and jurisdictions to immediately begin addressing the important rural corridor and town center development issues.

A companion technical effort of this project produced the “Options and Innovations Toolkit: Context Sensitive Solutions for Rural Town Centers and Corridors” as a reference document for numerous topics related to issues along rural corridors and in rural town centers. This document is available for public access on the Regional Council's website at [www.psrc.org](http://www.psrc.org).

Additionally, an appendix to this report contains a variety of internet website references on related topics and relevant references that may be of interest and assistance to readers exploring this subject.

### Project Objectives

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In the fall of 2002, the Puget Sound Regional Council initiated the Rural Town Centers and Corridors project to look at how to better identify and integrate rural highway corridor development needs with local town center development needs. The project's primary objective was to identify a process and set of recommendations that jointly address much-needed state highway corridor improvements in the region's rural areas while supporting local town center development needs. In early 2003, the Regional Council contracted with the consultant team of Makers Architecture & Urban Design, The Transpo Group and The Langlow Associates to assist with conducting rural area workshops and developing recommendations to guide future project actions.

### Background

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In 2000 and 2001, during the process of developing and adopting the central Puget Sound's regional transportation plan, *Destination 2030*, the Regional Council received comments from rural towns about potential state highway improvements on roads that serve and run through them. A number of towns expressed varying degrees of discomfort with the adopted regional plan. Some felt that their local communities' unique development needs and aspirations were not being sensitively addressed by state highway improvements shown in *Destination 2030*. Others felt that state highway improvements being shown—many of which the towns clearly wanted to see—were so far down the state's funding priority ladder that they would be ignored for decades, giving little hope for assistance with current transportation needs.

The economic health of our growing region requires keeping pace with a balance of urban and rural regional transportation system improvements. *Destination 2030*, the region's adopted transportation plan, calls for personal and freight mobility investments at all jurisdictional levels to improve freeways, local streets and roads, transit facilities and services, and bicycle and pedestrian facilities and amenities. The plan further specifically directs that urban and rural transportation investments be carefully fashioned to support "livable and sustainable" communities in urban and rural areas. In rural towns and communities, as required by the state's Growth

Management Act (GMA), this means a special focus is needed to support adopted city, county and regional policies to preserve and enhance the unique rural character of the central Puget Sound region's diverse towns—some of the region's very unique and special places.

The impetus for the Rural Town Centers and Corridors project was the above locally expressed concerns and planning needs along with a couple of positive new planning, design and construction concepts advocated by federal and state transportation agencies. At the federal level, the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has advocated that states and local governments utilize a more integrated and mutually beneficial planning/design process known as "context sensitive solutions" (CSS). In Washington, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) developed an excellent reference document called *Building Projects That Build Communities*, a guide to cooperative local-state project development. This document offers a wealth of ideas, with many good examples and explanations of often complex procedures that can help link corridor improvements with local development needs.

## Overview of Study Process

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Conducting this project involved a number of distinct types of activities requiring organizational and logistical efforts, data and information gathering, public outreach, technical analysis and policy review and discussion. These activities are summarized below.

- **Project Advisory Committee (PAC):** A small working group was pulled together to serve as an advisory committee to work with Regional Council staff to oversee the Regional Council's direction on this project. The PAC consisted of planning and public works staff from each of the four counties involved, WSDOT staff representing both regional and statewide perspectives on rural issues, a private sector advisor with planning and urban design expertise, and several Regional Council staff representing transportation, growth management and project programming interests. The advice and assistance of the PAC was essential to this project and is much appreciated by Regional Council staff and the consultant team. A list of the PAC members is on the inside cover of this report.

- **Identification of Candidate Communities:** Given the modest budget associated with this project, it was decided to limit the study area to a small representative sample of the region's diverse rural areas and highway corridors. With this in mind, the focus was on rural towns on state highway corridors that were not designated as being highways of statewide significance. An exception to this criterion for the definition of the study area was necessary for Kitsap County, since essentially all of its major inter-community arterial connections happen to be highways of statewide significance (HSS). Even with this narrowed criterion the communities and corridors to be examined still included 20 rural towns and the 15 state highways running through them that served as their main streets.
- **Local Issues Survey:** A survey was prepared and sent to senior planning and public works staff in each of the candidate towns and counties. The survey asked for their input to help identify key corridor and related town development issues that have come up over the past several years in the preparation of their local GMA comprehensive plans. The results were quite helpful in preparing materials for discussion at the rural/community area workshops noted below.
- **WSDOT Work Session:** The key stakeholder responsible for state highways in rural areas is logically WSDOT. To gain WSDOT's perspectives on rural highway issues, an afternoon working session was conducted with over 25 WSDOT staff from the Olympic and Northwest Regions on April 28, 2003 in the NW Regional Office. This was a very informative dialogue. The WSDOT staff were particularly generous and candid in sharing their extensive experience and perspectives about working with local rural communities on rural state highway projects. They were also most helpful in offering the project team a number of positive ideas and concepts to improve the cooperative planning and implementation work for future rural highway facilities. Many of their ideas and suggestions have been incorporated in the **Recommendations for Program Actions** chapter of this report.
- **Research of Options and Innovations:** The consultant team examined a comprehensive range of professional literature on the subject in tandem with a number of local and national examples of successful planning, design and "best practice" projects. A representative array of these

examples was assembled to be shared within the region to demonstrate successful approaches to corridor and development collaboration. The examples used innovative design concepts to address a variety of traffic and community concerns, such as alternate routes or bypasses, pedestrian and bicycle safety, transition speed zones as highways approach town centers, and management of access to properties along the highway. An abbreviated form of the previously noted toolkit of context sensitive solutions (CSS) was subsequently prepared from this research to capture these concepts and ideas in order to stimulate local discussion in the rural workshops.

- **Rural Area Workshops:** Five workshops were held in the four-county area (two in King County), where local officials, community leaders and local staff were invited to discuss issues, concerns, options and opportunities related to the need for rural corridor improvements and local town developments. At these two-to-three hour workshops, the Regional Council staff and the consultant team introduced the project objectives and presented examples of innovative options and design concepts that have been developed within Washington State and around the country as ideas for later discussion in the workshop. The remainder of the time was spent engaging citizens and local representatives in fruitful discussions about these issues. The workshop participants, while not numerous, were very articulate and focused. They talked about their concerns and what they would like to see improved in a cooperative local-regional-state planning process for more sensitive development of rural towns and their state highway corridors. The dialogues from the workshops identified patterns of common issues and concerns that are somewhat unique to rural areas. They also surfaced a number of unique localized needs and issues associated with the individual towns.

These five workshops, where officials, community leaders and staff from the 20 rural towns were invited to participate, were held in the following areas on the noted dates.

- Pierce County area (Summit) - May 28
- Snohomish County area (Marysville) - May 29
- South King County area (Covington) - June 5
- Kitsap County area (Kingston) - June - 10
- East King County area (Carnation) - June 12

Figure 4 on the opposite page provides a generic graphic summary of many issues and concerns gleaned from these workshops that are common to rural communities and rural corridor development.

- **Preparation, Review, and Approval of Recommendations:**  
The results of the various activities described above have been documented in the **Findings: Common Themes and Issues** chapter of this report. In consultation with the Project Advisory Committee, the consultants then prepared the set of recommended actions for Regional Council policy review and subsequent approval, as found in the **Recommendations For Action** chapter.

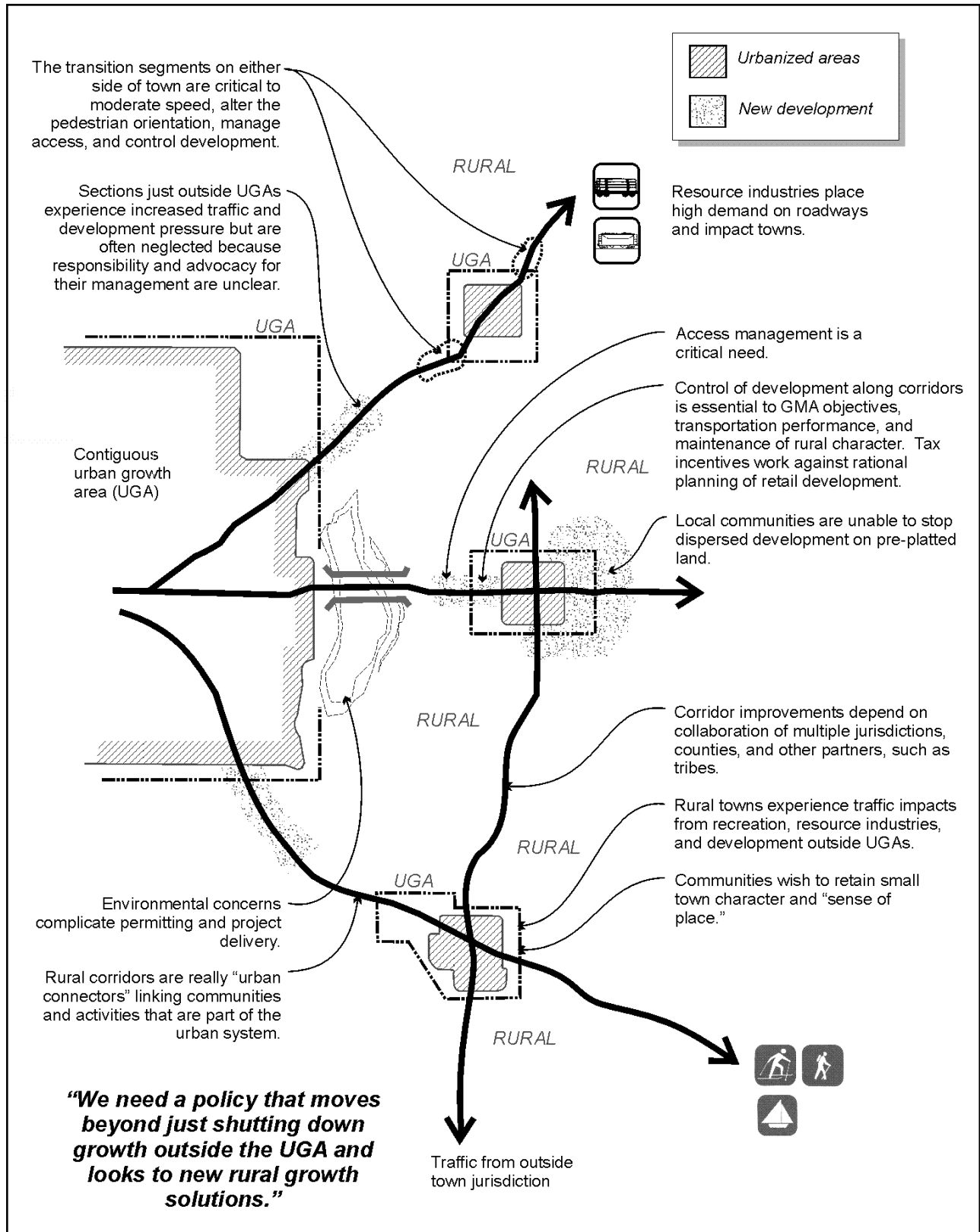


Figure 4. Generic Geographic Issues from Rural Town Center and Corridor Workshops.



# Findings: Common Themes and Issues

This section summarizes the principal ideas arising from workshop comments, survey responses, work session with WSDOT, and discussions within the Project Advisory Committee and technical team. The intent is to identify and distill the common themes and issues that often came up in discussions and responses. No particular priority is placed on the listing of concerns, and most issues, such as the shortage of resources, are inextricably linked to other issues. A few representative comments from the five rural area workshops that are relevant to a topical heading are interspersed throughout this chapter.

## a. There is a compelling need to focus attention on rural town centers and corridor development in the Puget Sound region.

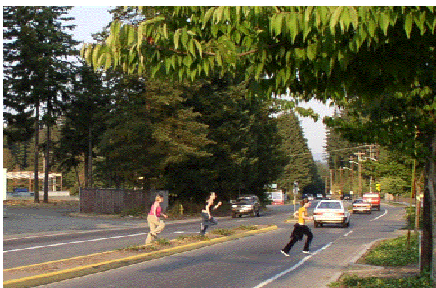
The regional growth strategy has been to focus both new growth and supporting infrastructure improvements in centralized urban areas. While participants in all five workshops expressed firm support for this strategy, they noted the need to address rural town center and corridor issues because these areas are also experiencing urban growth, and their success is important to the vitality of the whole region.

Rural corridors connect urban areas and are subject to rapid development growth and significant design constraints. In this way they resemble urban corridors, even though the abutting land uses may be rural. Regional policies and improvement priorities, as well as design standards, should recognize this fact. While they may accommodate less traffic than their urban counterparts, rural corridors and the communities through which they pass play an important role within the region in several ways, including:

- **Support of GMA Objectives.** The performance of rural corridors is important to achieving growth management objectives. These objectives include developing viable communities, incorporating multi-modal transportation to serve the region, coordinating land use and transportation policies, and accommodating some of the regional growth within rural communities.

*The region needs an approach that moves beyond simply shutting down rural expansion and offers new solutions for effective rural growth management. Local rural communities have growth trends and issues not unlike urban communities.*

– Comments from the south King and Kitsap Counties workshops



*Figure 5. SR 516 is an important corridor linking the Covington and Maple Valley communities. It has 50 mph speeds, few pedestrian crossings, and difficult traffic conditions.*

## Findings: Common Themes and Issues

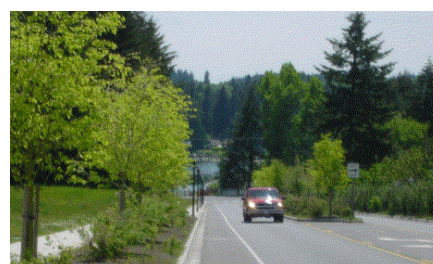
- **Access to Recreational and Rural Resources for the Whole Region.** Most of the corridors within the study area provide access to popular recreational destinations, such as Mt. Rainier, the Cascades, ski resorts, and lakes, as well as to the rural areas themselves. This weekend and holiday traffic not only results in unusual transportation demand profiles, it means that peak hour weekend volumes can disadvantage users throughout the region and hamper visitor service businesses.
- **Community Lifelines.** The town centers connected by rural corridors are urban growth areas that are experiencing urban growth and diversification. The connections between these small centers and the rest of the region are critical to their vitality. In some cases, the corridors may also be important emergency evacuation routes.
- **Freight Mobility.** Resource-based industries, such as gravel mines, wood product operations, and agricultural activities, also place unusual demands on roadways and impact rural town centers. This is especially true in communities such as Black Diamond, Eatonville, Carnation, Duvall, and Granite Falls, where the rural corridor also constitutes the town's "main street."
- **Regional Identity.** Rural corridors' scenic qualities are important to the identity of the region as a whole. Protecting a community's rural character was an objective mentioned at all the workshops.



*Figure 6. Rural corridors are important transit routes.*



*Figure 7. Truck access is vital for resource industries, but heavy truck traffic also impacts local communities.*



*Figure 8. Workshop participants identified the rural corridors' scenic qualities as an important regional asset.*



*Figure 9. Rural corridors take us to the places we enjoy.*

*It's really hard for small communities to compete with the "big guys" for most state and regional funding.*

– Comments from the east King, Pierce and Kitsap Counties workshops

**Examples:**

*Covington has monitored infrastructure needs. The City requires developers to pay between 30 percent and 50 percent of supporting infrastructure costs. But they still have a \$50 million gap in funding, with no idea where the money will come from. Furthermore, the section of SR 516 east of the city affects the city, but is not in its jurisdiction. The City can stop new development-related traffic within its own boundaries through concurrency, but growth in King County and Maple Valley continue to add traffic to the corridor.*

*Kingston, Kitsap County, and the state developed a sound plan for a remote ferry traffic holding area, but it has taken around 10 years to get on the CIP list, and there is still no funding in sight.*

**b. There is a severe shortage of resources for rural corridor planning and improvement.**

Participants noted that, despite the importance of rural corridors to the region as a whole, there are few resources available to maintain their performance. This lack of resources results from a variety of causes, including:

- It is very difficult for small communities to compete in most regional funding programs because rural projects do not score high in the priority criteria.
- Small communities often lack the staffing to comply with federal regulations, so they are more limited in their ability to secure federal funds than counties or larger cities.
- Small local governments often do not have the technical expertise needed to address corridor concerns or even to apply for a grant.
- There is no money to do large rural projects. While many rural corridor improvements can be made incrementally using small funding sources, some require a large amount of funding. However, there are no large funding sources available for rural areas, and urban funds are very difficult for rural communities to secure. Therefore, needed larger scale projects, such as the Kingston ferry/transit holding area, often are delayed for decades.
- The existing state law regarding gas tax distribution among cities and counties generates some strange results that appear counter to the intent of the state's Growth Management Act (GMA). When unincorporated areas undergo annexation—whether through the expansion of an existing city or the creation of a new one—the gas tax funds that were once associated with the roadways in that annexed area are no longer available to the county in which it is located. Oddly enough, neither are those funds redistributed or made available to the newly annexed city areas to assist with maintaining those existing roadways. While this has been an acknowledged predicament among cities and counties doing GMA planning, there has yet to be any politically acceptable solution to remedy the problem. It is particularly problematic when a new city is created in a rural area.

## Findings: Common Themes and Issues

- There are sections of rural corridors, often just outside the UGA boundary, that do not receive much attention from any specific jurisdiction but that are important for the corridor's function. These sections are typically experiencing high traffic and, in some cases, intensive land use development. Planning and/or design may fall under several agencies, and there is no process to set forth who should take the lead—WSDOT, county, or rural city. Because of this, concerns such as access management, orderly growth patterns, upgrading of the local street network, or long-range planning of corridor improvements are not addressed. The corridor is developed in a piecemeal fashion that can reduce safety and capacity.
- Rural communities need funding for both planning and implementation. With few staff resources, local governments often need assistance in initiating the planning necessary to address the corridor comprehensively, identify needed improvements and prepare funding proposals. At the same time, as noted above, there is a shortage of implementation funds for construction.

### c. There is a need for more effective intergovernmental coordination.

Workshop participants noted that cooperation is fundamental in building a consensus to advocate for funding and resolution of technical issues. Intercity, city-county, and state coordination is essential because the traffic patterns, planning issues, and funding sources cross jurisdictional boundaries. Close communication and joint efforts have been important components of recent successful projects.

There are significant opportunities for state and local collaboration to build a framework for better corridor planning and project delivery. In late 2002, the state published the *Building Projects That Build Communities* handbook, which outlines a collaborative approach and includes examples of recent interjurisdictional cooperation that could serve as models for other jurisdictions. However, even with these examples, local governments need clearer direction—or at least assistance—regarding the steps for coordinating town center/corridor planning, acquisition, and funding.

#### **Examples:**

*WSDOT worked closely with county and local officials in preparing the Route Development Plan for the SR 532 corridor. This plan has been identified as an example of a successful process to define issues and corridor improvement needs. An Implementation Committee was established to keep on top of the actions needed to move the project forward.*

*We seem to have a lot of piecemeal planning going on without tying state and local planning together. It's only a rare coincidence when local plans and state corridor plans for the same areas are being done at same time.*

– Comment from Pierce, east King and Snohomish Counties workshops

Better coordination and communication are necessary in order to:

- **Combine State and Local Projects for Greater Impact.** For example, combining state pavement repairs with a county sewer upgrade, pedestrian improvements, or access management efforts can save costs for all the projects and produce a better final result.
- **Prevent or Remove Obstacles to a Project.** The most significant roadblocks stem from breakdowns in communication (e.g., disagreements regarding design standards and program requirements) and inadequate funding, which limits the quality of project and design options—if not the entire project. Improved cooperation can reduce the likelihood of conflicts and more effectively advocate for project funding.
- **Account for Impacts Outside the Local Jurisdiction.** Local governments are affected by development and corridor improvements outside their jurisdictions. There is no automatic interlocal mechanism to deal with this.
- **Communicate with Communities and Elected Officials.** The groups involved with corridor improvement need a better communication strategy for outreach to rural communities. The objectives, methods and benefits of a project must be clear, and it is important to explain how this approach differs from business-as-usual.
- **Advocate for More Resources and Policy Changes.** Since rural communities must compete with much larger jurisdictions for attention and resources, it will take a combined advocacy to achieve greater political and administrative support.
- **Maintain Project Impetus.** Constituencies change over time, so a broader representation may be needed to maintain institutional memory between planning and implementation. An Implementation Committee could be established to keep the project on the front burner for funding.
- **Cooperate for Funding.** Agencies in the same corridor often compete for the same funding. Coming together to work at a larger scale can (1) reduce immediate competition and (2) build a better case for project funding.

**Example of Inter-governmental Cooperation:**  
*The Cities of SeaTac, Tukwila, Des Moines, and Kent collaborated among themselves and with WSDOT to secure funding for the SR 99 corridor.*

### d. There is a need to explore context-sensitive solutions for resolving technical planning and design challenges.

During the workshops, team members presented a number of innovative solutions to issues that frequently arise in town center and rural corridor design. These solutions derive from a new approach to corridor design called “context-sensitive design,” which adapts the corridor’s design to better fit with local conditions and a spectrum of community objectives. Several participants noted that greater flexibility in street design standards is needed in order to incorporate these ideas.

Participants indicated an interest in methods to address a number of design challenges, including:

- Moderating speed and increasing safety.
- Access management (better design and control of driveways and intersections along the corridor to improve safety and performance).
- Transition zones between the towns and their rural surroundings.
- Maintaining rural/small town character and enhancing pedestrian qualities.
- Addressing sensitive environment constraints.

These and other issues are discussed in the “Options and Innovations Toolkit: Context Sensitive Solutions for Rural Town Centers and Corridors” that was prepared as part of this project and is referenced in the appendix to this report..

Current design standards and expected future permit requirements can make some of the best plans difficult to implement. Design and permitting issues should be identified in the planning stage, at least to some minimal level.

### e. Each step of the town center and corridor improvement process presents special challenges.

While currently there is no formal process for accomplishing a cohesive set of corridor improvements, corridor improvements typically include at least three steps: planning, funding, and design/construction. Each step includes unique challenges and requires specific resources. The middle step—funding—while simple in concept, has become ever more complex and challenging over the past decade. There is virtually no new or additional funding being authorized to address traffic and population growth

*Small local governments often don't have the technical expertise needed to find out about new design ideas or work with WSDOT to identify more flexible ways to deal with state road design standards.*






– Comments from Pierce and south and east King County workshops

*We need to do more about rural towns and corridors than just ignore them because they lie outside the UGA boundary.*

– Sentiment expressed at all five workshops

or needs along rural corridors or in rural communities. This is especially problematic because the lack of funding means that project implementation is sometimes delayed for years. Thus, each step has difficult obstacles that must be overcome. The chart below summarizes the activities, challenges, and resources associated with each step.

**Project Development Cycle and Issues**

	Duration: 1-2 Years	Duration: 1-10 Years	Duration: Variable
PHASE	 Initiate Prepare corridor plan 	Secure funding 	 Regroup Design and construction 
KEY ACTIVITIES AND ELEMENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishing teamwork between participants.</li> <li>Conducting initial environmental review.</li> <li>Resolving corridor-wide and local interests.</li> <li>Addressing problematic design issues.</li> <li>Preparing an implementation strategy.</li> <li>Coordinating.</li> <li>Involving the public.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Applying for and assembling grants and other funds.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resolving design issues.</li> <li>Conducting final environmental review.</li> <li>Obtaining permits.</li> <li>Preparing construction documents.</li> <li>Involving the public.</li> </ul>
WHAT IS CURRENTLY MISSING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Small communities often do not have funding or technical resources to initiate the project.</li> <li>Determining an organizational structure and participation procedures can be difficult. There is no "roadmap" for coordination.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rural communities have a hard time competing for funds.</li> <li>It is often impossible to hold the team and the community together during the long time it takes to achieve funding. There is a need for implementation committees and commitment from various agencies.</li> <li>Rural communities often do not have a staff for grant activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New requirements and unresolved design constraints and conflicts can obstruct project delivery.</li> <li>Design standards need to be flexible to incorporate context-sensitive design solutions.</li> </ul>

*Figure 10. Steps, activities, and challenges in a typical rural town center and corridor project.*

**f. There is a need to integrate rural town center and corridor planning with growth management efforts at both the regional policy level and the local level.**

Land use affects corridor design and performance and *vice versa*. At the local scale, the type of uses, their traffic demand, and the design of driveways and other elements can increase the corridor's "friction" and reduce its capability to move traffic safely. Likewise, a poorly performing highway corridor or one that does not suit its context can hamper economic development in a town or degrade a community.

At the regional scale, uncontrolled growth can place unplanned demands on a highway corridor and reduce its performance. At the same time, a poorly conceived transportation network can encourage growth in undesirable patterns. Workshop participants commented on this critical nexus and noted that there are some perceived (though not necessarily real or unsolvable) policy inconsistencies and planning challenges that must be addressed to better coordinate land use planning and transportation improvements. Among them are:

- It is often difficult to link route development planning with comprehensive planning because the timing is off and staff resources for coordination are minimal. For example, WSDOT staff are supposed to participate in local comprehensive planning to ensure compatibility, but sometimes staff time is not allocated to do this.
- The region needs a conceptual approach that moves beyond simply shutting down rural expansion and toward new solutions to achieve effective rural growth. Such an approach is needed for two reasons: First, simply trying to shut down growth in rural areas and ignoring infrastructure needs has not proven effective, and, second, local rural communities have growth trends and issues similar to those in urban communities.
- It is assumed that widening rural highways encourages growth, which is contrary to GMA planning. Adding capacity between rural communities in order to enhance travel to the urban or recreational areas could result in changes to land use plans to allow more development or higher densities along the rural corridor. This increased development would add more traffic, using up the added capacity for local

*Aren't there inconsistencies among state, local, regional and countywide planning policies? Countywide and regional policies, supposedly following GMA direction, look like they don't support urban services or road improvements outside the contiguous UGA, yet incorporated rural towns are asked to be using urban development standards. How to reconcile that?*

– Comments from South King County area workshop

*RT-8.7 Where increased roadway capacity is warranted to support safe and efficient travel through rural areas, appropriate rural zoning and strong commitments to access management should be in place prior to authorizing such capacity expansion in order to prevent unplanned growth in rural areas.*

– Adopted regional plan,  
Vision 2020

- development, needs. This, in turn, would lead to congestion or safety issues in the corridor and impact the ability of the rural communities to maintain their character.

In order to avoid unintended or unplanned growth in rural areas, the regional policy identifies certain conditions that must be met before the Regional Council allows expansion of state highway capacity in and through rural areas. Unfortunately, this policy is difficult to implement and may need greater guidance for practical application. But, this need not be the case. With integrated land use/transportation planning, these issues could be identified and minimized, which would improve the overall effectiveness of the corridor.

- The region still needs to do a better job of integrating land use and transportation and of promoting multi-modal transportation options. This challenge is becoming increasingly evident in rural towns. The land uses in rural centers often increase commute time to the urban areas, adding to the inefficiencies of the regional transportation system. Also, the densities in these areas are not usually sufficient to support transit service.
- Participants suggested that there is an apparent disconnect between the policy of not providing urban services in rural areas and the demand that rural corridors essentially perform urban transportation functions. This dichotomy should be resolved at the regional policy level
- There is a local concern that concurrency is not working in many parts of the rural area. One reason is that there is a time lag between the development impacts and the resultant improvements to address the increased demand. Also, even though GMA is in effect, growth is still occurring in old expansionist patterns, partly because of vested pre-GMA plats and difficulties in changing traditional planning practices.

WSDOT is interested in this issue because it wants roadways that will perform for the long term, and unless growth can be accurately projected, highways cannot be properly sized. Unfortunately, without some form of desirable—but politically elusive—tax equalization,

## Findings: Common Themes and Issues

local governments will continue to pursue retail development to support basic governmental services. The result tends to be commercial development popping up along state highways to serve the increasing residential growth in the outlying communities, such as is seen in Bonney Lake along SR-410. This development, while serving a local need, exacerbates the need for new infrastructure along already low-priority highways.

# Recommendations for Program Action

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Much has been learned over the past year's work on this project about the unique needs and concerns of rural town centers and corridors. The frank, open dialogues with the many technical, policy and civic leaders who participated in the rural workshops and the positive working session with Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) staff from both WSDOT regions have been immensely helpful and constructive. Building upon this input, the consultant team, Regional Council staff and the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) have crafted a set of policy recommendations to address the challenges for improving the region's rural town centers and corridors. At the end of October 2003, the Regional Council's Executive Board approved this set of recommendations. These recommendations fall into five sets of actions, with 10 subsets, as outlined below and explained in greater detail on the succeeding pages:

## **A. Create Rural Program**

1. Establish a Rural Centers and Corridors Development Program
2. Provide financial incentives and assistance to get rural corridor interests together
3. Develop communications regarding the Rural Centers and Corridors Development Program

## **B. Develop Criteria and Coordinate Funding**

1. Establish criteria for evaluation and award of project funds
2. Coordinate and combine project funding opportunities with partner agencies

## **C. Coordinate Corridor Planning and Clarify Rural Policy**

1. Integrate and coordinate state route development planning with local comprehensive plan updates
2. Clarify "Preservation of Rural Character" policy

## Recommendations for Program Action

### D. Conduct a Case Study Involving Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS)

1. Select the SR 203 highway corridor from Monroe in south Snohomish County to include the Cities of Duvall, Carnation, and Fall City in east King County for a pilot case study to explore and evaluate application of the above recommendations using innovative and locally sensitive solutions

### E. Continue Research, Development and Application of Context Sensitive Solutions

1. Publish and periodically upgrade the toolkit materials
2. Support WSDOT efforts to incorporate context sensitive solutions for more flexible highway designs

Before jumping into more explanations about these recommendations, some overarching principles should be kept in mind in order to keep efforts on a positive track:

- **Recommended Actions Seek to Improve Project Coordination and Effectiveness.** Current planning and project development coordination practices can be improved at all levels: state, regional, county, and local community.
- **The Region Needs to Address a Variety of Issues Simultaneously.** For example, broad policy issues interact with organizational, technical, and funding issues; therefore, they should all be addressed together. Absent the ability to accomplish all elements at one time, a plan of action should comprehensively link the essential steps to assure effective follow-through.
- **There Appear to Be Two Types of “Change Actions” Needed.** Some actions, such as refining organizational cooperation between governments, can effect a better outcome without changing “the system.” On the other hand, actions such as revising the resource allocation method *are* directed toward changing the system. In the long run, both types will be needed.

The set of recommendations proposed for policy consideration are discussed below.

### Create Rural Program Establish Program

#### A. Create a Rural Program

##### 1. Establish a Rural Centers and Corridors Development Program.

###### Recommendation

- **Create the Program.** The Regional Council should endorse the findings noted in this report and authorize establishing a Rural Centers and Corridors Development Program. This rurally focused program should be incorporated into the Regional Council's ongoing planning and programming activities. It should be undertaken as a cooperative effort with WSDOT, the counties, and associated rural towns and communities. A partial source of funding—seed money—to support the program could be a portion of the region's discretionary federal funding known as the Surface Transportation Program (STP). Congress has traditionally earmarked a portion of regionally managed STP funding for projects or programs in rural areas.
- **Define "Rural Area and Centers."** It is further recommended that the geographic definition for the region's "rural areas" support the intent of the state's Growth Management Act (GMA) to include those areas outside the contiguous urban growth area (UGA) boundary. This "rural areas" definition is preferred to the recent federally defined (2000 census) "rural" area boundaries that are larger than the region's UGA. The eligible "rural centers" for this program are primarily cohesive incorporated rural town centers and unincorporated rural community centers outside the region's contiguous UGA boundary that reflect or are zoned for a compact "main street" type of higher density mixed-use development. Other town centers—within the contiguous UGA but which also include portions of a highway corridor having rural areas on either side—may also partner with rural towns and the county to participate with WSDOT on a corridor application for funding by this program.

- **Develop a Process.** The Rural Town Centers and Corridors PAC, the Regional Project Evaluation Committee (RPEC), and the newly established Task Force on Funding Priorities should collaboratively develop more specific recommendations for procedures to guide the allocation and administration of this proposed program. Once the program administration specifics are drafted, a briefing, including any further recommendations needing policy attention, will be made to the Transportation Policy Board and the Executive Board for review and comment. The briefing will be held either in December 2003 or timed with the final recommendations for a revised TIP Framework document to guide the region next year, after successful Congressional reauthorization of the next federal transportation act.

### Create Rural Program (continued)

#### Background/Problem

Around 14% of the 3.4 million people in the region live in rural towns and areas outside the region's contiguous urban growth boundary (UGB). While these areas may be viewed as having only a small portion of the region's population, they constitute about 84% of the region's land and contain a major share of the region's natural resources in terms of minerals, timber, recreational resources and open space.

In the region's *Destination 2030* plan, WSDOT has included future safety and capacity improvement projects for many of the region's rural corridors, most of which are programmed beyond 2020. WSDOT does not yet have identifiable funding to study or improve such corridors, as most are relatively lower priority since they are not designated as "highways of statewide significance" (HSS). An additional WSDOT and Regional Council interest in the Rural Centers and Corridors Development Program results from the concern that designs for such future highway improvements need to comply with state, regional and countywide policies to avoid negatively impacting designated agricultural and forest lands and to preserve the rural character of the towns and adjacent land areas.

At present, there is no coordinated program or dedicated planning effort (local or state) for the identification and support of much needed

### Create Rural Program (continued)

#### Provide Incentives

improvements along rural corridors and “main streets” serving the region’s rural communities. This has resulted in small and often fragmented efforts to address rural town and corridor improvements. There is no comprehensive sense of the role and needs of the region’s rural corridors or how rural town development fits into the larger regional picture.

#### 2. Provide financial incentives and assistance to get rural corridor interests together.

##### Recommendation

In establishing a Rural Centers and Corridors Development Program, the Regional Council is providing financial incentives to get local communities, towns, counties and WSDOT together for collaborative planning and implementation of rural town and corridor improvements. As needed, the Regional Council offers to facilitate discussions among the relevant parties to help identify and define respective roles and responsibilities, including lead administrative agency. The financial assistance incentive is intended to result in full and active engagement of all interested parties in conducting and overseeing center and corridor planning and project development activities. The cooperative activities undertaken for a given corridor and its communities will include documenting and sharing positive planning, design and construction information and implementation techniques with the rest of the region.

##### Background/Problem

Workshop participants and the PAC noted that there are several areas where coordination between various levels is essential but has been missing. Successful corridor improvement depends on collaboration of the affected parties, including local jurisdictions, the state, and other interested parties. While there are several models for collaboration—such as WSDOT’s Route Development Plan process and the FAST Corridor Program (a series and system of freight projects)—there appears to be no clear or obvious lead agency or sponsor to initiate collaboration. Without a lead agency to coordinate the planning and resource management necessary to enable a number of communities to come together, the critical mass to support a series of corridor improvement projects never develops.

Part of this problem comes from having insufficient and unpredictable funding, resulting in the previously noted fragmented project planning and implementation. This can result in a disrupted and extended project delivery process. By the time funding finally becomes available, it is not unusual for public officials and staff involved in the project's early years to have moved on, leading to further uncertainty and delay.

Another part of the problem is that local governments are sometimes affected by development and corridor improvements outside their jurisdiction and have to play a reactionary role in responding to them. There is no standing interagency mechanism or organization to deal with this problem, and it appears a logical role for the Regional Council. If requested, the PSRC could help facilitate defining the relevant parties in a given corridor and centers study and their potential administrative lead and oversight decision roles.

### 3. **Develop communications regarding the Rural Centers and Corridors Development Program.**

#### Recommendation

The Regional Council should prepare an easy-to-understand brochure to distribute to local rural agencies and interests and to post on its website. The brochure would describe the Rural Centers and Corridors Development Program and encourage coordinated local city, county and WSDOT efforts to prepare grants for subarea corridor planning and development. It would also convey the Regional Council's offer to facilitate discussions and, as requested, to clarify roles and responsibilities.

#### Background/Problem

The region needs a better communication strategy for reaching rural communities with new ideas and options for how to better address and coordinate implementation of their plans. The objectives, methods and benefits of more coordinated planning and project development must be clear, explaining how this approach is different from business-as-usual. WSDOT's document entitled *Building Projects That Build Communities* is a good starting point, but additional tools and outreach are needed for delivery to an audience that typically has limited staff resources. Once the proposed Rural Centers and Corridors

## Create Rural Program (continued)

## Develop Communications

Development Program is authorized by the Regional Council, staff should prepare written and electronic media information for distribution to rural town officials and staff. As requested, the Regional Council would provide informational briefings about the program's intent and participation process.

### Develop Criteria and Coordinate Funding

#### Establish Criteria

#### B. Develop Criteria and Coordinate Funding

##### 1. Establish criteria for evaluation and award of project funds.

###### Recommendation

As the proposed Rural Centers and Corridors Development Program would involve both planning and implementation, two distinct types of activities, it is recommended that two funding categories be recognized. The planning funds will assist rural cities/communities, county governments and their WSDOT partners to initiate an overall corridor and town center planning effort involving one or more towns that share a common relationship along a given highway corridor or corridor segment. Such initial planning will include development of an overall corridor plan and a package of prioritized project improvements to address rural center and corridor developments. Such planning typically also includes environmental and preliminary engineering work. The planned project is subsequently funded for design and construction with the implementation funds. Through this approach, local governments would have more confidence that implementation funds will be available once their planning is successfully completed.

- **Planning Criteria.** The criteria for evaluating and awarding funding in the planning phase for the program should consider:
  - Clear definition of the rural corridor, with targeted community center(s).
  - Demonstrated need for planning funds to address corridor and town center mobility, access and/or safety issues.
  - Summary of key corridor issues and project objectives, noting how they support policy objectives in adopted city, county, regional, and state plans.

### Develop Criteria and Coordinate Funding (continued)

- A multi-party commitment that the planning will involve partners, including at least city and county governments, WSDOT, and, as applicable to a given area, tribes, transit agency and business groups, who will work together to prepare an overall corridor plan and prioritized package of staged project improvements.
- Ability to leverage other resources or a demonstration that funding is specifically needed due to a lack of other resources.
- **Project Implementation Criteria.** The criteria for the implementation funds should consider:
  - Completion of a successful and publicly supported corridor plan with a prioritized program of projects. There should be implementation commitments for related elements of the plan (e.g., comprehensive or sub area plans) that affect the corridor's performance and complement the proposed improvements.
  - Consistency with countywide planning policies, Destination 2030 (regional transportation plan), and VISION 2020 (regional growth, transportation and economic strategy).
  - Commitment to implementation of the highest priority corridor and/or town center projects.
  - The amount of other funds that the requested funding may be able to augment or leverage.
  - Statement that the funds are needed to complete a funding package composed of other grants and funds.
  - Project contribution to some notable growth management efforts.
  - Support of the project by affected groups and other local governments.
  - Demonstrated teamwork as an important part of the planning and implementation process.
  - Project design or planning innovation.
  - Statement that the project is fully "ready-to-go," with completion of necessary environmental reviews.

### Develop Criteria and Coordinate Funding (continued)

#### Background/Problem

Rural communities find it difficult to compete for most regional and state funding sources for a number of reasons. The first is that rural highways are often not highways of statewide significance (HSS) and, therefore, in accord with state legal direction, receive low-priority consideration for WSDOT program funding. Complicating this, small local governments do not often have the staff or expertise available to prepare and apply for grants, making it difficult for local governments to plan and construct corridor improvements. Furthermore, the priorities of one jurisdiction sometimes do not match those of an adjacent jurisdiction or of WSDOT. A rural community's top priority may well be improving the state highway running through it, but the state's Highway System Plan may rate that same highway corridor very low in its priority array.

### Coordinate Funding

2. **Coordinate and combine project funding opportunities with partner agencies.**

#### Recommendation

The Regional Council should work with other agencies and relevant funding programs to help leverage and achieve improved coordination of funding for planning and implementation of rural centers and corridors projects. Targeted agencies and programs should include the state Transportation Improvement Board (TIB), the County Road Administration Board (CRAB), and WSDOT for other state-managed federal programs (e.g., STP Enhancements and Scenic Highways programs). The Regional Council would communicate with the targeted agencies and programs to express an interest in developing joint or better coordinated project evaluation and selection processes in order to combine funding sources for common geographic jurisdictions in the region's rural corridors. PSRC should also advise local agencies (perhaps on its website) of schedules for upcoming relevant funding opportunities from other agencies.

#### Background/Problem

For most communities, assembling the essential funding for corridor and town center improvements requires an opportunistic approach. It can take many years and a great deal of effort to prepare applications for the

individual grants and funding sources. It would be beneficial if the many programs with potential project funding for rural centers and corridor projects could coordinate their activities and combine project grants, possibly eliminating one or more years in project delivery schedules.

### C. Coordinate Corridor Planning and Clarify Rural Policy

#### 1. Integrate and coordinate state route development planning with local comprehensive plan updates.

##### Recommendation

The Regional Council encourages additional efforts by WSDOT when conducting route development plans (RDP) to better connect and coordinate future state highway improvements with local cities and counties as part of local comprehensive plan updates under the GMA. A number of steps are recommended to improve this situation.

- **Maintain and Publish RDP and Local Plan Update Schedules at Regional Council.** The Regional Council should periodically obtain and publish (probably on its website) a map and list of tentative dates for all proposed state RDP efforts and local comprehensive plan updates. Providing all parties access to this graphic and technical database of planning activities will, hopefully, result in schedule adjustments to enable all parties to conduct more effective and efficient joint state-local efforts involving the same geography and citizens.
- **Enhance Content and Conduct of State RDPs.** To improve the utility and benefits to be gained from better linkages between state RDPs and local comprehensive plans, the following general procedural steps are suggested to WSDOT to improve the typical rural corridor planning and design process:
  - Consider focusing a modest level of WSDOT technical capabilities to support corridor integration planning in local communities without other resources. In the absence of state resources for such support, WSDOT might request support from county staff to provide assistance with local town and corridor

### Coordinate Planning and Clarify Policy Integrate Planning

planning or design where the county's regional arterials are also involved.

- Establish a coordinated project purpose and need statement that meets both state and local objectives.
- Assure that the design team has early involvement in the corridor planning process to identify and address potential difficulties. This may require additional staff time early in the process but, hopefully, will mean less staff effort in the long run.
- Review and institute access management requirements up front—as part of planning for a larger corridor segment—instead of for single parcels as they develop. Sometimes this can lead to clarifying the need for better intersections, specific points for turning movements, or even setting up later warrants for a signal or turn lane.
- Provide more local education as to what WSDOT design standards are and why they exist (i.e., clarify what they are trying to accomplish and ask if there are other ways to meet the goals).
- Use greater flexibility in applying design standards on appropriate portions of a rural corridor, especially in town/community centers and in transitional zones. Incorporate “principled negotiations” techniques in the design process when the team encounters a difficult problem or impasse. Make sure the real decision makers are involved in working out the problems.
- Support WSDOT's ongoing effort to prepare a companion or supplemental document to its highway design manual to provide more flexibility and incorporate CSS into highways that are also city/county roadways involving a “main street” type of mixed-use development.
- Review standards for specific issues, such as transition zones, access management, and speeds associated with given adjacent land uses (e.g., schools).

- **Get Local Plan Input Focused for RDP Consideration.**

Local cities and counties should anticipate coordination with state highway route development planning efforts and should be sure to document and clarify a number of elements that will be critical inputs to the state RDPs. These factors will enhance the RDP products and enable them to be more sensitive to, and reflective of, the needs of local communities served by the highways. Local governments should be sure to prepare the following elements as part of their comprehensive planning efforts for inclusion in future WSDOT RDP efforts:

- Location and density of future development and its impact on transportation demand.
- Local circulation needs and plans.
- Need for access management controls along the corridor, especially in the unincorporated areas between town centers, to avoid unintended development and corridor performance deterioration if roadway capacity is improved,
- Redevelopment initiatives in the town centers and transition zones.
- Pedestrian and bicycle planning needs.
- Transit planning and potentially related transit facilities development.
- If a SEPA review is conducted on a significant land development project, identify related potential WSDOT project corridor improvement needs and opportunities in the transportation element of the local comprehensive plan. The intent of this documentation is to enable more rapid processing and development of future highway improvements because the impacts and potential mitigation needs could have already been covered in the local environmental document.

### Background/Problem

Ideally, local governments should account for corridor planning in their comprehensive planning activities through participation and input by WSDOT and affected jurisdictions (typically the county and

## Coordinate Planning and Clarify Policy (continued)

adjacent local governments). However, since state and county staff resources for review and input are severely limited, and since the timing of comprehensive planning is not usually congruent with state highway corridor planning and design, local comprehensive plans and development regulations do not always support effective corridor improvements. There are a number of design problems that frequently occur in rural corridor projects. Among the most common are:

- Small local governments often do not have the technical expertise needed to address the concerns or initiate the process—or even to identify the issues.
- A local agency's vision for a corridor is not always consistent with the state's Highway Systems Plan.
- Design limitations and issues sometimes emerge late in the process and disrupt general directions and agreements made earlier at the planning level.
- Local governments sometimes prepare improvements that do not meet WSDOT design standards. It is important that all parties come to the planning and design table ready to deal. Unless there is some flexibility on both sides, the project may languish or disappear completely.
- There is a need for more flexibility in design standards. Examples: speed and design criteria in transition zones near towns and lane widths.

### Clarify Policy

#### 2. Clarify “preservation of rural character” policy.

##### Recommendation

The Rural Centers and Corridors Development Program should make it clear that well-planned improvement projects found to be consistent with regional policies, including the “preservation of rural character” policy, and/or improved freight mobility will be supported for implementation action.

##### Background/Problem

A number of rural communities outside the contiguous urban growth area (UGA) have the mistaken impression that improvements along rural corridors run contrary to GMA policies. The perception exists that any capacity

## Recommendations for Program Action

improvements on rural corridors or in town centers will lead to undesirable growth in rural areas.

However, the corridors under discussion here typically connect urban to rural areas, and they experience traffic and safety concerns the same as inside the UGA. Adding capacity to a highway corridor may allow development that better meets transportation concurrency requirements. However, it may also require an adjustment of local level-of-service (LOS) standards and land use plans to ensure that undesirable or unplanned growth does not result from rural corridor improvements.

The region should clarify and/or refine regional policies so that rural corridors can be upgraded without triggering undesired development. An approach is needed that promotes rural corridor improvements while preventing the type of development inconsistent with the GMA.

### D. Conduct Case Study Involving Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS)

1. **Select the SR 203 highway corridor from Monroe in south Snohomish County to include the Cities of Duvall, Carnation, and Fall City in east King County for a pilot case study to explore and evaluate application of the above recommendations using innovative and locally sensitive solutions.**

#### Recommendation

A case study in one of the region's rural corridor subareas is recommended to test the above recommendations by engaging several communities, two counties and the WSDOT in a schematic corridor study. The \$100,000 budget for such a consultant-assisted study was programmed from designated rural area federal funds in the Regional Council's current budget. These funds were set aside to test a model process on a real situation, even if not carried through to a more detailed level of design and environmental activity. It is recommended that the team of participants explore organizational approaches to involve all parties, to identify resource and coordination needs, to identify desirable timing and innovative concepts for the various potential technical needs and solutions, to identify potential funding sources, and to

### Conduct CSS Case Study

#### Select Pilot Case Study

### Conduct CSS Case Study (continued)

document any technical obstacles. The study would likely not encompass the final actual public participation process or the full technical and environmental analysis needed for more specific final decisions. It is intended to help establish the roadmap for conducting a successful process in this new rural program.

The criteria recommended for selection of the case study corridor and communities are:

- Context and issues are broadly applicable to those of jurisdictions in other rural areas.
- The study area includes a clearly defined rural corridor with one or more cohesive community centers.
- The probable corridor issues are of a manageable scale to be addressed within the \$100,000 pilot project budget.
- The study area allows exploration of interconnections and interactions between different jurisdictions and transportation network links. For instance, the project could examine impacts from new development out of the area, clarify the role of the counties in working with multiple jurisdictions, and identify the potential to combine different small improvement projects and multiple funding sources in wider network solutions.
- Local communities are interested and able to provide staff resources to work with the project team.

The consensus recommendation (staff, consultant team and PAC) is that the SR-203 highway corridor offers an excellent opportunity to study and, as needed, help refine the above set of recommendations. This pilot study is to involve the WSDOT, Snohomish County, King County and the cities of Monroe, Duvall and Carnation (Fall City is unincorporated and represented by King County). This corridor is also fully outside designated federal urban boundaries and will be eligible to utilize the designated rural funds for this pilot project.

### E. Continue Research, Development, and Application of Context Sensitive Solutions

#### 1. Publish and periodically upgrade toolkit materials.

##### Recommendation

The Regional Council should publish the completed “Options and Innovations Toolkit: Context Sensitive Solutions for Rural Town Center and Corridors” produced as part of this project. For ease of public access and distribution, and for easy upgrading of the material content, the toolkit should be published on PSRC’s website and advertised as available to all interested parties. Additionally, the research and results of the CSS case study described in Recommendation D should be incorporated into the toolkit, which should be periodically upgraded to incorporate new examples and information. Funding for construction projects should include the requirement that the sponsoring jurisdiction complete a simple project profile and an evaluation of the improvements so that the experience can be easily shared with other communities.

#### 2. Support WSDOT effort to incorporate Context Sensitive Solutions for more flexible highway designs.

##### Recommendation

PSRC should encourage and assist WSDOT’s efforts to achieve more flexible highway designs by incorporating CSS into the proposed new companion document to the *State Highway Design Manual*. This document is intended to offer greater sensitivity for design and redevelopment of non-freeway state highways through local cities in urban and rural communities.

##### Background/Problem for Recommendations E-1 and E-2

As the recommended toolkit is only the beginning of a longer-term effort to develop more effective planning and design tools, web publication will provide for highly accessible information that can be easily upgraded as new experiences and information emerge. An additional advantage to web publication is the ability to incorporate web links in the document so that interested parties can be quickly directed to more detailed technical materials and references about the given toolkit topic.

### Continue Research, Development, and Application of CSS

#### Publish and Upgrade Toolkit

#### Support Incorporation of CSS

### Continue Research, Development, and Application of CSS (continued)

In 2002, the National Cooperative Highway Research Program published an extensive Report 480 entitled *A Guide to Best Practices for Achieving Context Sensitive Solutions*. The guide demonstrates how state departments of transportation and other transportation agencies could incorporate sensitivity to local context into their transportation projects. In addition to this effort, there has been a lot of design and planning work to find ways to resolve problems typically associated with corridor design. Specifically, many agencies and design teams have sought methods to balance regional transportation objectives with those of local communities, such as scenic area protection, main street development and pedestrian and bicycle mobility. These projects have resulted in a number of practical planning and design tools, such as access (property driveways) management, speed management, pedestrian facilities design, and alternative roadway configurations.

Participants in the workshops and work sessions pointed to a number of conditions where CSS might be useful and expressed interest in more information. In addition, local governments and some WSDOT participants in this study identified the need for greater flexibility in the state's own highway design standards, especially when the highways serve as local main streets. It appears that substantial benefit can be achieved with modest resources by assisting in updating the state's current standards and practices and by providing local communities with available information.



# Appendix:

## Internet Website References

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The following website references are for Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) and design, traffic calming, community building, and related documents and data.

### **Tool Kit**

#### ■ **Options and Innovations Toolkit: Context Sensitive Solutions for Rural Town Centers and Corridors**

After conducting the rural workshops, the consultant team found a significant interest and need expressed by local staff and public officials for more information and examples about how to address a wide variety of rural corridor and town center development issues. These were typically in under the broad technical umbrella called “context sensitive solutions” (CSS). An electronic, searchable document in Adobe PDF format was prepared as a public reference tool and is available for viewing or downloading on the Regional Council’s website.

[www.psrc.org](http://www.psrc.org)

### **Federal/National Resources**

#### ■ **Context Sensitive Design & Context Sensitive Solutions – CSD/CSS**

Good Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) site as starting point to explain positive new federal emphasis on integration of community interests in more flexible roadway design.

[www.fhwa.dot.gov/csd/index.htm](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/csd/index.htm)

#### ■ **A Guide to Best Practices for Achieving Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS), NCHRP Report 480 (2002) [Available for purchase through TRB Bookstore, Book Code: NR480 ISBN#: 0-309-06770-7 Price: \$21.00]**

This report also comes with searchable CD and is a valuable resource and complete reference guide on this evolving topic. It provides lessons from five pilot states regarding how to have effective decision processes and includes examples on such topics as how to reflect community values in development process, achieve environmental sensitivity, along with many pictures and examples of sensitively executed projects.

[www.national-academies.org/trb/bookstore/](http://www.national-academies.org/trb/bookstore/)

#### ■ **Flexibility in Highway Design - FHWA**

Excellent FHWA source document developed as companion to FHWA’s “Green Book” (latest highway design standards manual) to advocate “flexible design” concepts and encourage highway designers to be more creative by incorporating community, aesthetic and cultural values in roadway planning interpretation and design applications. Was developed under prior FHWA Administrator Jane Garvey.

<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/flex/index.htm>

## Appendix: Internet Website References

### ■ Geometric Design Practices for European Roads – FHWA

Project report resulting from International Technology Exchange Program, June 2001. Is excellent report on European field trip by several state, federal and local transportation officials to review and document “best practices” experience and designs in several countries regarding innovative approaches and designs for traffic management, traffic calming, and bicycle and pedestrian mobility. Particularly “readable” with clear photos illustrating concepts and applications in a number of countries.

[http://international.fhwa.dot.gov/Pdfs/Geometric\\_Design.pdf](http://international.fhwa.dot.gov/Pdfs/Geometric_Design.pdf)

### ■ US Dept. of Energy (USDOE) – Center of Excellence for Sustainable Development

Site offers extensive perspectives on sustainable economic and community development, including rural as well as urban development. Sustainable development provides framework under which communities can use resources efficiently, create efficient infrastructures, protect and enhance quality of life, and create new businesses to strengthen their economies. Site has excellent links to planning principles, land use guidance and related links to APA, Awahnee Principles, and other prominent planning resources for sustainable development practices.

[www.sustainable.doe.gov/index.shtml](http://www.sustainable.doe.gov/index.shtml)

### State and Other Resources

#### ■ Washington State Department Of Transportation – Building Projects That Build Communities

Website for access to excellent WSDOT publication (2003) in downloadable/printable PDF format. Provides complete explanation and guide to cooperative local-state project development process. Includes checklists and good photographic examples of innovative projects that satisfy local needs in concert with state highway improvements.

[www.wsdot.wa.gov/biz/csd/BPBC\\_Final/](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/biz/csd/BPBC_Final/)

#### ■ Oregon State Department of Transportation – Main Streets Handbook:

Great 105 page reference manual available free as downloadable PDF document

[www.lcd.state.or.us/tgm/pub/mainst/MSH.pdf](http://www.lcd.state.or.us/tgm/pub/mainst/MSH.pdf)

#### ■ Maryland State Highway Administration – Thinking Beyond the Pavement:

Latest Status on State of Maryland’s Efforts to Implement Context Sensitive Design Solutions. They were the first State DOT to formally promote and integrate such concepts and collaborative local processes into state highway planning and design.

[www.marylandroads.com/Events/oc/thinkingBeyondPavement/thinking.asp](http://www.marylandroads.com/Events/oc/thinkingBeyondPavement/thinking.asp)

#### ■ New Jersey DOT - Flexible Design of New Jersey’s Main Streets

Highly practical hands-on report recently published by New Jersey DOT (2003). Report developed to address New Jersey’s needs and recommendations for more flexible roadway design and development standards in local communities. Document is rich with specific examples, design templates/profiles, standards and photos for how to examine and improve existing roadways for more community sensitive and effectively performing state roadways that

serve as a community's main street. Is in accessible and printable PDF format (good color photos enhance report if have color printer available).

<http://www.state.nj.us/transportation/publicat/flexibledesign.pdf>

### ■ **Traffic Calming and Residential Traffic Management – FHWA & ITE**

State of the Art Practices in US and Canada. Site is joint effort by FHWA & Institute of Traffic Engineers (ITE) and provides good, clear reference and educational documentation on many technical aspects of community traffic calming and management.

[www.ite.org/traffic/index.html](http://www.ite.org/traffic/index.html)

### ■ **Traffic Calming for Communities – ITE & FHWA**

Very helpful site with information about "Traffic Calming Seminar" including instructional material, information and description about one day seminar plus free descriptive materials and downloadable PowerPoint slides for conducting seminar (joint effort of FHWA & ITE)

[www.ite.org/traffic/tcseminar.htm](http://www.ite.org/traffic/tcseminar.htm)

### ■ **Project for Public Spaces – PPS site on CSS**

PPS is non-profit technical assistance, research and educational organization with great resources for CSS plus additional articles, slides/pictures, training, etc. regarding how to sustain public places and build communities.

[www.pps.org/CSS/cssonline.htm](http://www.pps.org/CSS/cssonline.htm)

### ■ **Walkable Communities – Converting 4 lane roads to 3 lanes**

Two insightful and well written technical articles from Walkable Communities, Inc., Florida non-profit company helping communities be more pedestrian friendly. Articles make good technical case showing circumstances where concept most applicable for improving traffic flow and gaining community benefits by converting 4 lane roads to 3 lanes with center left turn lane.

<http://www.walkable.org/4-3CON%7E1.PDF> "The Conversion of Four-Lane Undivided Urban Roadways to Three-Lane Facilities" (TRB Circular E-C019: Urban Street Symposium)

<http://www.walkable.org/download/rdiets.pdf> "Road Diets: Fixing the Big Roads" (1999)