

PUGET SOUND REGIONAL COUNCIL
ADOPTED POLICY AND PLAN REVIEW PROCESS
Revised: September 2003

A hallmark of planning in Washington State is its emphasis on coordinating issues that are interjurisdictional in nature. The Growth Management Act requires coordination and consistency among planning efforts where there are “common borders or related regional issues” (RCW 36.70A.100). The Act also requires countywide and multicounty planning policies to serve as frameworks for ensuring consistency among local comprehensive plans (RCW 36.70A.210). In addition, the Regional Transportation Planning Organization legislation, which was adopted with the Growth Management Act, mandates that regional agencies certify that the transportation elements in local comprehensive plans are consistent with regional transportation plans (RCW 47.80.023). To that end, the legislation requires regional organizations to “establish guidelines and principles” for the purpose of evaluating transportation-related provisions in local comprehensive plans (RCW 47.80.026).

The Puget Sound Regional Council’s *Interlocal Agreement for Regional Planning of the Central Puget Sound Area* and *Framework Plan* also provide direction for coordinating planning on interjurisdictional issues. The *Interlocal Agreement* calls for the Regional Council to develop a process for the review of countywide planning policies (VII-C). The *Framework Plan* directs the Regional Council to work with local and state agencies to ensure that provisions of the regional growth strategy are reflected in local planning efforts (Section 5, 1-c-3).¹

The process for reviewing planning policies and local and regional plans includes three types:

- (1) review of local comprehensive plans, including the certification of their transportation elements
- (2) review of countywide planning policies and multicounty policies, including certification of countywide policies for consistency with the regional transportation plan
- (3) consistency review of transit agency plans.

Type 1: Review of Local Comprehensive Plans, Including Certification of Transportation Elements

A questionnaire to be completed by agency staff is the chief tool used in the review of local comprehensive plans. The questionnaire focuses on the multicounty planning policies contained in the adopted regional growth and transportation strategy.

Jurisdictions are encouraged to provide copies of their draft comprehensive plans to the Regional Council prior to or during their formal plan review period. This enables the Council to address

¹ VISION 2020, last updated in 1995, serves as the region’s overall growth and transportation strategy. Incorporated in VISION 2020 are the multicounty planning policies required under the Growth Management Act. These policies provide a framework for local and regional planning in the four-county region. The regional transportation plan, *Destination 2030*, is a functional plan of VISION 2020. Adopted in 2001, this long-range transportation plan includes the multicounty framework policies and transportation policies.

The Regional Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Policy Framework requires that only jurisdictions with certified transportation elements can submit applications for projects and programs to be considered for inclusion in the Regional TIP.

any potential issues prior to the adoption of the plan. Regional Council staff will be available to local jurisdictions and transportation agency staff to discuss any issues or problems.

The certification of transportation-related provisions in local comprehensive plans is based on (1) conformity with requirements in the *Growth Management Act* for comprehensive plan elements, (2) consistency with the regional transportation plan, including consistency with established regional guidelines and principles, and (3) compliance with federal and state clean air legislation.

1. Conformity with the Growth Management Act. Conformity with the *Growth Management Act* focuses on five requirements for transportation elements listed in the Act: (1) consistency with the land use element, (2) identification of facilities and service needs, (3) discussion of financing for transportation facilities and services, (4) description of intergovernmental coordination efforts, and (5) development of transportation demand-management strategies (RCW 36.70A.070).
2. Consistency with the Regional Transportation Plan. Consistency with the regional transportation plan is determined through a comparison of the transportation-related provisions in local plans with the policies and provisions in the adopted regional transportation plan.

Consistency with Established Regional Guidelines and Principles. Regional guidelines and principles are formally incorporated into the regional transportation plan and identified in the questionnaire used in the review of local comprehensive plans. As required by law (RCW 47.80.026), these guidelines address the following factors: a) freight transportation and port access, b) circulation systems, access to regional systems, and effective and efficient highway systems, c) transportation demand management, d) present and future railroad right-of-way corridors, e) intermodal connections, f) concentration of economic activity, g) residential density, h) development corridors and urban design that support high-capacity transit, i) ability of transportation facilities and programs to retain existing and attract new jobs and private investment to accommodate growth in demand, j) joint and mixed use developments, and k) development patterns that promote pedestrian and non-motorized transportation.²

Physical Design Guidelines. In addition, ten physical design guidelines have been established in the regional transportation plan.³ These include: (1) encourage mix of complementary land uses, (2) encourage compact growth by addressing density, (3) link neighborhoods, connect streets, sidewalks and trails, (4) integrate activity areas with surrounding neighborhoods, (5) locate public and semipublic uses near stations, (6) design for pedestrians and bicyclists, (7) provide usable open spaces, (8) manage the supply of parking, (9) promote the benefits of on-street parking, and (10) reduce and mitigate the effects of parking.

² See Destination 2030, page 5 and Appendix 1.

³ See Destination 2030, pages 36-37.

3. Air Quality Conformity. For jurisdictions in the central Puget Sound region that are within the designated maintenance areas for carbon monoxide, ozone, and/or particulate matter, air quality conformity is determined based on the consistency of local plans with the regional transportation plan. For the purpose of determining conformity with the state's Clean Air Conformity Act and consistency with the regional plan, the transportation element should include, at a minimum, policy language and provisions that commits the jurisdiction to developing programs and measures that address federal and state air quality regulations and laws (WAC 173-420-080).

Provisions That Are Not Transportation-Related. In order to coordinate planning on issues other than the transportation-related provisions addressed in local and transit agency plans, the Puget Sound Regional Council will provide comments to localities and agencies during their formal review period. Both formal and informal consultation on these plans provides an opportunity to identify how local governments and transportation agencies are using the regional growth strategy in their planning efforts. (This area of coordination is voluntary.)

Procedures for Certification. The certification of transportation-related provisions in local plans includes a two-step review. In the first step, the Regional Council performs a preliminary review as soon as the draft comprehensive plan is available, typically during the time that the draft plan is being reviewed by state agencies; that is, at least 60 days prior to plan adoption. Review of the transportation-related provisions in draft form provides the opportunity for the jurisdiction to address inconsistencies or potential problems prior to plan adoption. The certification review includes completion of the plan review questionnaire by agency staff, which is returned to the Regional Council for review.

Once the final plan is adopted, the transportation-related provisions are reviewed a second time, focusing on any changes made to the plan after the preliminary review. The Regional Council then prepares a report on certification and sends it to the jurisdiction. After the jurisdiction has had an opportunity to review the report and comment, a recommendation on certification is presented to one or both of the Regional Council's policy boards and then to the Executive Board for consideration and action.⁴ Transportation elements of local comprehensive plans remain certified until amended.

An appeals process is identified in the *Interlocal Agreement* for jurisdictions wishing to take issue with the Board's action. Upon receipt of an appeal, the Executive Board will direct that a five-member board of hearing examiners be constituted from the membership of the Board to resolve the conflict in a manner that would allow the transportation element to be certified.⁵

Certification of Subarea Plans for Designated Regional Growth Centers. Jurisdictions which have formally designated regional growth centers are requested to prepare a subarea plan for each center. The subarea plan should be adopted within four years of the designation of the center. The plan should address the criteria identified in the Regional Council's center plan checklist. The Regional Council performs a preliminary review on the draft center plan, during the time that draft is under review by state agencies. Once the final center plan is adopted, the

⁴ Amendments addressing transportation-related provisions are reviewed by the Transportation Policy Board; amendments that address centers planning or other growth management issues are reviewed by the Growth Policy Board.

⁵ *Interlocal Agreement for Regional Planning of the Central Puget Sound Area (VII.A.4 and VII.A.5)*.

Regional Council prepares a certification report and sends it to the jurisdiction for review and comment. A recommendation is then presented to one or both of the policy boards and Executive Board for consideration and action. The appeals process described in the previous paragraph applies.

Type 2: Review of Countywide Planning Policies and Multicounty Policies, including Certification of Countywide Policies for Consistency with the Regional Transportation Plan

The review of countywide planning policies and multicounty policies is based upon a comparative analysis of countywide and multicounty policies. The comparison focuses on the policy areas for regional planning identified in the Growth Management Act (RCW 36.70A.210). These policy areas include (1) designation of urban growth areas, (2) contiguous and orderly development and the provision of services, (3) transportation facilities and strategies, (4) siting regional capital facilities, (5) interjurisdictional planning, (6) economic development, and (7) affordable housing. In addition, multicounty policies also include policies on open space, resource protection and critical areas.

The review of countywide planning policies and multicounty policies is a collaborative-review which is intended to provide information to allow enhanced coordination of regional planning. The comparison focuses on the consistency of each county's countywide policies with adopted multicounty policies. Regional Council staff, together with local government staff, prepares a draft consistency report and circulates it for review and comment by the counties and any countywide growth management planning bodies. Any identified problems shall first be addressed through staff to staff discussions. Unresolved issues are referred to the Executive Board, counties, and countywide growth management planning bodies for consideration. If inconsistencies remain, the Regional Council, any county, or any countywide growth management planning body may request the Washington State Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development to provide mediation services pursuant to the Growth Management Act.

Certification of Countywide Planning Policies and the Adopted Regional Transportation Plan for Consistency

The consistency certification of countywide planning policies and the regional transportation plan is based on a comparative analysis of the adopted countywide transportation-related planning policies and the regional transportation plan (RCW 47.80.023).

Regional Council staff reviews the countywide policies and the regional transportation plan and prepares a certification report noting any possible inconsistencies. (Note: This report may be a section of the consistency report comparing countywide and multicounty policies, if the transportation-related provisions are provided as part of a whole set of policies.) The report shall identify any recommended amendments to the countywide policies or the regional plan, or both, to make them consistent with each other. The report shall be submitted to one or both of the policy boards and Executive Board for action and then to the counties and the respective countywide growth management planning bodies for consideration. Any inconsistencies shall be

addressed by consideration of amendments either to the policies or the plan, or both, according to the procedures established by law for amendment.

If a county or a countywide growth management planning body disagrees with a recommended amendment to its policies, it may appeal the recommendation. Appeals shall be made to the Executive Board, which shall either make recommendations to the General Assembly to amend the regional transportation plan to allow certification or deny certification.

Proposed amendments or updates to countywide planning policies shall be submitted by each county to the Regional Council for preliminary review at least 60 days in advance of action by the countywide growth management planning body. Preliminary review shall identify and recommend amendments to allow certification. After adoption of the policies they shall be reviewed for any changes made after the preliminary review, which would affect certification. A certification report and recommendation shall then be prepared as described above. Countywide planning policies remain certified until amended.

Type 3: Consistency Review of Transit Agency Plans

To coordinate planning among the Regional Council, local governments and transit agencies, the Regional Council provides comments to transit agencies during the development of their transit development plans (six-year) and longer-term strategic plans. Coordination and consultation regarding these plans and the adopted regional growth and transportation strategy provides an opportunity to identify how transit agencies are using the regional strategy and reflecting growth management provisions in their planning efforts. Agencies are encouraged to provide copies of their draft plans to the Regional Council prior to or during their formal review period. This enables the Council to address any potential issues prior to the adoption of the plan. Regional Council staff are available to transit agency staff to discuss any issues or problems.

For major plan updates, Regional Council staff, together with transit agency staff, prepares a draft consistency report and circulates it for review and comment by the transit agency. The report is revised accordingly and transmitted to one or both of the policy boards and Executive Board for consideration. Any identified problems shall first be addressed through staff to staff discussions. Unresolved issues are referred to the Executive Board and transit agency officials for consideration.

Certification of Plans Prepared by the Regional Transit Authority (Sound Transit) Washington State law requires the Regional Council to formally certify that the regional transit system plan prepared by the Regional Transit Authority – known as Sound Transit – is consistent with the regional transportation plan (RCW 81.104). The agency is encouraged to provide the Regional Council with drafts of its plan prior to or during the formal plan review period. This enables the Council to address potential issues prior to final adoption. Regional Council staff, together with Sound Transit staff, prepare a draft consistency report for review and comment by the authority. A recommendation is then forwarded to one or both of the policy boards and Executive Board for consideration and action. If the authority disagrees with the recommendation, it may appeal to the Executive Board.

Land Uses Adjacent to General Aviation Airports

Washington state law requires local jurisdictions to establish plans, zoning ordinances and development regulations which discourage the siting of incompatible land uses adjacent to public use general aviation airports (RCW 36.70.547). As part of its review of local comprehensive plans, the Regional Council assesses whether localities are addressing this requirement.

The Review of Amendments and Updates to Local Comprehensive Plans, Countywide Planning Policies and Transit Agency Plans

All amendments to countywide planning policies, local comprehensive plans, and Sound Transit's plan shall be submitted to the Regional Council for review. However, action by the Regional Council's boards concerning certification of local comprehensive plans and countywide planning policies is limited to the certification-related issues addressed in the amendment(s).⁶ Transit agencies are requested to submit any updates and amendments to their plans to Regional Council for review and comment.

Frequency of Plan Review and Certification

Local jurisdictions' transportation elements are certified until amended or updated. Any changes to the transportation-related provisions will require certification. Countywide planning policies are also certified until amended or updated. Any changes will be reviewed against the multicounty policies and the regional transportation plan, as appropriate.

The policy and plan review process needs to be flexible in order to incorporate changes made over time. The regional transportation plan will itself be amended and updated regularly in accordance with federal requirements to reflect changes in local comprehensive plans and other related transportation plans. Amendments and updates to local plans and countywide policies are expected to demonstrate consistency with the version of the regional transportation plan in place at the time countywide or local adoption action is taken.

Questions concerning this document may be directed to: Puget Sound Regional Council, Growth Management Section, 1011 Western Avenue, Suite 500, Seattle, Washington 98104-1035, (206) 464-5815.

⁶ For example, if a jurisdiction amends only its policies addressing transportation demand management, then only that set of policies would be reviewed and acted upon for certification.