

VISION 2050



Regional Growth Strategy

Background Paper

March 2019



Puget Sound Regional Council

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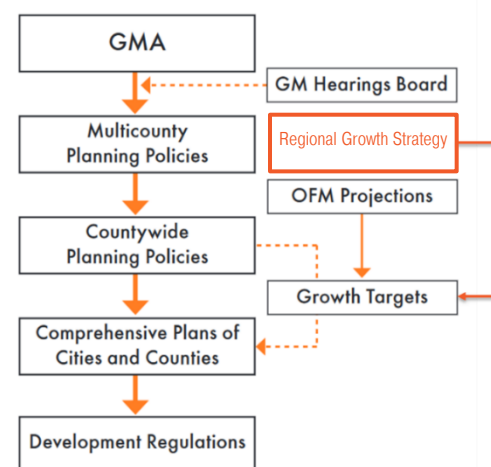
Introduction

VISION 2040 is a shared strategy for moving the central Puget Sound toward a sustainable future. As the region continues to grow and change, VISION 2040 works towards a center-oriented pattern of growth that supports vibrant, livable and healthy communities, while protecting the environment and offering economic opportunities for all. The pattern of growth plays an important role in the quality of life in the region. It shapes commutes, helps provide access to transit and services, and creates places for new jobs and for communities to flourish.

Proactive planning for long-term growth is a key tenet of VISION 2040 and the Washington State Growth Management Act and can help shape outcomes for residents, businesses, local governments, and other service providers. This focus on proactive and coordinated growth is widely shared in the region. In a recent public opinion survey 67% of residents in the region thought it was important or very important for local governments to work together on a regional growth strategy.

The Regional Growth Strategy is the long-range approach in VISION 2040 for the distribution of population and employment growth within the four-county central Puget Sound region. This paper provides background, data and policy context to consider as PSRC extends VISION to 2050 and develops growth strategy alternatives for environmental review. VISION 2040 set out an ambitious goal of a guiding growth to enhance communities. At a regional scale, growth trends over the past decade have been largely consistent with the Regional Growth Strategy. The region has seen significant housing and commercial development in regional growth centers and employment growth in manufacturing/industrial centers. Environmentally critical areas, shorelines, and rural lands have been protected and preserved. However, challenges remain. The region has not yet achieved all the goals of the strategy. Housing construction has struggled to keep up with job growth, and economic opportunities are not uniformly

Figure 1: Planning Framework
TARGETS AND GMA RELATIONSHIP

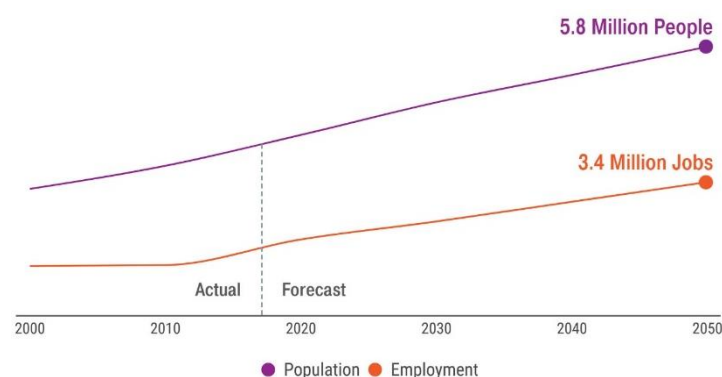


available. This paper further discusses performance of the growth strategy and key policy considerations for VISION 2050.

Purpose of the Regional Growth Strategy

The central Puget Sound region is forecast to continue to grow in the coming decades — up to 5.8 million people are projected to live here by the year 2050. See Figure 2. VISION's Regional Growth Strategy provides guidance to accommodate that growth. The strategy is organized around guiding most employment and housing growth to the region's largest cities and urban centers. Other cities and unincorporated urban areas are expected to play a more modest role as locations for new growth. Outside the urban area, rural communities, farms and forests will continue to be a permanent and vital part of the region. The strategy promotes infill and redevelopment within urban areas to create more compact, walkable, and transit-friendly communities.

Figure 2: 2050 Population and Employment Forecast



Under the Growth Management Act, counties, in consultation with cities, are responsible for adopting 20-year growth targets. These population and employment growth targets are a key input to local comprehensive plans, ensuring that each county

collectively is accommodating population growth and that jurisdictions have shared expectations for growth. Jurisdictions use growth targets to inform land use, transportation, and capital facilities in their 20-year comprehensive plans.

The Regional Growth Strategy provides regional guidance for the countywide growth target process. The Regional Growth Strategy defines a role for different types of places in accommodating the region's residential and employment growth.

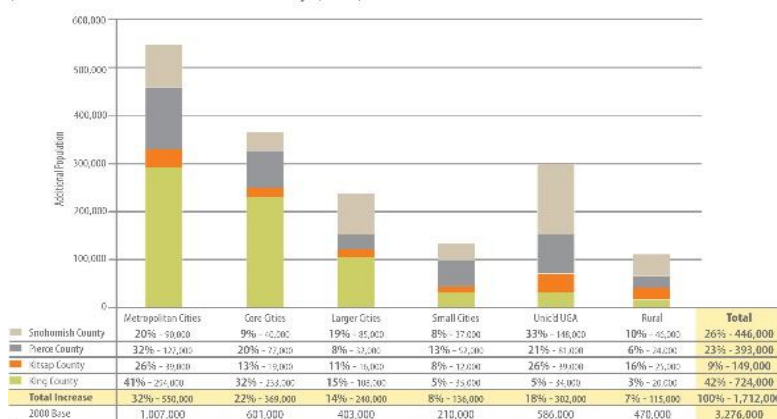
Environmental review for VISION 2040 showed that, compared with a broad range of alternatives, the desired growth pattern in the Regional Growth Strategy would have significant benefits for mobility, air quality, environmental stewardship, and healthy communities.

Overview of Current Regional Growth Strategy

The strategy is organized around categories of “regional geographies” and provides a description of an overall development pattern that the central Puget Sound region should strive for over time. The majority of the region’s employment and housing growth is allocated to *Metropolitan Cities* and *Core Cities*, which together contain the more than nearly 30 designated regional growth centers. *Larger Cities* also play an important role over time as places that accommodate growth. *Small Cities* provide jobs and housing that support vital and active communities at a less intensive scale. Growth in the *Unincorporated Urban Growth Area* is prioritized for areas that are identified for annexation into adjacent cities. Significantly less growth is allocated to the *Rural areas* than has occurred in the past. The Regional Growth Strategy provides numeric guidance for counties to consider when developing local growth targets within the framework of the Growth Management Act. See Figure 3.

Figure 3: VISION 2040 Regional Growth Strategy Population and Employment Allocations

Population Growth by Regional Geography and County, 2000-2040
(Final Draft Technical Amendment as of January 8, 2009)



Employment Growth by Regional Geography and County, 2000-2040
(Final Draft Technical Amendment as of January 8, 2009)

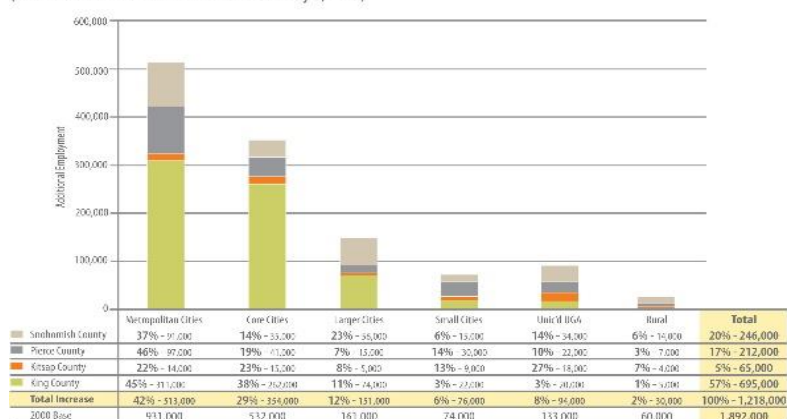
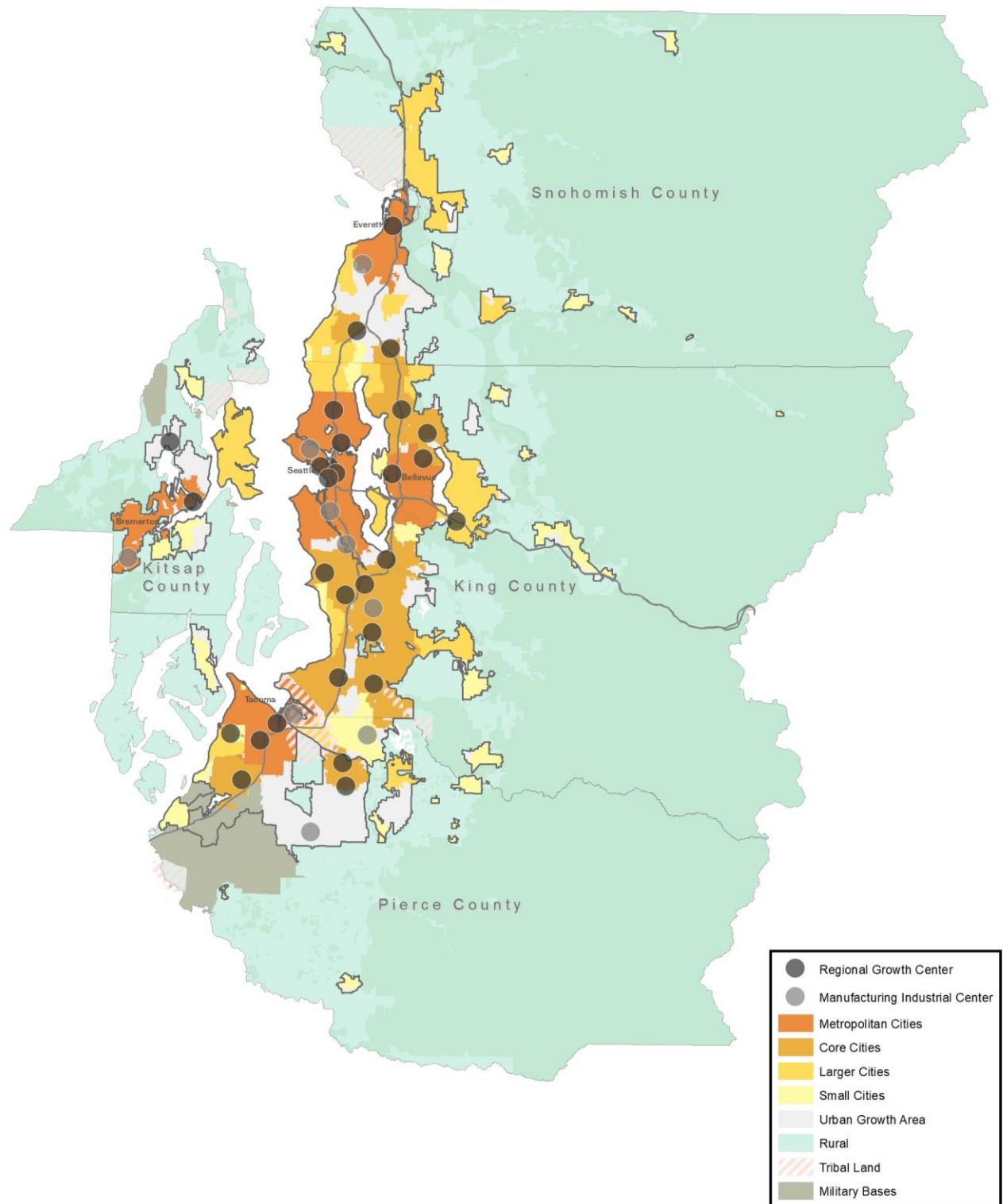


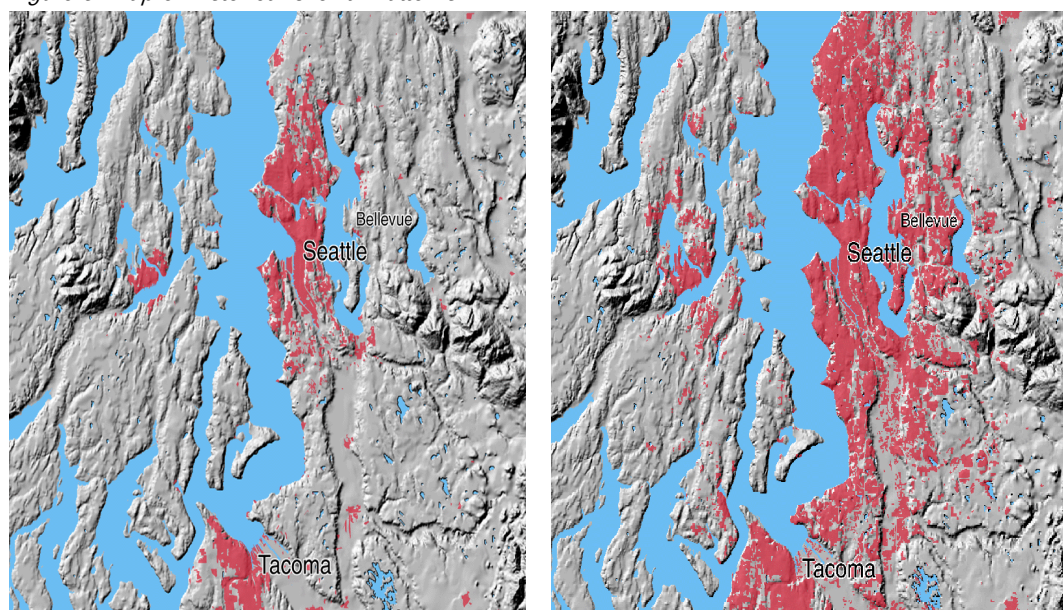
Figure 4: Regional Geographies in VISION 2040



Historical Context

The central Puget Sound has long been attractive to new residents. By the 1980s, the central Puget Sound region had achieved national and international prominence because of its plentiful advantages: spectacular natural areas, high-technology and aerospace companies, and rising stature in world trade. However, the effects of a strong economy changed the region. Rapid economic growth fueled a building boom. New subdivisions, shopping malls, office campuses, and parking lots consumed previously undeveloped land at a fast rate. After the 1960s, the region's traditional central cities – Seattle, Tacoma, Everett, and Bremerton – experienced population declines, while their surrounding suburbs continued to grow, with annexations of formerly rural, agricultural, and forest lands, and new city incorporations. These sprawling development patterns, together with more drivers, more cars, and more miles driven by each driver, increased distances between job locations and homes, traffic congestion, and air pollution. See Figure 5. By the late 1980s, public concerns about these trends and environmental impacts prompted regional and state leaders to begin work on a new vision that would support economic growth while also preserving the natural beauty and resources of the region. To achieve the vision, changes had to be made in lifestyles, growth management methods, and decision-making processes.

Figure 5: Map of Historical Growth Patterns



Seattle's share of regional population fell from 37% in 1960 to 18% in 1990.

Growth Strategy in VISION 2020

The region's first growth strategy was adopted in the 1990 VISION 2020 plan. The strategy directed new regional growth to regional, metropolitan, and subregional centers and pedestrian areas. The intent of the strategy was to promote a regional urban form characterized by compact, well-defined communities framed by a network of open spaces and connected by new transportation facilities, transit lines and ferries. The goal was to encourage future growth to take place in a more concentrated manner within designated urban growth areas. A more concentrated growth pattern would encourage transit use, bicycle and pedestrian trips, and reduce the growth in traffic congestion, air pollution and fuel consumption. The strategy would also lessen pressure to develop open space and environmentally sensitive lands. While VISION 2020 was adopted as regional policy shortly after the passage of the Growth Management Act, it was seen as a general framework that had little force in law, leaving ambiguity on how this guidance should be incorporated into comprehensive plans and countywide policies.

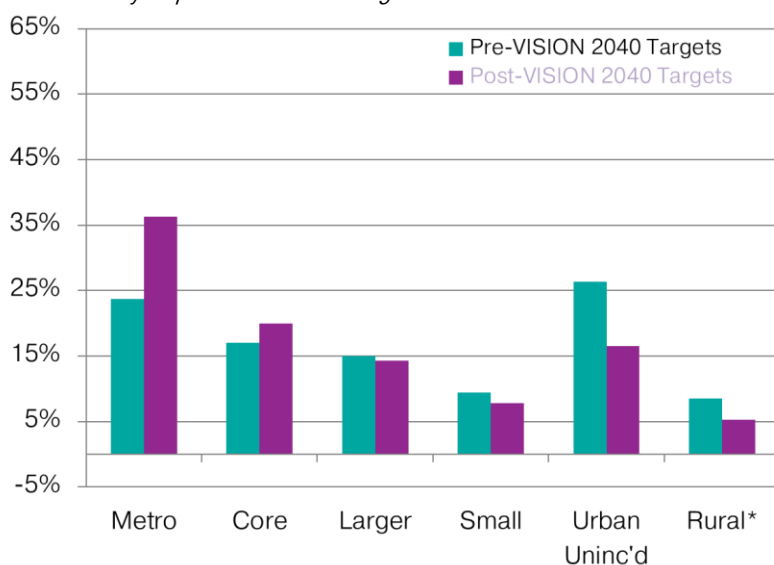
VISION 2020 was updated in 1995 to serve as the region's multicounty planning policies under the new state Growth Management Act, with only minor changes to the growth strategy articulated in 1990. The 1995 VISION 2020 growth strategy built on the base provided by the 1990 plan, the recently adopted Growth Management Act, countywide planning policies, and local comprehensive plans. The strategy included three parts: 1) identify and maintain urban growth areas, 2) support compact communities, and 3) focus growth in centers. Together, these three parts encouraged a more compact development pattern that would conserve resources and create additional transportation, housing, and shopping choices.

The VISION 2020 growth strategy served as an organizing vision for the region. However, other than general guidance calling for the development of compact communities and dense urban centers, there was little direction for how those centers should be identified or designated, how to coordinate the identification and designation of urban growth areas. There was not a clear plan for how counties, working with their cities, should allocate population and employment growth more broadly outside of centers relative to regional infrastructure, environmental assets, or other local conditions.

Growth Management by the Numbers

In 2005, PSRC conducted an analysis for VISION 2040 to better understand the first round of local growth target processes and what they added up to regionally. That analysis, *Growth Management by the Numbers* (PSRC 2005) found that the four counties had used different approaches to developing targets. Planning horizons differed, as did requirements for creating employment targets, whether or not to translate population allocations into housing units and creating specific growth targets for designated regional centers. The targets also directed more growth to both urban and rural unincorporated areas than envisioned in VISION 2020 policies. See Figure 6. The outcomes were playing out in actual growth patterns. The report developed recommendations to reconcile some of these inconsistencies. PSRC acted to incorporate findings and recommendations of the report into development of VISION 2040, and several findings were acted upon by countywide planning groups, and partially incorporated into the VISION 2040 Regional Growth Strategy.

Figure 6: County Population Growth Targets Before and After VISION 2040 Adoption



Development of VISION 2040

VISION 2040's strategy for accommodating growth is organized around the Growth Management Act's concepts of urban, rural, and natural resource areas. It reflects a commitment to plan for the future in a way that preserves and enhances communities, conserves our natural and financial resources, and maintains a high quality of life. This approach helps to fully utilize existing services, provide new services more efficiently,

and minimize the environmental impacts of growth. In developing the Regional Growth Strategy, policy makers articulated a more specific strategy where:

- Growth is focused within a designated Urban Growth Area (UGA)
- Within the UGA, growth is focused in cities containing regional growth centers
- Rural and natural resource lands are protected
- The environmental impacts of growth are minimized, and
- Existing infrastructure and new investments are used efficiently

Importantly, the Regional Growth Strategy was designed to provide clearer guidance to more effectively direct growth to and within urban growth areas, achieve a better jobs housing balance – particularly across county lines. Numeric guidance more clearly articulated the different roles of the region's cities, towns, and other urban areas in accommodating growth, resulting in a future development pattern that would provide desired regional outcomes.

In the Regional Growth Strategy, the region's landscape has been divided into seven types of geographies.

- *Metropolitan Cities* and *Core Cities* include cities that have designated *regional growth centers*. These two groups of cities are and will be the most intensely urban places in the region.
- The *Larger Cities* category groups together the next tier of large cities that have similar amounts of population and employment.
- The *Small Cities* category is further subdivided into three types to reflect the wide variety of smaller cities and towns throughout the region, as well as the different roles they will likely play in accommodating forecast growth.
- *Unincorporated Urban Growth Areas* capture a wide variety of urban lands, both lightly and heavily developed. The transformation of these urban lands will be critical to the region's future success.

- *Rural Areas* and *Natural Resources Lands* are categories that describe the different types of unincorporated areas outside the urban growth area, and include very low-density housing, working landscapes, and open space.

These regional geographies provided a framework for a numeric distribution of the region's forecasted growth for the year 2040. By allocating county and regional growth to groups of regional geographies, the strategy preserves flexibility for counties to work with their cities as they develop specific, jurisdiction-level growth targets that take into account local conditions. This framework provides clearer regional guidance about the roles of different types of cities in accommodating regional growth.

In addition, unlike the growth strategy described in VISION 2020, VISION 2040 called for local jurisdictions to translate population allocations to housing unit targets, develop employment targets, and set specific growth targets for designated regional centers. When employment and housing targets were developed across the region, it allowed for a better assessment of the planned regional distribution of housing and jobs, and therefore allowed for better planning for jobs-housing balance within each county. And lastly, the Regional Growth Strategy called for more employment growth in Kitsap, Pierce, and Snohomish counties, and more population growth in King County, than predicted by the region's employment forecasts at the time. This was an effort to ensure that well-paying jobs could be found throughout the region and minimize commute distances.

The Regional Growth Strategy was developed over a year-long process based on four growth alternatives. The alternatives were designed to represent a broad, but realistic, range of growth options. They represented four distinct choices based on different distributions of growth and each provided reasonable options for accommodating the anticipated population and employment growth through 2040. These alternatives included:

Figure 7: VISION 2040 Alternatives analyzed on range of outcomes

Selected Evaluation Criteria Summary						
		VISION 2020 Update Alternatives				
		Growth Targets Extended	Metropolitan Cities	Preferred Growth Alternative	Larger Cities	Smaller Cities
Environmental Quality						
	1D. Air Quality			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	1E. Climate Change		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Economic Prosperity						
	3A. Access to Jobs - Transit Adjacency to Employment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	3D. Jobs/Housing Balance - Regional Share of Jobs in Everett, Tacoma, and Bremerton	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Land Use (includes Maintaining Rural Character & Protecting Resource Lands)						
	4A. Transit Adjacency to Population		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	4C. Rural Area - Population Levels in Rural Area		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	4H. Resource Lands - Protection of Resource Lands		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Transportation						
	5C. Daily Vehicle Miles Traveled		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	5E. Daily Hours of Delay		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	5F. Work Trip Mode Split		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Environmental Justice						
	7A. Distribution of Employment Growth Compared to Locations of Environmental Justice Populations	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
	7B. Access to Transportation Services and Facilities		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		

Source: VISION 2040 FEIS. Checks indicate alternatives that performed best (large) or near top (small)

- *Growth Targets Extended.* The “no-action” alternative that allowed growth to proceed with no change to growth targets found in local comprehensive plans.
- *Metropolitan Cities.* The most concentrated choice, this alternative directed most growth into the cities of Seattle, Bellevue, Tacoma, Everett, and Bremerton.
- *Larger Cities.* An alternative less concentrated than the Metropolitan Cities alternative that spread growth among additional larger suburban cities.
- *Small Cities.* The alternative with the most dispersed growth pattern, with more growth in smaller cities and unincorporated urban growth areas

With the goal of selecting an aspirational, but achievable, strategy, the Growth Management Policy Board used four tools to evaluate the alternatives and develop the final hybrid Preferred Growth Alternative: 1) Findings in the Draft Environmental Impact

Statement, 2) Public comments, 3) Supplemental technical analysis, and 4) Evaluation criteria.

A fifth hybrid Preferred Growth Alternative was analyzed in the Draft Supplemental and Final Environmental Impact Statements, and incorporated into the final VISION 2040 plan as the adopted Regional Growth Strategy. See Figure 7.

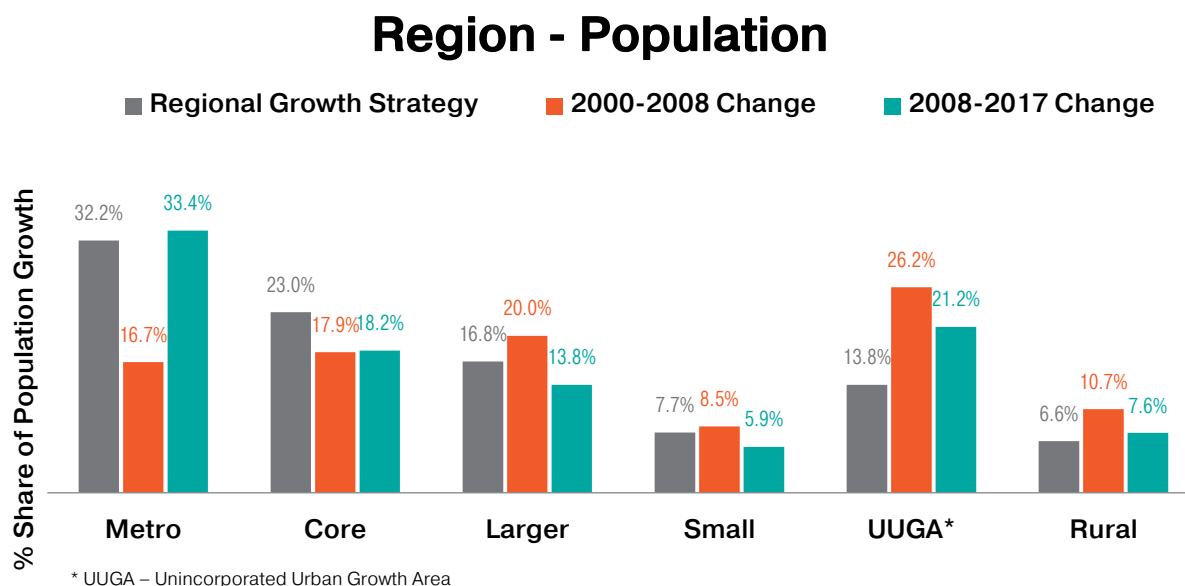
Following the adoption of VISION 2040, counties and cities worked to implement the Regional Growth Strategy through local targets. The path to implementing VISION 2040 has been longer than first anticipated. During the Great Recession, the Legislature delayed required periodic comprehensive plan updates until 2015-16. Consequently, local targets and plans reflecting VISION 2040 have only been effective for the last three years.

Growth Trends and the Regional Growth Strategy

The central Puget Sound region has seen a surge of growth in recent years, adding 376,000 people since 2010, and is now home to more than 4 million people. Comparing recent trends with the strategy is one way to measure how the region is doing in achieving the goals of VISION 2040 and help inform work to extend the Regional Growth Strategy to 2050.

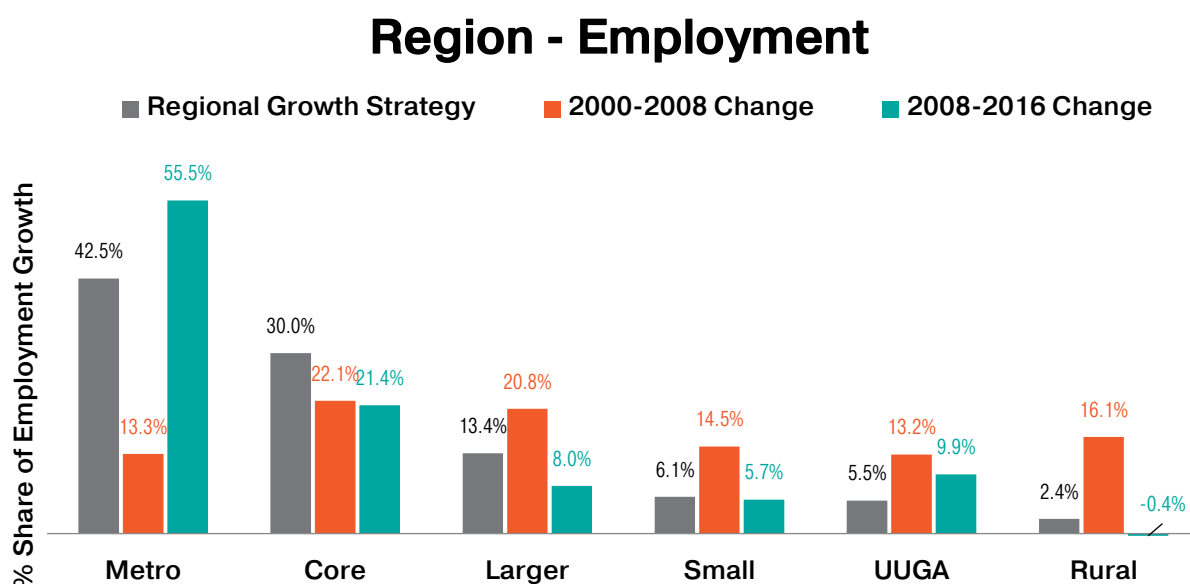
Looking at the big picture and in the context of a 40-year plan, growth trends are in alignment with or moving in the direction called for in VISION 2040. Overall, the trend is showing an increase in population and employment locating in urban areas, cities, and centers, and declining growth within rural and resource lands. In 2015-16, 95 percent of job growth and 92 percent of population growth occurred inside the urban growth area.

Figure 8: Regional Population Growth Trends and Regional Growth Strategy, by Regional Geography



As shown in Figures 8 and 9, population and employment growth in Metropolitan Cities has surged since 2008, led by growth in Seattle and Bellevue. Core Cities have seen steady growth since 2000, slightly below levels suggested by VISION 2040. Overall, Larger Cities' growth since 2000 aligns with VISION 2040 with some slowing since 2010. Small Cities and Urban Unincorporated Areas are adding more population and jobs than planned for in VISION 2040, but at a declining rate since 2008.

Figure 9: Regional Employment Growth Trends and Regional Growth Strategy, by Regional Geography



These findings reflect trends averaged for the entire region, and mostly reflect patterns in King County, where much of the new growth has occurred. So far, the pattern of actual development in Pierce, Snohomish, and Kitsap counties looks different from King County. Metropolitan and Core cities in those counties, which includes places such as Everett, Tacoma, and Lynnwood, have generally grown slower than planned in VISION 2040. Unincorporated areas have continued to grow more rapidly than called for in VISION 2040.

Overall and over time, actual growth has been more consistent than not compared with the Regional Growth Strategy. In terms of county-level growth:

- King County has captured a larger share of population growth than the Regional Growth Strategy, fueled by a surge of population in last eight years.
- King County leads the region in job growth, but at a lower level than envisioned because of major economic downturns from the “Dot Com bust” and the Great Recession, though King County jobs growth since 2008 has been very strong.
- Both population and employment trends are supportive of the Regional Growth Strategy objective of achieving better jobs-housing balance.
- Population growth in Kitsap County growth has significantly trailed the Regional Growth Strategy. Given lower total growth expected in Kitsap County, future growth could potentially reduce the gap.

See Figures 10 and 11.

Figure 10: Population Growth Trends and Regional Growth Strategy, by County

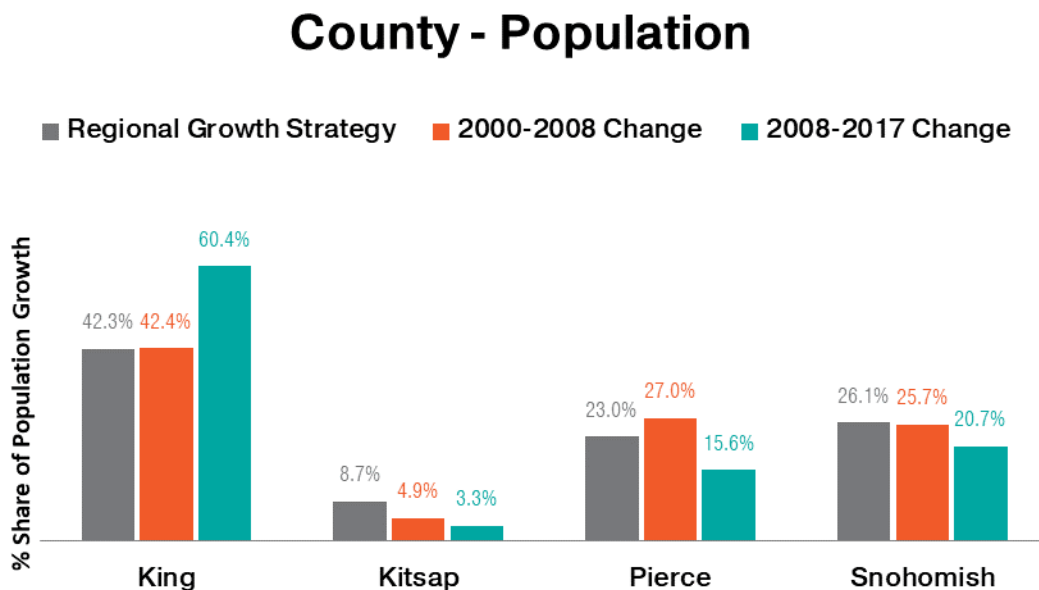
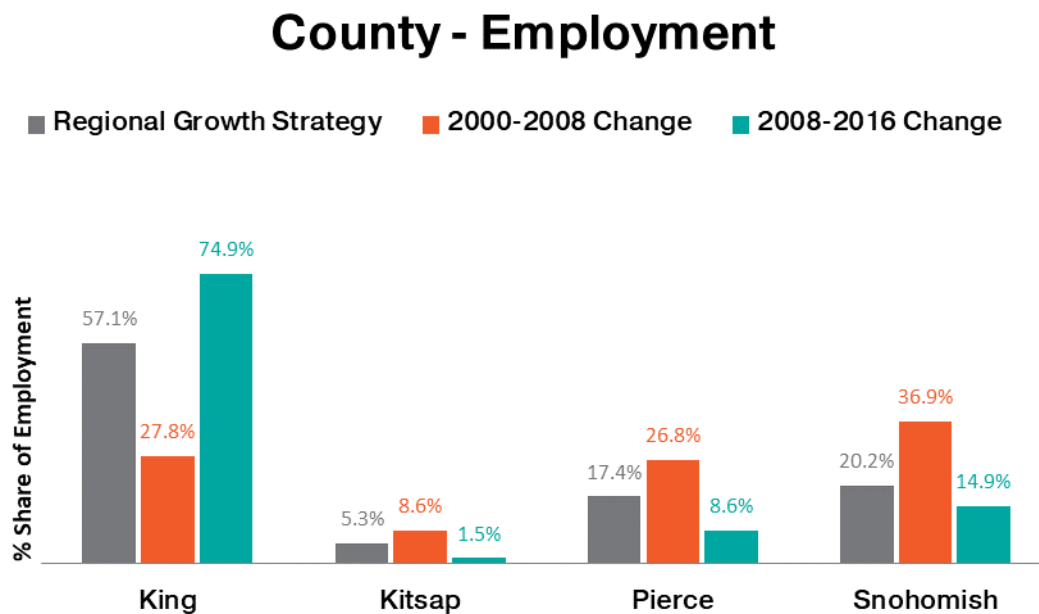


Figure 11: Employment Growth Trends and Regional Growth Strategy, by County



King County

Overall and over time, actual growth patterns in King County have been more consistent than not compared with the Regional Growth Strategy.

Overall performance was driven by a shift toward strong growth in Metropolitan Cities (Seattle and Bellevue) that occurred in the last eight years, particularly driven by expansions at Amazon and other technology companies.

There has been somewhat more population growth in Urban Unincorporated than envisioned, and Core Cities have not matched employment or residential growth levels.

Figure 12: King County Population Growth Trends and Regional Growth Strategy, by Regional Geography

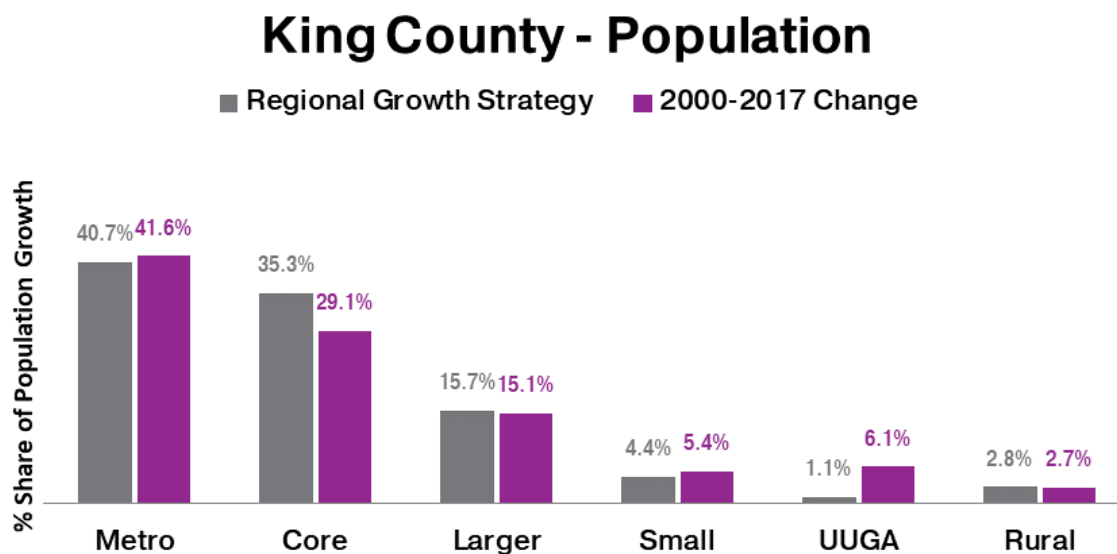
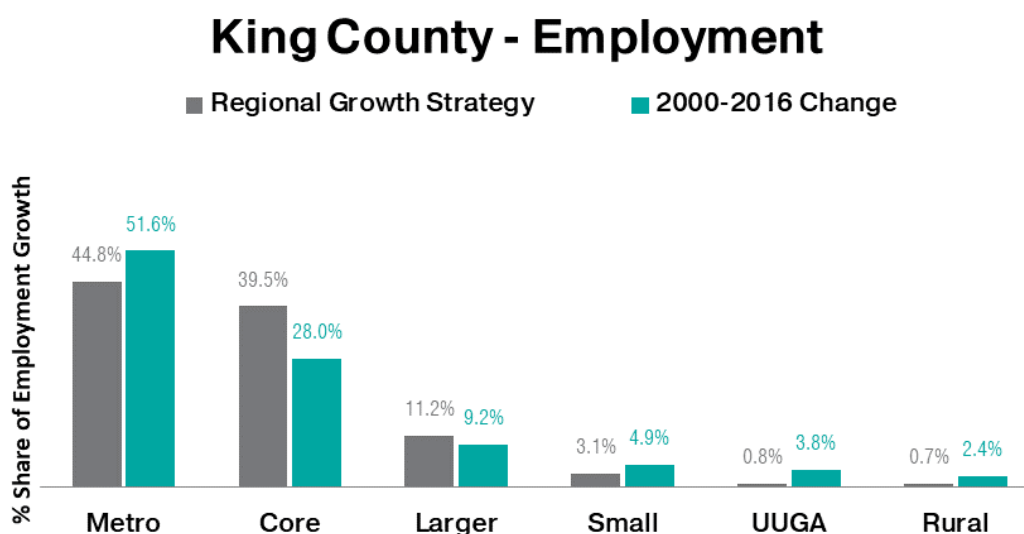


Figure 13: King County Employment Growth Trends and Regional Growth Strategy, by Regional Geography



Kitsap County

In Kitsap County, growth in Larger Cities, Small Cities, and Urban Unincorporated is generally tracking well with the Regional Growth Strategy.

While the amount of actual growth in Kitsap is relatively low, the share of growth occurring in the Rural Area has been significantly higher than in VISION 2040.

Bremerton has trailed the Regional Growth Strategy, but more recently has seen an increasing share of new population and jobs. The total amounts of growth in Kitsap County are smaller than the other counties, and the gaps between trends and the Regional Growth Strategy could narrow in the remaining time period. See Figures 14 and 15.

Figure 14: Kitsap County Population Growth Trends and Regional Growth Strategy, by Regional Geography

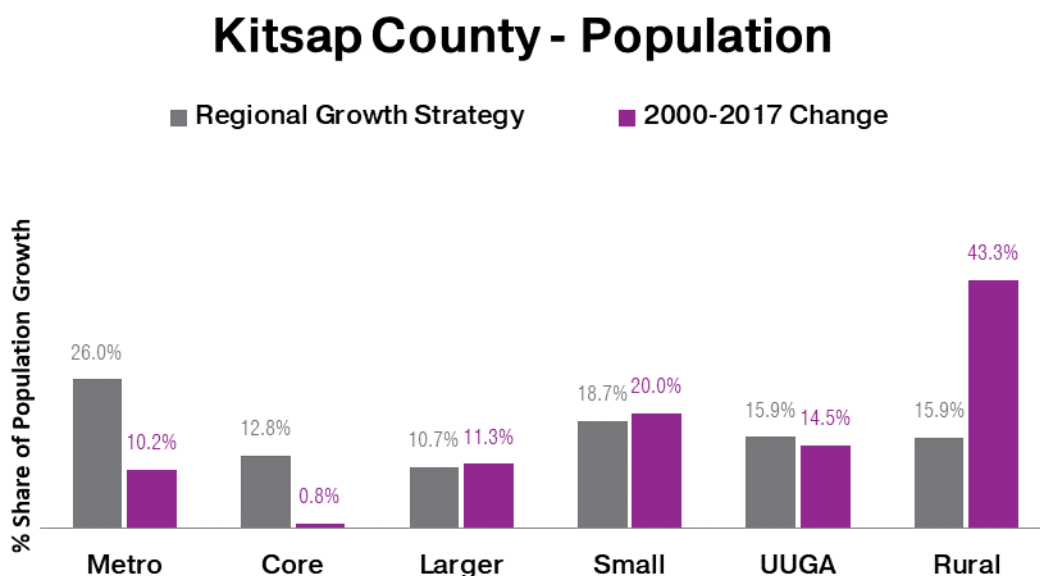
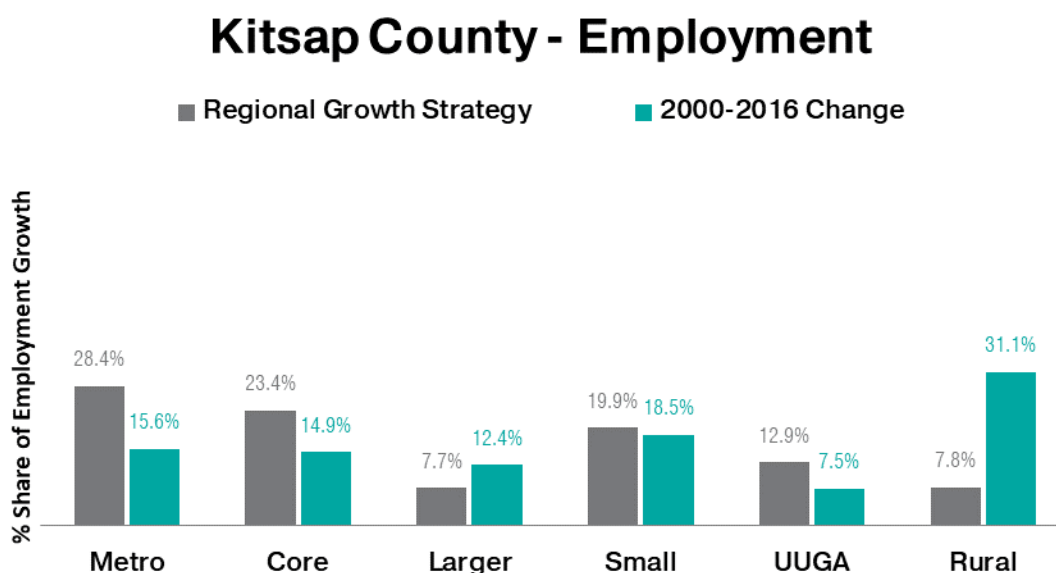


Figure 15: Kitsap County Employment Growth Trends and Regional Growth Strategy, by Regional Geography



Pierce County

Larger and Small Cities are tracking well with the Regional Growth Strategy on population, and Larger and Core Cities are tracking well with the Regional Growth Strategy on employment.

To date, population and job growth in Tacoma have been tracking behind the Regional Growth Strategy shares, although growth in Tacoma has increased in recent years. Core Cities trail expectations in the Regional Growth Strategy on population only.

Population and employment growth in Urban Unincorporated and Rural area is higher than anticipated in the Regional Growth Strategy but slowed in absolute terms due to slower countywide growth after 2008. See Figures 16 and 17.

Figure 16: Pierce County Population Growth Trends and Regional Growth Strategy, by Regional Geography

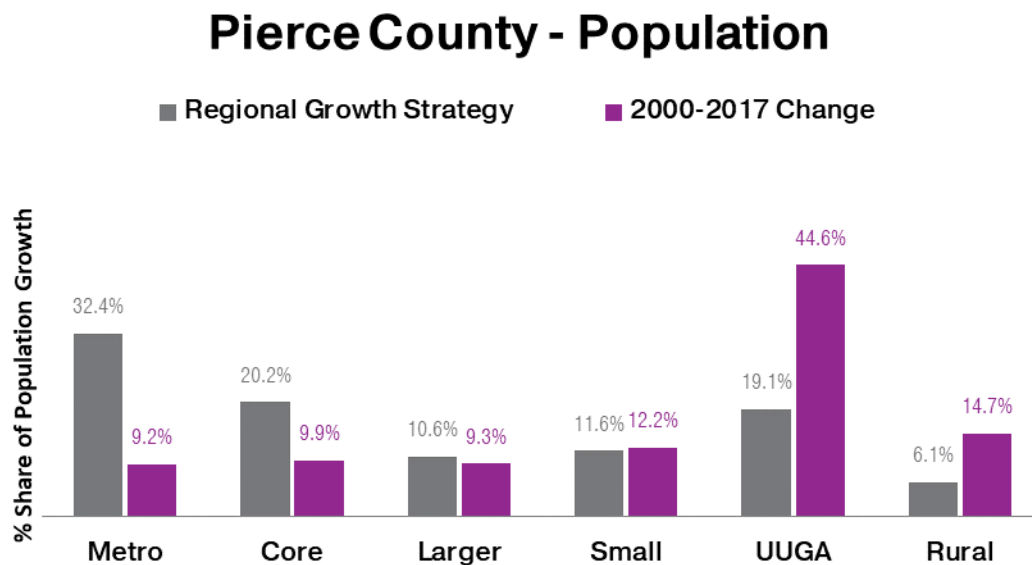
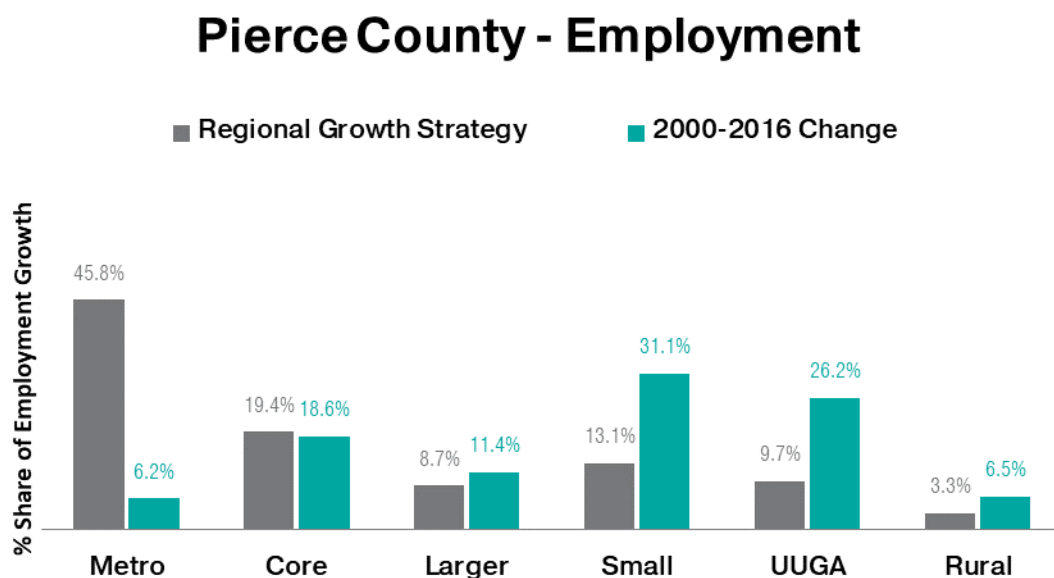


Figure 17: Pierce County Employment Growth Trends and Regional Growth Strategy, by Regional Geography



Snohomish County

In Snohomish County, Larger Cities, Small Cities, and the Rural Area are tracking well with the Regional Growth Strategy on population. Core Cities, Larger Cities, and Small Cities are tracking well on jobs.

Growth in unincorporated areas, both urban and rural, is moderately higher as a share of the county than anticipated in the Regional Growth Strategy. Additionally, the Metropolitan City (Everett) and the Core Cities have added less population than planned, and Everett has not added as many jobs as anticipated by the Regional Growth Strategy. See Figures 18 and 19.

Figure 18: Snohomish County Population Growth Trends and Regional Growth Strategy, by Regional Geography

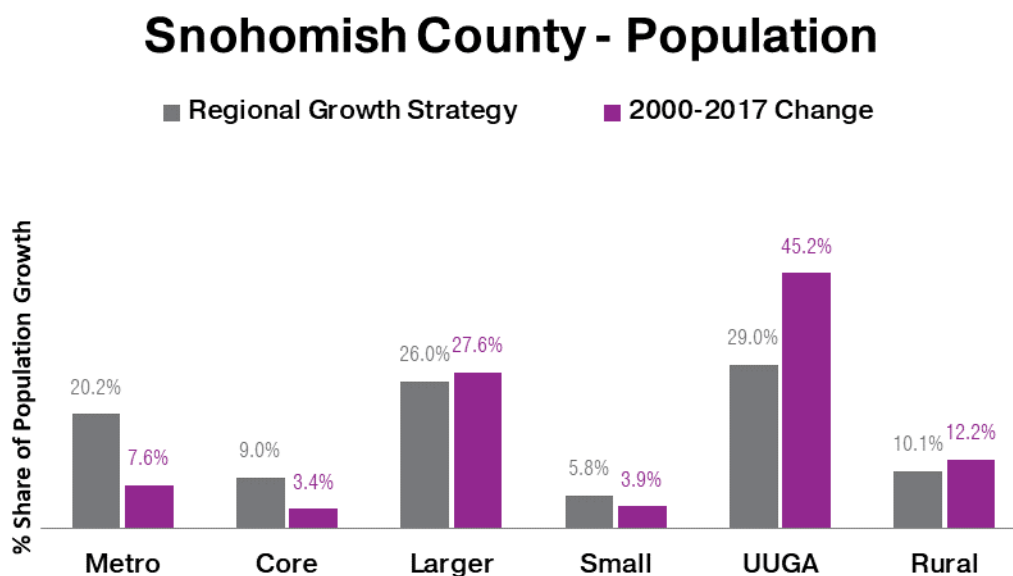
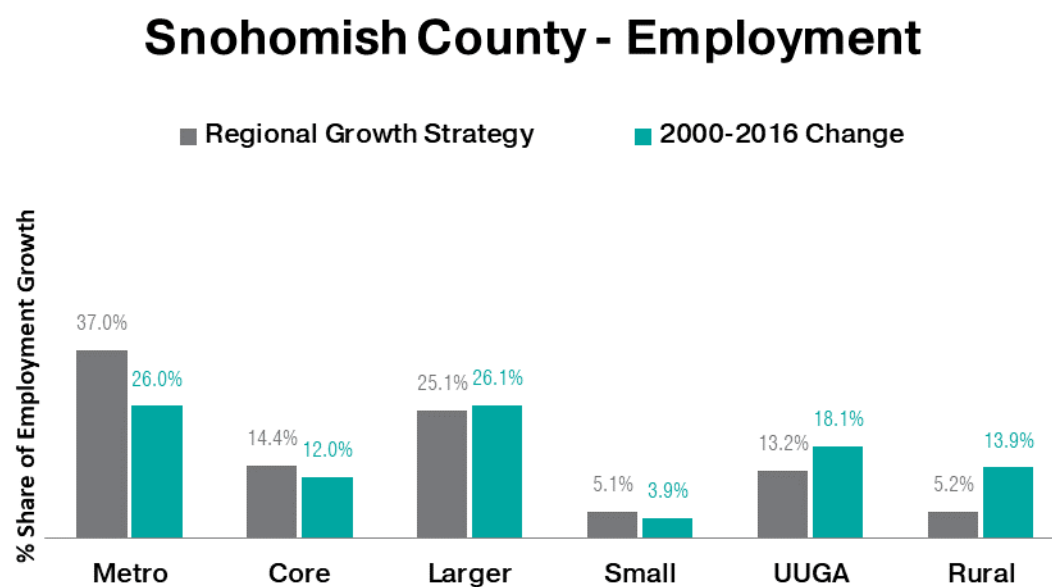


Figure 19: Snohomish County Employment Growth Trends and Regional Growth Strategy, by Regional Geography



Policy Considerations

Recent plans and initiatives, data and other factors can help inform the update to the Regional Growth Strategy. This section summarizes updated factors since the 2008 development of VISION 2040. Some of these factors may be used to inform shares of growth, while others (localized market conditions, access to infrastructure, etc.) could also help guide development of growth targets for individual jurisdictions at the countywide level.

Plans and Initiatives

Work by PSRC and other agencies since 2008 may help inform an update to the Regional Growth Strategy.

Completed in 2013, the **Growing Transit Communities Strategy** is an implementation plan to promote thriving and equitable transit communities in the central Puget Sound region. PSRC and many member agencies are signatories to the Growing Transit Communities Compact. The Strategy calls for transit communities to attract at least 25% of housing growth and 35% of the employment growth expected in the region through the year 2040 in current and future light rail stations. [As of 2017](#), including some updated station locations, the region was exceeding the goal for employment growth, and nearly achieving the housing growth goal. VISION 2050 will consider additional transit communities beyond the light rail corridors studied in Growing Transit Communities could consider broader growth goals around transit-served areas.

The Growing Transit Communities Strategy includes individual strategies for PSRC, local governments, transit agencies, and other stakeholders to promote thriving and equitable transit communities. Strategy 6.1 speaks directly to the Regional Growth Strategy:

6.1. Amend plans and policies to establish transit communities as a key element of the regional growth strategy to concentrate new population and employment within urban areas in centers linked by a high capacity transit network.

In 2018, PSRC's Executive Board adopted the **Regional Centers Framework Update**. The framework clarifies and revises provisions for regional centers and provides

guidelines to designate other types of centers at the countywide level. The framework also includes a key implementation step to designate military installations as a regional geography in the Regional Growth Strategy. The framework identifies different types of regional growth centers and manufacturing/industrial centers, with different growth expectations for each. These growth expectations can inform development of the Regional Growth Strategy and development of targets at the countywide level.

The 2017 **Regional Economic Strategy** – *Amazing Place: Growing Jobs and Opportunity in the Central Puget Sound Region* – identifies goals to open economic opportunities to everyone, compete globally, and sustain a high quality of life. The strategies reinforce that the central Puget Sound region must remain a great place to live, work, do business, go to school, and visit. Residents value the region's natural beauty and cultural assets and are determined to sustain and enhance an outstanding quality of life for generations. Strategies which are relevant to the Regional Growth Strategy update include:

- Ensure a diversity of housing stock that is affordable and connected to jobs
- Focus new growth in urban areas, regional centers, and cities
- Ensure an outstanding and healthy natural environment
- Preserve, enhance, and improve access to open space
- Encourage economic growth across all parts of the region
- Advance economic development within small cities and rural communities

VISION 2040 and the Regional Transportation Plan are built upon a strong regional commitment to sustaining a healthy environment. This commitment includes policy guidance and prioritization of investments to reduce impacts on air quality, particularly greenhouse gas emissions. The Regional Transportation Plan contains a **Four-Part Greenhouse Gas Strategy** encompassing land use, transportation choices, user fees, and technology. The strategy is designed to complement statewide efforts to achieve statutory limits. Over the past several years, significant progress has been made towards implementation of the Four-Part Greenhouse Gas Strategy, within all categories.

The distribution of growth in the Regional Growth Strategy and multicounty planning policies is an important basis for the land use portion of the Greenhouse Gas Strategy.

The Regional Transportation Plan emphasizes the potential of transit-oriented development, in particular, to reduce emissions. With the adoption of local comprehensive plan updates in 2015-2016, cities and counties are now planning for increased growth in designated centers and in high capacity transit areas. The Regional Growth Strategy update will provide an opportunity to continue evaluating the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions through focused and efficient land use patterns for the expected growth into the future.

There are a variety of other factors that can support an informed update to the Regional Growth Strategy and future development of growth targets at the countywide level.

- **Transit investments.** With over \$100 billion in anticipated investments, the central Puget Sound region has made one of the largest commitments in the country to develop a regional high-capacity transit system. Throughout the region, significant transit investments have been built or planned since 2008, including Sound Transit 2 and 3, Metro Rapid Ride, Kitsap Transit's fast ferries, Swift bus rapid transit, and Pierce Transit's bus rapid transit. The plan update represents a key opportunity to consider how regional growth can best leverage significant new investments in transit service.
- **Access to infrastructure.** Beyond transit, the region will see significant investments in other transportation facilities through [Connecting Washington](#). Other types of infrastructure, such as sewer availability and water access, can support or limit the ability of some jurisdictions to accommodate new growth, and should be factored in when setting growth targets.
- **Jobs-housing balance.** The location of jobs and housing plays a significant role in regional travel patterns, affordability, and quality of life. During the development of VISION 2040, the Growth Management Policy Board made policy-based adjustments to the distribution of jobs and housing to promote more balance across the region. The update represents a renewed opportunity to evaluate how the region is planning for jobs-housing balance.
- **Access to opportunity.** The Growth Management Policy Board highlighted social equity as a key priority of the update. Opportunity mapping measures 20 indicators that represent education, economic health, housing and neighborhood quality, transportation/mobility, and health and environment.

PSRC is updating opportunity mapping to support development of VISION 2050. These maps will help illustrate where growth may be planned and highlights needs in lower opportunity neighborhoods.

- **Displacement risk.** The rising cost of housing has led to economic and cultural displacement of communities around the region. PSRC is developing a map of displacement risk, based on research of known risk factors. Information on displacement risk can highlight how growth may affect communities and opportunities for early interventions in the face of change.
- **Recent growth trends.** As documented in Section 3 of this paper, information about how the region has grown since 2000 and since VISION 2040 was adopted in 2008 can help inform potential adjustments to the Regional Growth Strategy.
- **Land use capacity.** Jurisdictions establish land use capacity through their local development regulations. The location and type of housing and jobs capacity varies by county, but data drawn from Buildable Lands Reports shows considerable alignment with the existing Regional Growth Strategy. See Figure 20.

Figure 20: Urban Land Use Capacity

	Share of regional housing capacity	Share of regional jobs capacity
Metropolitan Cities	43%	50%
Core Cities	15%	22%
Larger Cities	17%	14%
Small Cities	6%	6%
Unincorporated UGA	18%	7%

Source: Buildable Lands Reports, PSRC

While the region can take proactive steps to direct growth, existing capacity and vested projects can present challenges for shifting development trends.

Factors like these can shape development of alternatives, selection of a preferred alternative, and the need for policies or actions to support desired outcomes for the Regional Growth Strategy.

Stakeholder Comments

Comments solicited through Taking Stock 2016 and VISION 2050 scoping suggest changes or considerations for the update to the Regional Growth Strategy.

Taking Stock 2016 was an assessment of the collective efforts of the region's counties and cities to implement [VISION 2040](#), as viewed immediately following the 2015-2016 cycle of local comprehensive plan updates and looking ahead to the next update of VISION 2040. The report highlighted key VISION 2040 strategies that are positively influencing local plans and shaping the region as well as strategies and tools that require more work and may need to be reinvigorated in the next update.

Taking Stock found that cities and counties are generally planning for growth consistent with the Regional Growth Strategy, but many face challenges in shifting from past trends. For the most part, local planning for countywide growth targets aligned well with the pattern of future housing and employment growth called for in VISION 2040. However, trends that pre-date VISION 2040, including faster growth in smaller cities and unincorporated areas, and lower rates of infill and redevelopment in a number of Metropolitan and Core cities, present local and regional challenges. The [report](#) (see p. 7) more fully documents successes, challenges, and options for PSRC in addressing the Regional Growth Strategy.

Options included in the report can inform work to develop the Regional Growth Strategy, and future implementation steps for PSRC:

- **Set ambitious, but realistic, guidance in an updated Regional Growth Strategy, and adopt policies and tools to make it a reality.** PSRC can work closely with member jurisdictions to develop an updated strategy that is achievable over the long term, incorporating lessons learned from market trends experienced since 2000, building on the success of jurisdictions that are currently on track with the Regional Growth Strategy, and providing better guidance on best practices and tools to shift growth trends further, where needed. A revised approach to Regional Geographies may be part of the update.
- **Support planning for capacity to accommodate growth in urban areas.** The next update of VISION 2040 will likely extend the Regional Growth Strategy out to

2050. As buildable land capacity becomes tighter, reaching community agreement on targets and accommodating the planned growth may be difficult. PSRC can be supportive of this process with regional modeling and analysis, infrastructure investments that support targeted growth, and guidance for local governments on efficient land use practices.

PSRC solicited comments on **scoping for VISION 2050** from February 2 through March 19, 2018 and held five in-person listening sessions. Numerous commenters addressed the Regional Growth Strategy, including factors to consider in updating the strategy, revisions to the Regional Geographies definitions, and implementation. There were a number of reoccurring themes from comments (more fully documented in the [VISION 2050 Scoping Report](#)):

- **Continue what works from the existing strategy.** Many comments continue to support the existing strategy, to focus growth within a stable urban growth area and within cities and centers, improve jobs-housing balance, and plan for small cities to stay small.
- **Consider new or revised strategies.** Some comments favored reconsideration of the role of urban unincorporated areas or a more flexible and robust role for small cities. Many commented on the need to incorporate a broader range of recent historical and geographically specific data on growth trends, zoned development capacity or other information derived from Buildable Lands, development in the pipeline, infrastructure investments, and environmental constraints on development.
- **Jobs-housing balance** was a key theme, with comments asking for the Regional Growth Strategy to more actively promote equitable economic growth and jobs across the region.
- **Transit-oriented development** was a prominent theme in many comments that stressed the importance of focusing future development around regional high-capacity transit investments, with a common thread of wanting to see a growth alternative that strongly focuses on transit-oriented development.
- Many comments urged review of how **regional geographies** are defined in VISION 2050, focusing on the distinction between Small and Larger Cities, in particular. Commenters urged PSRC to explore other factors to differentiate

places, such as proximity to job centers, annexation potential, planned and funded infrastructure, and/or distance from urban growth area boundary.

- Consistent with the Regional Centers Framework Update, include **major military installations** as a regional geography
- With regard to **implementation**, some commenters want to see greater accountability for jurisdictions to plan for and achieve their growth targets. Others would like to see VISION 2050 be less prescriptive. The Regional Growth Strategy, in this view, should focus on providing guidance for local target setting, emphasize local flexibility, and strive to shape future development through incentives.

Implementation

While the Regional Growth Strategy is clearer and more measurable than previous policy guidance, there are still limited tools to implement the strategy. In 2009, PSRC recognized that changes in growth patterns may not be linear and issued [Appendix II-B](#) to VISION 2040 to provide guidance on aligning local growth targets with the Regional Growth Strategy. PSRC staff was actively involved in reviewing and commenting on countywide growth targets as they were developed. During the 2015/16 comprehensive plan updates, PSRC's boards had extensive discussions about what it means to be consistent with growth targets and with the Regional Growth Strategy. The certification review process found several cities planning for growth not consistent with growth targets. Through that process, board direction generally focused on seeking better alignment between individual city planning and the regional policy framework to support more coordinated and consistent local and regional planning.

PSRC's Executive Board adopted technical amendments of the Regional Growth Strategy in 2009, 2011, and 2017 to reclassify cities which met the standard for Larger City classification. Board conversations for the 2017 amendment emphasized the need to provide additional clarity and structure in the future for amendments to the Regional Growth Strategy to recognize changing conditions.

Feedback from the plan review process, board deliberations, and Taking Stock 2016 emphasized that additional clarity about approach to implementing the Regional Growth Strategy would be beneficial for both local governments and PSRC. As noted in

the scoping comments, there are differing perspectives on the best approach to implementing the Regional Growth Strategy. Implementation of the revised Regional Growth Strategy and guidance provided to local governments will be an important policy conversation during the update to VISION 2050.

Next Steps

PSRC's Executive Board initiated early work on the update of VISION 2040 in July 2017, which directed development of an updated regional 2050 forecast of people, jobs, and housing; a review of regional trends and data; a review of the region's performance in implementing the Regional Growth Strategy; and public engagement through a scoping process that asked communities, stakeholders and individuals about the regional issues they want to see addressed in VISION 2050.

PSRC developed and evaluated different growth scenarios over the summer and early fall 2018 for the update to the Regional Growth Strategy. These growth scenarios will inform selection of alternatives for the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. Plan development, including selection of a preferred alternative and policy development around implementation of the Regional Growth Strategy, will take place in 2019. VISION 2050 is scheduled for adoption in the spring of 2020.

VISION 2050 Work Program

