



## Puget Sound Regional Council

### DISCUSSION ITEM

July 2, 2020

**To:** Transportation Policy Board

**From:** Erika Harris, AICP, SEPA Responsible Official

**Subject:** Regional Transportation Plan Update – SEPA Background Memorandum

### IN BRIEF

PSRC is initiating an update of the long-range Regional Transportation Plan. Federal transportation planning requirements mandate adoption of an update every four years, and the next plan, scheduled to be adopted in 2022, will extend the planning horizon to 2050.

This memo describes the anticipated environmental analysis that will occur for the project in accordance with the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA). The update of the Regional Transportation Plan will be based on the prior update adopted in 2018 and the work to develop VISION 2050 between 2018 to 2020. Correspondingly, the SEPA analysis will build on and incorporate the SEPA analysis completed for those two prior planning efforts.

### DISCUSSION

A broad array of regional transportation alternatives was studied in the Transportation 2040 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Transportation 2040 Final EIS (2010) included analysis of the preferred alternative that is a regional transportation network in the year 2040 and that is inclusive of long-range transportation plans from transit agencies, the state Department of Transportation, and other transportation agencies. PSRC issued an addendum to the Transportation 2040 EIS in 2018 to address updates to the plan included in the 2018 Regional Transportation Plan.

The VISION 2050 Environmental Impact Statement used the Regional Transportation Plan transportation network as a base to analyze four land use and growth alternatives that extend the planning horizon to the year 2050. The preferred alternative, currently being reviewed by PSRC's Executive Board, was included in the Final EIS for VISION 2050, which was released on March 18, 2020. The VISION 2050 EIS, therefore, includes

analysis of the Regional Transportation Plan extended to the year 2050 using the growth forecast and distribution of VISION 2050.

The 2022 Regional Transportation Plan update is anticipated to include several updates, including:

- Updating the base year used in the VISION 2050 EIS from 2014 to 2018;
- Revisions to transportation projects that are included in the current regional transportation project list to reflect projects that have been completed or adjusted;
- Reflection of recent updates to individual transportation/transit agency long-range plans;
- Discussion of transportation planning issues, such as changing technologies and user behaviors; and
- Identification of potential new areas of transportation improvements. New investments with significant change or improvement would require further study and analysis and would not be formally added to the Regional Transportation Plan in this update.

**What changes are anticipated to projects included in the Regional Transportation Plan?** Changes to projects considered by the 2022 Regional Transportation Plan are anticipated to fall within the analysis completed for the Transportation 2040 EIS and the VISION 2050 EIS, which include a multimodal transportation system built out through the year 2041. Due to the economic impact of COVID-19, it is anticipated that some transportation projects may be delayed from their current schedules due to changes in transportation revenues. Current long-range transportation plans extend for a 20-year period. Potential revenue-induced delays to projects are anticipated to remain within the 2050 horizon year.

**Will the SEPA process look at alternatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions?**

The Regional Transportation Plan includes a Four-Part Strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The update of the transportation plan will continue PSRC's work to implement the strategy by identifying and coordinating work to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Any new efforts to further reduce greenhouse gas emissions would be presumed to result in an additional environmental benefit. In addition, VISION 2050 includes provisions directing PSRC to conduct an analysis of the wider spectrum of climate strategies – beyond land use and on-road transportation – to demonstrate regional progress in reducing greenhouse gases and make progress toward regional reduction goals, an effort also known as a climate wedge analysis. This information will be brought to regional decision makers in support of the development of the 2022 Regional Transportation Plan.

**Will the changes to the transportation system result in significant environmental impacts?** The update of the Regional Transportation plan is an opportunity to study and explore how the regional transportation system can continue to support the growth and land use changes anticipated by VISION 2050. However, the update will not produce a new transportation system alternative. Exploration of potential new transportation needs

would be a first step in an iterative endeavor, where identification of new needs in this plan update may evolve into projects identified by local jurisdictions in upcoming comprehensive plan and transportation/transit agency plan updates. This is an opportunity to identify areas in the transportation network that may need additional improvements in the 2040-2050 timeframe, and for local jurisdictions and transportation agencies to identify potential solutions at the local level as they update local comprehensive plans in 2024. The 2026 Regional Transportation Plan will be informed by these collaborative efforts.

The complete transportation network and the year 2050 growth distribution were analyzed in the VISION 2050 EIS. Therefore, it is anticipated that PSRC will issue a SEPA addendum that incorporates the environmental analysis from the VISION 2050 EIS and the Transportation 2040 EIS. The changes to the plan listed above are anticipated to fall within the scope of review of the prior environmental documents, be of a non-substantive nature, and, in some instances, would result in environmental benefits. Because the plan update will not produce a new transportation system alternative, an addendum would not include analysis of new alternatives. However, an addendum does allow for additional analyses in the plan update related to the transportation system, such as changes in technology and travel behavior, the needs for freight distribution and local deliveries, or how to better serve underrepresented populations.

Based on these assumptions, PSRC anticipates that environmental impacts of the update will be within the range of impacts and alternatives described in the Transportation 2040 FEIS and the VISION 2050 EIS. As is always the case, additional environmental review for specific projects will occur at the project level by individual agency leads.

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

For more information or to discuss this memorandum, please contact Erika Harris, SEPA Responsible Official, at [eharris@psrc.org](mailto:eharris@psrc.org) or (206) 464-6360.