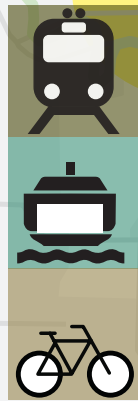


Transportation 2040

UPDATE

toward a sustainable transportation system

Appendix R: Rural Transportation Study



MAY 29, 2014

Puget Sound Regional Council

Transportation 2040 Plan Update

APPENDIX R: RURAL TRANSPORTATION STUDY

What is the Rural Transportation Study and how is it intended to be used?

To implement VISION 2040, PSRC is examining the region's major transportation issues from the rural perspective. The purpose of this effort is to provide information and contribute to a greater understanding of the region's transportation system outside the contiguous urban growth boundary. The study examines opportunities for the region to maintain, preserve, and enhance the regional transportation system that serves rural areas outside the contiguous urban growth boundary in ways that are consistent with the goals and policies of VISION 2040. Issues identified in the rural transportation study may be considered for closer examination in the future as part of the 2018 Transportation 2040 Update.

VISION 2040 and the Regional Growth Strategy

VISION 2040 emphasizes the role of centers and compact urban communities in accommodating future population and employment. The Regional Growth Strategy in VISION 2040 focuses the majority of the region's employment and population growth into the region's largest cities (metro and core cities) and regional growth centers, while calling for less growth in smaller cities and towns, and even less in designated rural areas. The Regional Growth Strategy outlines growth in population and employment by regional geographies, including those for rural unincorporated areas, and smaller cities and towns, which make up the majority of the area examined as part of this study. VISION 2040 states "Rural lands will not develop urban service levels or characteristics, or accommodate a great deal of residential or employment growth." This policy emphasizes a different role for the region's rural areas. Smaller cities and towns also make up a part of the area being examined as part of the rural transportation study, with many of these described in VISION 2040 as being "free standing cities and towns." These smaller cities and towns serve as hubs for relatively higher density housing choices, and as job and service centers for surrounding rural areas, and will experience less growth than smaller cities inside the contiguous urban growth boundary.

Rural Study Area

To examine regional transportation issues from a rural perspective, this study looks at transportation in areas designated unincorporated rural and other areas that are outside the region's contiguous urban growth boundary, including freestanding cities and towns, tribal reservations, military installations, and parks and natural resource areas. By taking a different look at transportation in the region using the contiguous urban growth boundary as a dividing line, it is possible to see what some of the unique transportation issues are for the region's cities, towns, and rural areas that are the furthest removed from the most urban areas in the region.

Cities, towns, and unincorporated urban areas that are outside the contiguous urban growth boundary for the four-county region are Carnation, Duvall, Enumclaw, North Bend, Skykomish, Snoqualmie (King County) and Bainbridge Island, Poulsbo, Kingston unincorporated (Kitsap County), and Bonney Lake, Buckley, Carbonado, Eatonville, Enumclaw, Gig Harbor, Orting, Roy, South Prairie, and Wilkeson (Pierce County), and Darrington, Gold Bar, Granite Falls, Index, Monroe, Snohomish, Stanwood, and Sultan (Snohomish County). These areas are included in the Rural Transportation Study.

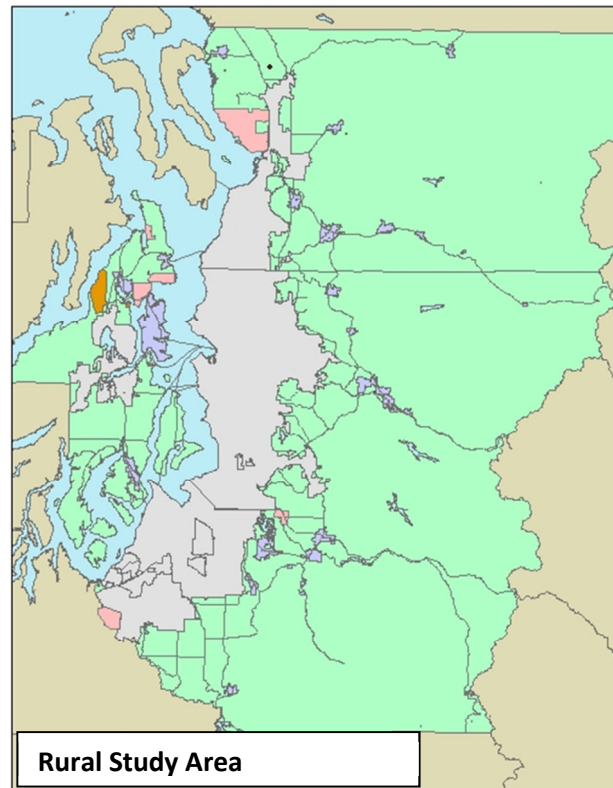
Eight tribal governments have some presence outside the contiguous urban growth boundary in the four-county region. These are the Stillaguamish, Snoqualmie, Tulalip, Port Gamble S’Kallam, Port Madison, Suquamish, Muckleshoot, and Nisqually tribes.

Military installations in the study area include Naval Base Kitsap’s Submarine Base Bangor, Keyport, and Manchester Fuel Depot.

Stakeholder Involvement

As part of this effort, representatives from local governments and other regional interests were consulted on issues that were of importance in their communities. Stakeholders interviewed included:

- Washington State Department of Transportation
- Staff and elected officials at King, Kitsap, Pierce, and Snohomish counties
- Naval Base Kitsap
- Staff and elected officials at cities of Monroe, Sultan, Carnation, Granite Falls, and Stanwood
- Tribal Transportation Planning Organization (TTPO)
- Business associations
- PSRC Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Committee
- PSRC Regional Food Policy Council
- PSRC Regional Staff Committee



Building on previous and current efforts

The rural transportation study incorporates previous and current efforts related to rural transportation in the region, and examines opportunities to build on lessons learned through these efforts. A summary of relevant activities is provided below.

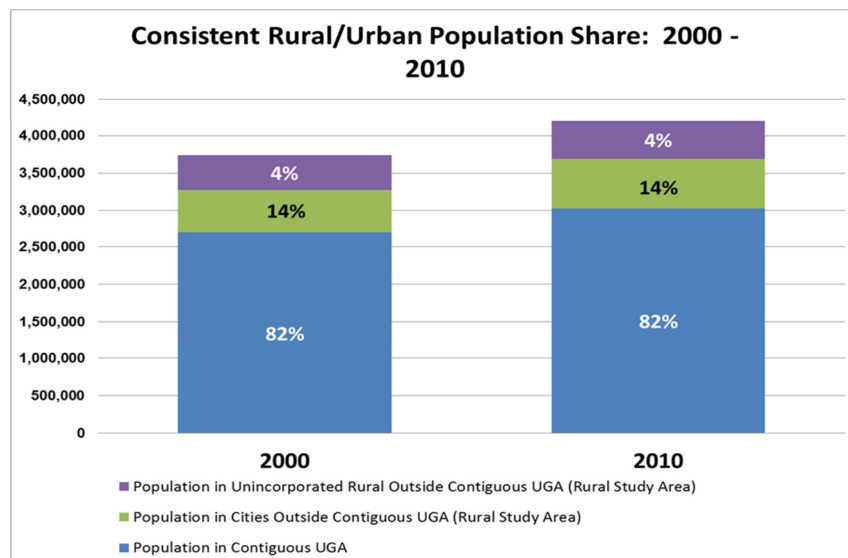
- WSDOT Corridor Studies and Management Plans – The Washington State Department of Transportation serves as lead agency on numerous corridor studies and management plans, which provide valuable information regarding transportation issues outside the region’s contiguous urban growth boundary. The purpose of these studies is to determine the best way to serve existing and future travel demand, consistent with local plans and goals. Corridor studies typically respond to a specific problem (high accident locations and corridors, high levels of existing or forecast congestion, significant land use changes, etc.) and often involve more than one mode. These plans establish community-based goals and implementation strategies along a corridor, describe how to use community resources efficiently, how to conserve intrinsic qualities of the corridor, and how to enhance its value to the community. By examining these previous studies, the rural transportation study identifies cross-cutting issues that may be applicable throughout the central Puget Sound region’s rural study area.

- Rural Town Centers and Corridors Program - The Puget Sound Regional Council created the Rural Town Centers and Corridors program in late 2003 following completion of a study in partnership with WSDOT and each of the four counties in the region. This program recognizes and supports the region’s rural areas, which provide much of the natural resources, agriculture, open space and recreation, and contribute to the success of the region’s long-range growth, economic and transportation strategy, VISION 2040.

Starting in 2012, the Rural Town Centers and Corridors Program is funded with a \$3 million set-aside from regional STP/CMAQ funds, up from a previous set-aside of \$2 million. Since 2004, this program has a separate competition held during the subsequent year. In September 2013, PSRC’s Executive Board approved five projects to receive the available funds, along with a contingency list of projects should additional funds become available. The selection process has been completed for 2013, with nearly \$3.4 million allocated for projects in all four counties. Examples include a roundabout project in Monroe to improve traffic flow in the city’s downtown gateway, developing a complete streets plan for the Kingston unincorporated urban area, and other investments in the cities of Buckley, Snoqualmie, and Snohomish. The primary purpose for the program is to support rural towns with state routes as their “Main Street.” This funding goes above and beyond the minimum \$1 million annual required STP funds to be spent in the rural areas.

Population

A look at data from the 2010 Census in the rural study area shows that approximately 664,000 of the region’s 3.7 million residents live outside the contiguous urban growth area. The rural study area contains approximately 18% of the region’s population, with about 4% living in freestanding cities and towns, and the other 14% living in rural unincorporated areas. Population data for the rural areas shows consistent growth as a share of total regional population from 2000 to 2010. Regional population grew by more than 400,000 during this time period, but the proportion of residents both inside, and outside the contiguous urban growth area remains split at 82% inside the contiguous urban growth area, and 18% residing outside the contiguous urban growth area. Additionally, the share of the population living outside the contiguous urban growth area in incorporated cities and towns has been consistent as well, making up about 4% of the total regional population in both 2000 and 2010.



Employment

In 2010, about 7% of the region's employment (137,000 jobs) was located outside the contiguous urban growth boundary. About 46% of these jobs are located in freestanding cities and towns. Unique sources for employment in the rural study area include jobs related to tribal governments and businesses, which account for approximately 9,400 jobs. Also, Naval Base Kitsap installations at Bangor, Keyport, and Manchester Fuel Depot employ significant numbers of uniformed and civilian staff. Bangor alone has approximately 6,500 personnel, and Keyport has about 3,200.

Travel Patterns

About 92% of employed rural study area residents travel to jobs inside the contiguous urban growth boundary, and they travel about twice as far with an average commute of 22 miles. Of these, there are differences between those who live in designated rural unincorporated areas as compared with those living in freestanding cities and towns. For those in freestanding cities and towns, more than 35% have jobs in freestanding cities and towns. Only 9% of residents living in rural unincorporated areas work in those areas

More than 10% of workers aged 16 and over who reside outside the contiguous urban growth boundary work from home, compared to fewer than 8% for residents inside the contiguous urban growth boundary. Future efforts to examine telecommuting in the region may examine opportunities targeted towards populations in the region's most rural areas.

Major Issues

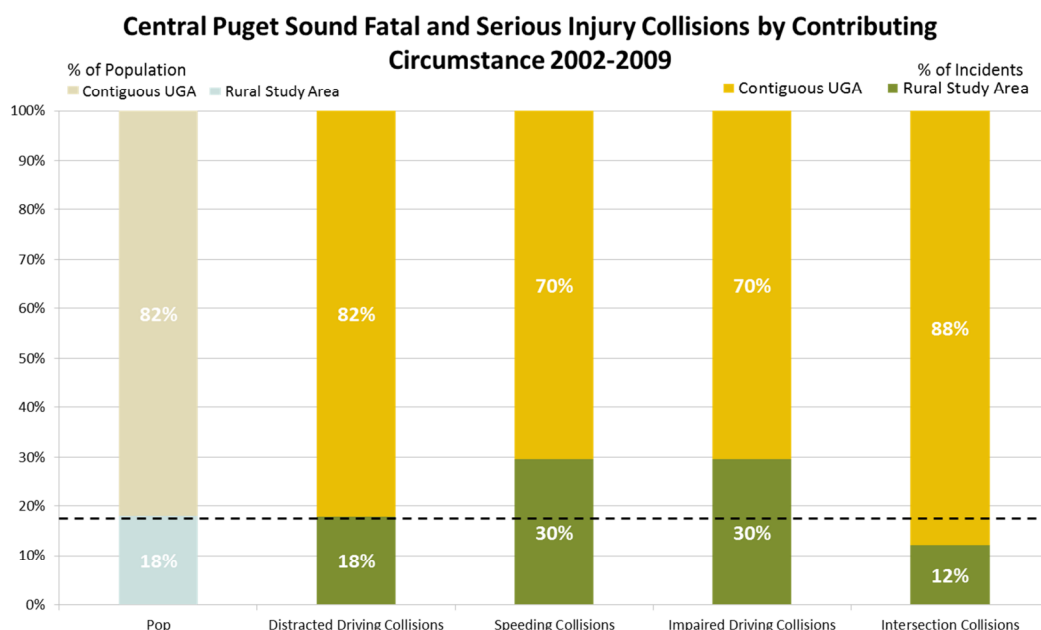
Through closer examination and outreach, the following major issues have been brought forward as important to communities in the rural study area. There may be value in exploring these issues in future updates to Transportation 2040, with a focus on the rural perspective.

Safety

Washington State's strategic highway safety plan, Target Zero, helps to assess the safety needs for both the state and for the region, encouraging and promoting good safety practices in the design and operation of the transportation system, as well as promoting safety by system users. Transportation 2040 explicitly aligns its policies and program direction at the regional level with the state's Target Zero plan. The plan focuses on five key areas:

1. Driver Behaviors
2. Other Users (Pedestrians, Bicyclist, Motorcyclists, and Freight)
3. Roadway Improvements
4. Emergency Medical Services
5. Traffic Management

In the rural study area, an examination of available WSDOT collision data shows that there are unique issues that may be worth further study with the next major update to Transportation 2040.



Between 2002 and 2009, WSDOT collision data reveals the rural study area experienced a higher proportion of speeding and impaired driving collisions than the region as a whole, suggesting that these contributing factors may be areas for targeted emphasis in the 2018 Transportation 2040 Update.

Transit

All four counties in the central Puget Sound region have been affected by reduction in transportation revenue related to the national recession. Transit service across all counties has been reduced accordingly across all agencies, with agencies making decisions to reduce service on routes that are considered to be lower productivity routes. With less than 1% of all fixed route transit bus boarding occurring outside the contiguous urban growth boundary, transit agencies have been confronted with the need to reduce or eliminate these services to preserve service for customers on the most productive routes. Many of these high-productivity transit routes are located in the most urbanized areas inside the Urban Growth Area. Some transit agencies are examining options for alternative service delivery, such as dial-a-ride, rideshare, and vanpool as options in areas where service cuts have left rural areas with little to no fixed route transit options. With high levels of commuting to jobs in the urban growth area, but little available transit service, rural area residents must rely on autos to get to work.

Special Needs

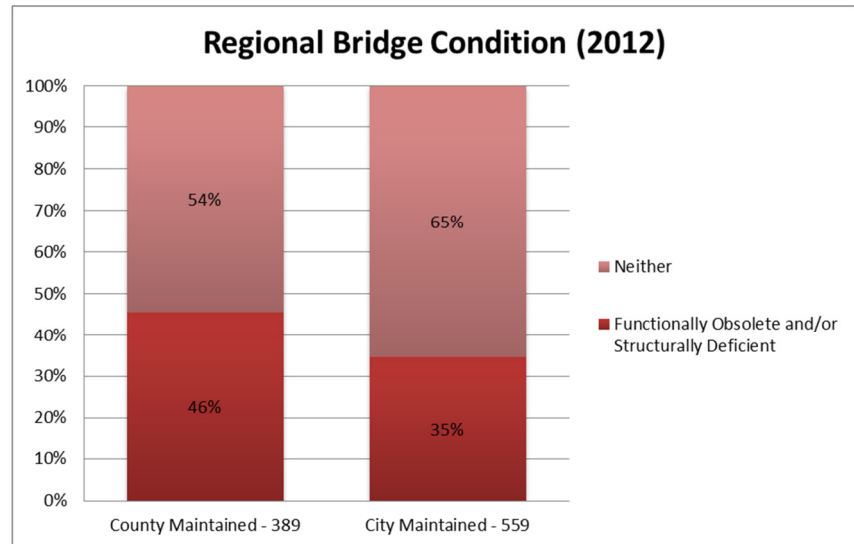
The 2014 Transportation 2040 Update includes an update to the Coordinated Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan (Coordinated Plan). The Coordinated Plan serves as a unified regional approach for delivering transportation services to special needs populations – youth age 5-17, seniors over the age of 65, low income individuals and individuals with a disability. While rural populations aren't examined separately in the Coordinated Plan, there are challenges that may be worth further consideration. In many cases, in the rural study area, demand response transportation services for meeting special needs' populations daily travel requirements have been found to be more cost effective (in terms of cost per passenger) than providing fixed-route service. With regional transit agencies facing continuing declining revenue, a shift towards a more prevalent use of demand response strategies in the rural study area

might allow agencies to continue providing these services, while cutting costs. Please see Appendix K for more detailed information on strategies to address these needs.

Roadway System – State of Good Repair

Transportation 2040 commits, as a top priority, to fully funding the maintenance, preservation and operation of existing infrastructure in a safe and usable state. These investments help to ensure that current assets continue to function properly to sustain mobility for both people and goods. By its very nature, much of the region’s transportation system outside the contiguous urban growth boundary is managed and maintained by the region’s four counties. Available funding for maintaining roads and bridges has declined, in part as a result of the recession, but also in part through annexations that leave counties with less revenue.

Regionally, county reports demonstrating the change in lane miles that are in poor or failing conditions show an increase of greater than 100% since 2004 for areas outside the contiguous urban growth boundary. The 2014 Transportation 2040 Update examines this issue in greater detail as a component of the updated Financial Strategy. For more information on State of Good Repair see Appendix S in the Transportation 2040 Update.



Freight Mobility

Freight and goods movement issues outside the contiguous urban growth boundary are somewhat unique compared with the region as a whole. Rural study area communities dependent on deliveries for food and other goods experience longer delivery times, and less frequency than elsewhere in the region. In rural areas, food mobility is especially important, both in terms of access to food for rural residents as well as access from farm to market. Good transportation enhances access to local markets and food security and locally grown food travels less distance than do imported foods.

Resource intensive industries such as gravel mining, forestry, and timber require trucking and access on roads that are not always designed to sustain heavy trucking use. Additionally, the transportation system outside the contiguous urban growth boundary is sometimes used for alternate routing in the event of flooding or other disruption affecting the region’s established freight routes, but many of the roadways being used are not designed for heavy truck use. Significant freight rail movement also affects communities outside the contiguous urban growth area, leading to safety issues at crossings.

The 2018 Transportation 2040 Update will include an update to the Regional Freight Strategy, which will provide an opportunity to potentially address freight issues outside the contiguous urban growth boundary.

Ferries

Several communities outside the contiguous urban growth area are served by ferry service: Vashon Island, Ketron Island, Kingston, unincorporated Kitsap County, Southworth, and Anderson Island. This service is provided through a combination of Washington State Ferries, Pierce County Ferries, and King County Ferry District.

Recreation and Open Space

The central Puget Sound region is located close to the Cascades and Olympic mountain ranges, with options for recreational access provided by the National Park Service, National Forest Service, Washington State Parks, Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Washington State Department of Natural Resources. Estimates provided by the USFS show that the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest has approximately 5.4 million visitors per year. Mount Rainier National Park estimates an average of 1.8 million annual visitors. For the 14 state parks outside the contiguous urban growth boundary, visitation is an estimated 2.5 million annually. Three commercial ski areas operate in the four-county region: Crystal Mountain, Steven's Pass, and Summit at Snoqualmie, employing approximately 2,750 during the ski season. Combined, these three ski areas attracted a three-year annual average of 1.34 million visitors who each traveled an average of 82 miles per visit.

Currently, USDOT in partnership with the Volpe Center are finishing the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest Alternative Transportation Feasibility Study, which is looking at issues related to recreation access for destinations managed by the USFS along transportation corridors in the region. Findings from the study will be focused on opportunities around the Snoqualmie Pass area on Interstate 90 and will be available in 2014.

Bicycle and Pedestrian

As a component of the Transportation 2040 Update, PSRC is developing an Active Transportation Plan to represent bicycle and pedestrian transportation needs for the four-county region. Building on the 2003 Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Implementation Strategy for the Central Puget Sound Region, the 2014 Active Transportation Plan examines bicycle and pedestrian transportation needs throughout the central Puget Sound region.

Issues that have been brought up during this rural transportation study process include desires by residents and local governments to make improvements to local pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure that encourage downtown revitalization through increased visitors and an improved small retail business environment. Additionally, with increasingly limited funding for transportation investments, local governments are faced with challenging decisions when considering new pedestrian and bicycle investments. In some cases, there are strong desires to invest in completing off-road trail systems, while in others, taking a complete streets approach may be more desirable. These issues and others are handled in detail in the Active Transportation Plan.

Next Steps

The issues and opportunities outlined in the rural transportation study are intended to serve as the starting point for potential future efforts to address rural transportation issues in the central Puget Sound region. The next major update for the region's long-range transportation plan will be in 2018. As the scope of that process is developed, the issues and opportunities outlined in the rural transportation study, as well as the geographic study area, may be considered for possible further examination.