

To Puget Sound Regional Council,

February 2nd, 2026

Comments on the Puget Sound Regional Council Draft Regional Transportation Plan from the Climate Rail Alliance, All Aboard Washington, Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility and additional rail advocates

Summary

The Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) Draft Regional Transportation plan (RTP) is an essential document for prioritizing transportation investments in the four county area, Pierce, King, Kitsap and Snohomish counties. Though the rail system for freight and passenger is mentioned in the RTP (p15), more emphasis could show how passenger and freight rail infrastructure are effectively shared for mutual benefit and how improvements to both can significantly help relieve congestion on roads and at airports and seaports. A full analysis of how a fast, frequent and reliable intercity passenger rail system can leverage investments in local transit and provide a safe, convenient and seamless alternative to highway and regional air travel between major hub cities should be part of the RTP.

Given that the four county area is the hub of Washington state commerce, population and transportation gateway to the state and the world, the RTP needs to align with the Washington State Transportation Commission's [Vision 2050 Transportation Plan](#) p20. The RTP needs to also reflect the recommendations for much more ambitious plans for Amtrak Cascades articulated in the [comment letter](#) from PSRC Executive Director Josh Brown on the pre-SDP for Amtrak Cascades from April 2024.

Recommendation summary: *Prioritize investments in seamless interconnection between regional and local transit (Metro, Sounder), Seatac Airport, inter-city passenger rail (Amtrak) and the Ferry system.*

Amtrak Cascades

The RTP refers to the Amtrak Cascades CID application and Service Development Plan, in the [2025 Current Systems Report](#) and [Future Systems Report](#), but does not stress the importance of a frequent, reliable and faster intercity passenger rail service that is within reach now. Current service on Amtrak Cascades and Sounder commuter rail are infrequent and Amtrak Cascades service is unreliable. There are six stops along the Amtrak Cascades route in the four county area, Stanwood, Everett, Edmonds, Seattle, Tukwila and Tacoma. There are many opportunities for Amtrak Cascades to be better integrated with the local transit network and travel within and beyond the four county area.

Recommendation: Please add a section to the "On the Horizon" section of the [Future Systems Report](#) (pg 35) that describes the role Amtrak Cascades can and should provide to meet our current and future inter and intra regional transportation challenges. Please use the above recommendations. See examples below.

1) Rail connections to ferries makes the ferry an entry to regional rail travel. The sections that describe the needs of the Ferry system must include interconnection with intercity passenger rail as well as transit. Downtown Seattle and Edmonds have rail stations proximal to ferry docks. Population increase in Kitsap County should be supported by passenger ferry to Amtrak with adequate service so that passengers can use transit for trips throughout the region, along with

local transit, and avoid needing to use a car.

2) The Tukwila station is an 11-minute drive to Sea-Tac Airport and could serve as a connecting hub for travelers in and out of Sea-Tac Airport. If Amtrak Cascades and Sounder (see below) were more frequent, faster, reliable and augmented with an airport shuttle service, it could significantly enhance the options for travelers to get to/from SeaTac and enable more regional travel using passenger rail in addition to already existing buses and light rail. For example, Boston's Logan Airport has a free bus service every 10 minutes between Logan Airport and Boston South Street Station, providing travelers with direct access to locations throughout the Northeast via the Northeast corridor rail network.

3) A local transit hub (bus, Link, shuttle) should be co-located with the Amtrak Station in Everett, not several blocks away, which would be an unnecessary burden for non-drivers, seniors, families, persons with disabilities. Everett Station, already a transit hub, should be co-located with a Sound Transit Link station when the line is extended to Everett.

4) A fast, frequent and reliable Amtrak Cascades intercity rail service is described as a feeder to the Cascades High Speed Rail program in its CID grant (see last section). Please describe in the RTP how investments in Amtrak Cascades are a prerequisite to the success of future Cascades High Speed Rail program.

Sounder

The RTP describes how Sounder will expand to Dupont (X) but does not mention increased frequency, and [all day service between Seattle and Tacoma is being](#) considered. At this time Sounder allows commuters who live in Tacoma, Pullayup, Kent, Auburn, or Renton to travel to work in Seattle (or vice versa). Likewise, those in Everett, Edmonds and Mukilteo and towns between can travel to work in Seattle. If Sounder had frequent, all-day service routed through Seattle, it would provide another alternative for moving people around the region for numerous other travel needs, such as medical appointments, sports and cultural events, access to the airport, ferry system, and education.

Recommendation: Please expand the description of future Sounder service in the [Future Systems Report](#) (p5) to include more frequent and all day service. This will make Sounder a vastly more useful transportation option and help reduce congestion on our freeways. Please see examples below.

1) Sounder routed through Seattle, or so frequent and timed such that one could easily transfer, would capture 'reverse commutes' which are difficult to negotiate by any mode, and open up access by trips during non-peak hours to adjacent towns and smaller cities.

2) The 2003 BNSF/Sound Transit contract limiting Sounder frequency to 4 round trips per day must be renegotiated for future needs. As employment at office patterns are shifting and when 'rush hour' is not really discernable, residents need more flexibility to travel throughout the region without driving. Station areas are important for concentrating goods, services and jobs because of the connections created. As jurisdictions scale for growth, they rely on infrastructure being leveraged. Sounder service can be a more functional connector between planned places inside the Puget Sound Region.

3) Please include the idea that Sounder extend south to Olympia/Lacey, with new double track rail bridge across the Nisqually River; would further provide additional transportation options between urban hubs in the region including our capitol, Olympia.

Freight

Much of the rail infrastructure is owned by freight rail companies, thus a partnership between state government and freight railroads needs to be included in the RTP. The RTP could emphasize and encourage closer relations between BNSF and other stakeholders to create win-win projects for all users of the infrastructure. Reliability and speed of passenger rail can improve with strategic planning and project selections that create as much dedicated passenger track as possible for Amtrak and commuter rail. Additional main tracks reduce conflicts and enable freight movements with less interference, thus creating a more efficient rail network for all users.

With an improved rail network, more freight can shift to rail from roadways and air cargo, which also has the benefit of reducing road congestion and meeting environmental goals.

Cascadia High Speed Rail (UHS GT)

The “On The Horizon” section of the [Future Systems Report](#) discusses the Cascadia High Speed Rail (UHS GT) planning but does not describe the relationship between Amtrak Cascades and other existing rail programs. The UHS GT planning is for a green field >200mph rail corridor. If the system is ever built it will likely only have one stop in the four county area, as trains going >200mph typically have about 100 miles between stops. Thus, regional rail would be an essential complement for UHS GT to reach riders beyond the immediate UHS GT station. In addition, UHS GT would not be in service for three or more decades, whereas Amtrak Cascades can deliver significant improvements much sooner.

Recommendation: The RTP needs to describe the relationship between the passenger rail network (Amtrak Cascades and Sounder) and UHSR as described in the CID grant applications for UHS GT.

From the UHS GT CID grant (also attached):

“It (UHS GT) is intended to create a seamless journey experience through the megaregion that complements I-5 in the US and Highway 99 in British Columbia, Amtrak Cascades service, existing and in-development regional transit systems, as well as air travel throughout the region.”

The success of UHS GT is dependent on the success of expanding and improving the frequency and on time performance of our current intercity passenger rail network. Please include in the “On the Horizon” section a detailed description of the relationship between UHS GT and the requirement for improvements in our regional rail networks. This investment is necessary to provide seamless connections for rail transportation within and beyond the region that are comfortably competitive with driving and flying.

Safety

Recommendation: Include safety information about passenger rail travel in the safety section [2025 Current Systems Report](#) (p48). Though at grade crossings can be made more safe or eliminated, it must be acknowledged that rail is on par with air travel and four to seven times

safer than highway travel. Moreover, rail travel is considerably more energy efficient for moving passengers and freight and with much lower emissions compared to driving, trucking and air transport.

Thank you for considering our comments.
Sincerely,

Arvia Morris, Alan Borning, Lael White, Thomas White,
Rail Advocates on behalf of Climate Rail Alliance

Breck Lebeque MD MPH
Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility

Mike Elliott
Rail Labor Retired

Charles Hamilton Executive Director
All Aboard Washington

