

**Health and health equity considerations in the
2026 Draft Regional Transportation Plan**

Date: February 2, 2026

To: Kelly McGourty, kmcgourty@psrc.org, Transportation Program Manager, PSRC
Ben Bakkenta, bbakkenta@psrc.org, Planning Director, PSRC
Dr. Charles Patton, CPatton@psrc.org, Equity Program Manager, PSRC
RTPcomment@psrc.org

From: Jessica Jeavons, Director of Policy and Strategy, Public Health - Seattle & King County, and
TPB Public Health Regional Liaison, jjeavons@kingcounty.gov

Kim Van Pelt, Director, Snohomish County Health Department, TPB Public Health Alternate

CC: PH GMPB liaisons – Primary, Chantell Harmon Reed, Director, Tacoma-Pierce County
Health Department, Creed@tpchd.org

Alternate, Yolanda Fong, Administrator, Kitsap Public Health District,
yolanda.fong@kitsappublichealth.org

Regional Public Health contacts

- Pierce County: Chantell Harmon Reed, GMPB Public Health Member, Erika Bartlett, EBartlett@tpchd.org
- Kitsap County: Yolanda Fong, GMPB Public Health Alternate, and Adrienne Hampton, adrienne.hampton@kitsappublichealth.org
- Snohomish County: Kim Van Pelt, Snohomish County Health Department and TPB Public Health Regional Liaison alternate, and Cristina Ciupitu-Plath, Cristina.Ciupitu-Plath@co.snohomish.wa.us
- King County: Richard Gelb, Richard.gelb@kingcounty.gov, and Julie West, Julie.west@kingcounty.gov

RE: Health and health equity considerations in the 2026 Draft Regional Transportation Plan

On behalf of the four-county PSRC public health jurisdictions, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on the 2026 Regional Transportation Plan. The 2026 update to the Puget Sound Regional Council's (PSRC) Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), with its 30-year \$300 billion wingspan, has significant influence on Puget Sound residents' choices for getting around, and their access to services, opportunities, and social connection. In the run up to issuing this draft plan update, PSRC, based on guidance of the Transportation Policy Board, has undertaken significant analysis of transportation system conditions today and modeled the future land uses and associated mobility patterns - per the approach described in Vision 2050 (the region's growth plan).

The rigor in developing input data and the integration of modeling elements in the RTP update is technically impressive. Aspects of our future cities are being forecast in detail, including resident mode choices (walk, transit, drive) and the densities of jobs, housing, and other land uses to the parcel level. This approach, which assumes the most density along existing and planned transit lines and stations, provides a basis for guiding the upcoming allocations of Federal resources intended for highway and transit improvements.

From a Public Health perspective, as this plan moves from draft to final, high-value opportunities to **clarify actions and definitions, strengthen framing and focus of the analyses, and expand data references** may include:

Clarify actions and definitions:

- Based on the indicators selected in the health chapter of the plan, the RTP update only generates minor improvements to health-related outcomes that are not uniformly distributed. For example, there are limited forecasted benefits in terms of active transportation that would not allow youth to meet daily physical activity guidelines. One method to improve this would be to add consistency with language to align with the [Safe System Approach](#), as defined by US DOT and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). This would strengthen the implementation of language regarding human health and safety so that these important measures are prioritized.
- The draft plan would benefit from clearly defined and specific actions to avoid, mitigate, and correct for the harm to human health caused by roadway pollutants today which disproportionately bear on low-income, non-white residents. The equity framing broadly addresses access to mobility and significantly understates existing socio-economic and racial injustice caused by the transportation system. Providing greater specifications in this way would strengthen equity goals in our region and respond to long-standing strategies for improvement voiced by community advocates. A creative fix would be to develop an analogue to the High Injury Network (HIN), that is the High Pollution Network (HPN), working from the [EPA AirToxScreen Mapping Tool](#), and include clear policy objectives to reduce and eliminate disparate harms for impacted communities.
- The draft plan would also benefit from an implementation table or other descriptive visual to convey how new available resources will be organized and deployed (via program allocations and project selection process improvements). This would support readers and practitioners in clearly understanding how safety and equity advancements will be prioritized in system improvement efforts.

Framing and focus of analyses:

- **Safety** – Given the sharp increase in roadway deaths and serious injuries in the region since 2021, the safety elements in the main plan and safety chapter may be better served by a stronger narrative to emphasize this as a key policy focus area that requires immediate intervention to prevent future fatalities and serious injury. The “Responsibility is Shared” principle provides a pathway to enhance this framing so that the goal of achieving zero deaths and serious injuries is realized.

- **Spatial scales** – While future-state modeling is structured to the ¼ mile hex grid, the demographic conditions are presented in the draft plan at the census tract level, limiting understanding of what populations will benefit and what populations may continue to experience disparities. For example:
 - Most High Injury Network roadway segments are long, with some differentiation of intensity of harm along the corridors. Adding a higher level of detail would provide greater clarity for system intervention, investment, and improvement.
 - The Equity Focus Area criteria are structured so that more than half (54%) of the census tracts in the Puget Sound region are included, thus limiting guidance on where social vulnerability is highest. These broad spatial scales may make it more challenging to identify specific actions for implementation that will resolve barriers and result in better equity and health equity outcomes where needs may be the greatest.

- **Equity approach** – Similar to the above, there is insufficient guidance to inform a jurisdiction or agency to know where needs are greatest for safety interventions, environmental justice improvements, active transportation facility additions, or other program and system improvements. The policy objectives and data references to address these equity questions are unclear, for instance:
 - For whom and where is access to mobility (for essential trips) most constrained?
 - Where are existing transportation system burdens (cost, time, pollution) most concerning?
 - Where are households that have the most burden and least benefit from transportation system conditions today?

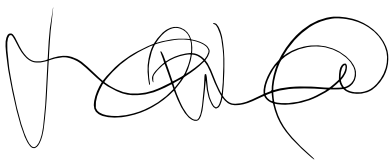
Data considerations:

- The [Transportation System Visualization Tool](#) does not provide data for transportation-related air and noise pollution burden levels. One tool that would support the integration of this type of data at the census tract level is the [EPA AirToxScreen Mapping Tool](#).
- As stated previously, the High Injury Network would benefit from a higher level of detail to interpret where system intervention, investment, and improvement would result in the best outcomes. This would improve the tool as the Network presents corridor segments as binary (in or out), with no differentiation on the degree or extent of harm occurrences.
- The plan may also consider incorporating a data layer that depicts areas where households are relying on active modes (i.e, walking biking) for a high percentage of their trips. This is an important perspective to reduce exposure of vulnerable system users to traffic-related injuries, another impactful pathway to promote regional safety implementation.

Additional comments for the health, safety, and system performance chapters of the plan are attached for review and consideration (Appendix A).

Public Health agencies in the Puget Sound share responsibilities to address health threats to our communities, help ensure access to quality health care, and promote healthy community conditions where all people can achieve their optimal well-being. We believe these suggested additions and revisions reflect longstanding community concerns, are feasible to implement, and will provide long term value to our communities and residents through the implementation of the plan. Your attention to and consideration of these plan improvements are gratefully appreciated.

Thank you,



Appendix A. Table of Recommendations for the Regional Transportation Plan Update – by Chapter and Section.

Section	Page(s)	Comment	Recommendation
Main Document			
An integrated, safe, accessible, efficient and reliable transportation system	page 7	<p><i>"Safety: Deaths and serious injuries on the region's roads will be substantially reduced through proactive actions based on a Safe System Approach."</i></p> <p>This statement lacks consistency with Safe System language. For alignment, this sentence should state that we seek to eliminate all serious injuries and deaths on the transportation network.</p> <p>WA State's Safe System Approach has 6 pillars which includes safer land use. The USDOT's Safe System Approach includes only 5 pillars.</p>	<p>Consider rephrasing to: <i>"Safety: Deaths and serious injuries on the region's roads will be eliminated through proactive actions based on a Safe System Approach."</i></p> <p>Ensure the Safe System Approach graphic references the correct source.</p>
An integrated, safe, accessible, efficient and reliable transportation system	Page 7	<p><i>"Equity: All the region's residents will have access to transportation choices that provide reliable and timely connections to the places they want to go."</i></p> <p>This statement would benefit from including specific references to overburdened communities as well as clear environmental justice considerations.</p>	<p>Consider rephrasing to: <i>"Equity: All the region's residents will have access to transportation choices that provide reliable and timely connections to the places they want to go and health disparities related to transportation burdens, including pollution, will be avoided and mitigated."</i></p>
Foundation – Promote a Safe and Healthy Transportation System: Safety	Page 15	<p><i>"To address this, VISION 2050 prioritizes transportation safety and incorporates a policy supporting the state's goal of zero roadway deaths and serious injuries outlined in Washington's Target Zero plan."</i></p> <p>Understanding that roadway safety has been one of the key policy focus areas for regional transportation planning since 2020, this statement would be complimented by a clear commitment to eliminating serious injuries and deaths on the transportation network.</p>	<p>Consider rephrasing to: <i>"To address this, the Regional Transportation Plan elevates safety as a priority objective, and commits to allocating resources toward preventing transportation system user deaths and serious injuries."</i></p>

Health	Page 17	<p><i>"Traditionally, public health addressed a broad set of factors and disease control, managing health conditions and improving access to health care. Over the past decade, awareness has grown about how the built environment and travel patterns affect public health."</i></p> <p>An updated description of public health considerations for transportation planning may be more beneficial in this section. Consider providing greater clarity regarding how the transportation system influences public health and community wellbeing.</p>	<p>Consider adding additional detail for these elements: Transportation-related health determinants include - 1) travel behavior – including sedentary time , stress, and amount of physical activity; 2) safety impacts – personal and road vulnerabilities; 3) access to destinations and services; and 4) environmental impacts – including air, noise, vibration, and other harmful pollution burdens from system conditions. Or, consider including an updated description of public health in this section, such as: <i>"Public health encompasses a population level approach to promoting healthy communities, preventing and responding to health threats and disease, as well as improving linkages to health services. The ways people travel throughout the region has a direct impact to public health, including physical activity, road safety, access to health supportive services, and other important community conditions such as air quality, social connection, sanitation, and economic opportunity."</i></p>
Health	Page 18	<p><i>"To advance health equity, risk factors, benefits, and protective features of the transportation system should consider the social vulnerability of communities."</i></p> <p>Social vulnerability is a broad category; this section would benefit from additional definition of what social vulnerabilities within communities may include. PSRC could also reference the 2025 report about overburdened communities recently published by the WA Department of Ecology (https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/2502037.html).</p>	<p>Consider incorporating detail on geographical variation in exposures to pollution burdens across the Puget Sound region today as well as specific health concerns faced by communities that experience the cumulative impacts to transportation-related air, noise, vibration, and other harmful pollutant exposure.</p>

Health	Page 18	<p><i>"The RTP contains investments that can improve health outcomes in the region, including:"</i></p> <p>There is opportunity in this list to incorporate a specific equity outcome for overburdened communities.</p>	<p>Consider adding the following point: <i>"Focused efforts to improve transportation system conditions in overburdened communities that experience greater health disparities due to transportation-related pollutants."</i></p>
Conclusion and Call to Action	Page 27	<p><i>"Action steps for PSRC and partners to support plan implementation include:"</i></p> <p>Noting an opportunity to add an action step to this list.</p>	<p>Consider adding an additional action step for: "Equity and environmental justice: Map and describe, at a granular spatial scale, the cumulative pollutant burden levels experienced by those along and adjacent to major transportation corridors as a basis to target system improvements and interventions that avoid, mitigate, and/or correct for disparate harm patterns."</p>
Safety			
New Section	New section in the safety chapter	<p>Provide a dedicated section to describe Target Zero within the safety chapter.</p> <p>The plan makes only one reference to the state's Target Zero program but could benefit from going into more detail about the Target Zero regions and local work being done. Washington's Target Zero program is often referenced as an innovative and impactful program among its peers nationally.</p> <p>The RTP does not mention the great work of the 6 (Bellevue, Seattle, Tacoma, Everett, Kirkland, Redmond) Vision Zero cities across the four counties. King County's Target Zero team also hosts a monthly Vision Zero/Target Zero meeting for open discussion and sharing of knowledge, with participation from three of the four PSRC counties.</p>	<p>Consider adding a new section, incorporating the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The regional Target Zero Managers coordinate high visibility enforcement across their counties, create and deploy traffic safety messaging, build and maintain coalitions, and act as local traffic safety subject matter experts. • In a 2025 state legislative report from Washington Traffic Safety Commission, street lighting was an important and lacking aspect in roadway safety. The report made several recommendations including increased funding and coordination. Also, according to current observations from fatality reviews and law enforcement, lack of lighting continues to be an important contributing factor in crashes especially when involving active transportation users. Roadway lighting or lack thereof is also an equity issue with more well-resourced cities having more opportunity to provide illuminated areas for their residents. • The RTP could outline more details on emerging traffic safety issues such as e-scooter expansion and subsequent injuries, cannabis impaired driving, and other growing areas of concern. Specifically, regarding e-scooters, their expansion into more cities across the state will need further evaluation on how to regulate for safety and minimize the growing number of traumatic brain injuries and other injuries seen at local trauma centers.

Health			
Data Tables and Formatting	All tables	Thank you for offering an overview of health-relevant indicators stratified by geographies, Regional Growth Centers, and disproportionately impacted population groups. Given the granularity of the data presented, it is at times difficult to gauge the extent of forecasted changes to these indicators between 2026 and 2050. We therefore recommend presenting the data in a visual format for more clarity and appending the tables to the document.	Strongly recommend presenting data using visuals such as bar or line charts that are better suited to illustrate trends and data interpretation.
Introduction	Page 4	Washington state has taken great strides to improve the health and quality of life for residents, particularly as it relates to environmental justice. The HEAL Act defines environmental justice as “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. This includes addressing disproportionate environmental and health impacts by prioritizing vulnerable populations and overburdened communities, equitably distributing resources and benefits, and eliminating harm.”	In the introduction section, consider emphasizing the importance of addressing the health implications of transportation options improvements in overburdened communities, such as: <i>“Specific health needs and priorities will vary by community. This means transportation practitioners should collaborate with related agencies, health professionals, and community partners, and engage in meaningful consultation with Tribal communities early and often to identify transportation solutions that will reduce environmental health disparities in overburdened communities and support community health to achieve shared goals.”</i>

Regional Transportation Plan	Page 5	<p><i>"Traditionally, public health addressed a broad set of factors and disease control, managing health conditions and improving access to health care. Over the past decade, awareness has grown about how the built environment and travel patterns affect public health."</i></p> <p>An updated description of public health considerations for transportation planning may be more beneficial in this section. Consider providing greater clarity regarding how the transportation system influences public health and community wellbeing.</p>	<p>Consider adding additional detail for these elements: Transportation-related health determinants include -</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) travel behavior – including sedentary time , stress, and amount of physical activity; 2) safety impacts – personal and road vulnerabilities; 3) access to destinations and services; and 4) environmental impacts – including air, noise, vibration, and other harmful pollution burdens from system conditions . <p>Or, consider including an updated description of public health in this section, such as: <i>"Public health encompasses a population level approach to promoting healthy communities, preventing and responding to health threats and disease, as well as improving linkages to health services. The ways people travel throughout the region has a direct impact to public health, including physical activity, road safety, access to health supportive services, and other important community conditions such as air quality, social connection, sanitation, and economic opportunity."</i></p>
Active transportation	Page 11	<p>Overall, the plan highlights improvements to the total number of mins/day that residents spend walking and/or biking; however, it is important to note that the forecasted improvements are very small and there are some reductions in biking times by 2050 (e.g., in unincorporated areas). Although youth are highlighted as the population that spends the most time in a day biking, one must acknowledge that the total (both current and forecasted) time youth spend biking and walking falls short of meeting the physical activity recommendations of a minimum of 60 min/day. Recognizing that some youth have access to additional opportunities to be physically active, not creating a transportation system that ensures physical activity recommendations are met may pose a disproportionate risk to youth in communities that have historically lacked such opportunities, thus broadening existing inequities.</p>	<p>Consider the following: Place findings and forecasted physical activity times in context by outlining discrepancies with physical activity guidelines. Encourage investments that create equitable opportunities for physical activity across the life course to reduce health inequities. For reference, please see: https://odphp.health.gov/sites/default/files/2019-09/Physical_Activity_Guidelines_2nd_edition.pdf</p>

Proximity to Grocery Stores	Page 11	<p>Broaden the scope of healthy eating and acknowledge the growing constraints of accessing healthy foods today (such as changes to federal policy and affordability).</p> <p>In addition, consider deepening the analysis to differentiate between urban and rural areas to better understand differences for urban and more rural households (and thus potential transportation improvements). This could be accomplished by incorporating new buffers to understand greater distances to grocery stores in more rural communities.</p>	<p>For example: <i>"Healthy eating is important in every stage of life and key to long term health. A healthy diet significantly reduces the risk of obesity, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and other health problems. Having grocery stores in proximity to households is assumed to offer more opportunities and make it easier for community members to build healthy eating habits that result in positive health outcomes. Increasing access to healthy food and services is a vital public health intervention to reduce experiences of food insecurity driven by factors of affordability and proximity to nutritious foods."</i></p>
Proximity to Grocery Stores	Page 12	<p>Overall, minimal changes in access to food are forecasted. No changes are forecast in rural and unincorporated areas, likely because transit expansion will primarily focus on urban communities. The highest change is documented for core cities, i.e., 7%. Proximity to food outlets is slated to decrease in Regional Centers. Although it is encouraging that more people of color, people with limited English proficiency, and people with disabilities will be closer to grocery stores by 2050, the question remains of whether they will be closer to culturally relevant food outlets, which is critical in reducing food insecurity.</p>	<p>Acknowledge limitations in expanding access to food across geographies and equity focus areas, including uncertainty regarding proximity to culturally relevant food outlets.</p>
Proximity to Health Care	Page 16	<p>The stagnant access to health care facilities in Kitsap and minimal increases in other counties is concerning. Increases in proximity to health care are only forecast for metro cities, while no increases are predicted for youth and in equity focus areas with limited language proficiency significantly above average. Minimal increases are expected in areas where people of color, low income levels, and people with disabilities are overrepresented. A decrease in access to care is expected in Regional Growth Centers.</p>	<p>Thank you for acknowledging the persistent distance to health care facilities faced by residents in rural and unincorporated areas. Given the limited improvements in access to health care facilities that would ensue from the implementation of the RTP as is, we strongly suggest recommending additional investments and careful consideration of project ability to enhance access to health care during regional project selection processes.</p>
Proximity to Parks	Page 18	<p>While we acknowledge the benefits associated with half of the region's population living in proximity to parks, as well as the progress in ensuring access to outdoor recreation for people of color and people with limited English proficiency, we noted that only 38% of the region's youth live in proximity to parks and this percentage is slated to decrease to 36% by 2050.</p>	<p>Acknowledge limitations of the currently planned transportation system to facilitate access to parks among youth. Encourage additional investments in transit to ensure easy access to recreation in green spaces to meet physical activity guidelines and improve youth mental health.</p>

High Volume Truck Routes	Page 21	<p>Explanation and definition of safety and pollution exposure risks due to proximity to high volume truck routes is lacking in paragraph and would be complimentary. We encourage additional explanation of health in this section.</p> <p>This section is particularly concerning as key highlights report that: "EFAs with a significantly higher share of people of color, people with low income and people with limited English proficiency than the regional average have the highest shares of households located near freight routes, all of which are over 30%. This rate that is expected to further increase by 2050."</p> <p>This data details a clear example of the legacy of disproportionate pollution exposure in overburdened communities that must be addressed by transportation system improvements and zero emission solutions. Addressing these factors with actionable tools within the air quality section of this chapter is critical given the 2050 outlook for equity focus areas.</p>	<p>Consider incorporating the following language: <i>"Living near high volume truck routes increases exposure to transportation related pollutants that pose significant human health and safety risks. Diesel particle pollution from diesel engines is the top air quality toxics risk in the region and remains a top priority for public health, especially for overburdened communities (PSCAA CCAP, 2025). Serious health impacts are associated with freight related diesel particle pollution exposure such as respiratory diseases, lung cancer, and premature mortality. Given the 2050 projections of increased exposure to freight routes for equity focus areas in this plan, such outcomes must be addressed by tailored transportation system improvements and zero emission solutions to reduce long term negative health outcomes in equity focus areas."</i></p>
High Volume Truck Routes	Page 23	<p>The current plan forecasts an increase in proximity to freight routes across counties, with the highest increase in Snohomish County. Although there would be a reduction in the percentage of households in proximity of freight routes in unincorporated areas and the percentage would remain constant in rural areas, there will be high increases in cities and up to an 8% increase in EFAs where people with lower income, disabilities, and limited English proficiency are overrepresented.</p>	<p>Apart from acknowledging the health risks posed by exposure to freight related diesel particle pollution, recommend and emphasize mitigation strategies and coordinated investments through e.g., fleet electrification and land use measures.</p>
Air Quality	Page 27	<p>Second paragraph only mentions single occupancy vehicles, after stating the threat of diesel exhaust. Include medium and heavy duty vehicles and their widely studied correlation to the disproportionate exposure of these pollutants in overburdened communities and other impacted geographies. A zero emission transportation future must consider health equity and the equitable distribution of zero emission technologies where health needs may be the greatest.</p>	<p>Elaborate on strategies, investments, and policies that would address disproportionate pollution exposure in overburdened communities, leading to improved health outcomes.</p>
System Performance			
Table 1: Performance Metrics	Pages 5 - 8	<p>Table 1 Performance Matrix is missing a metric on transportation system pollution disparity reduction.</p>	<p>Add new performance metric: Extent that disparate and cumulative transportation system pollution burdens are reduced.</p>
Overall model sequence	Page 9	<p>The modeling sequence, in current state is rendering a spatial depiction of where needs are greatest - either for greater service levels or increased protective and mitigating measures for disparate harms and exposures.</p>	<p>Add spatial analyses and spatial depictions of the existing and forecasted transportation system conditions, that include benefits of mobility levels and burdens of cost, time, and health effects.</p>