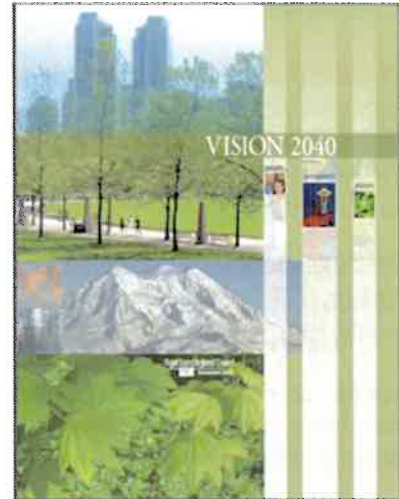


Taking Stock 2016 – Executive Summary

Regional and Local Perspectives on Local Plan Updates and VISION 2040 Implementation

Taking Stock 2016 is 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 of the next update of VISION 2040. This report highlights 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. The Taking Stock 2016 assessment aims to identify many of the successes and challenges encountered locally in implementing VISION 2040, as well as those encountered by PSRC in fulfilling its plan review and certification responsibilities. Adopted in 2008, VISION 2040 set a new course for planning in the region, including a quantitative Regional Growth Strategy and new and expanded Multicounty Planning Policies. As the first major round of local comprehensive planning completed under VISION 2040, the 2015-2016 updates represent progress in many areas and lessons for the region moving forward.



During fall 2016, PSRC staff summarized observations from review of 80 plan updates and solicited input from local jurisdictions and state agencies via an online survey, workshops held in each county, and a Working Group that guided the process and collaborated on this report. The following major themes emerged from this process as they related to key regional policy areas as well as reflections on the role of PSRC in supporting and reviewing local plans for regional certification.

Big Points: Plans and Policies

County and city plans are advancing regional goals and strategies. Overall, local plan updates support VISION 2040 and the Regional Growth Strategy, reflecting general consistency between regional and local policy direction.

Sufficient tools and resources for local planning are critical to make VISION 2040 a reality. Many jurisdictions lack the financial or staff capacity, or models of best practice, to enable them to address the full range of regional policies and actions.

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.

Cities are planning for vibrant centers with walkable compact development, but with uneven market activity so far. Most plans encourage growth within regional and local centers with supportive policies, targets, and prioritized investments, with a new focus on transit-oriented development. Many centers have attracted growth and investment, but others have not.

With housing costs climbing, housing affordability was an important and challenging policy area across the region. Many plans included robust housing needs analyses, new tools and commitments to explore housing strategies, however, regulatory tools and subsidies are insufficient to meet the growing need.

Local transportation plans integrate well with land use, but face financial and technical challenges. Local jurisdictions are planning for multiple modes of travel, integrating transportation with land use, and coordinating across agencies, but are continually challenged by the gap between infrastructure costs and available revenues.

Local plans address new topics, such as public health, social equity, and climate change, but more work and resources are needed. Many plans included innovative strategies on emerging policy areas not central to VISION today. Financial, educational, and technical resources, along with further policy guidance, would help cities and counties do more.

Big Points: PSRC Assistance and Plan Review

Updating local plans is a heavy lift and PSRC technical assistance has been essential. Many aspects of PSRC technical assistance, including outreach, data products, guidance documents, and online tools, have been valuable to counties and cities, and more is needed in advance of the next round of updates.

Regional review and certification met transportation funding timelines and enhanced the quality and completeness of local plans. PSRC completed certification review for 80 plan updates, on track to ensure local access to funding. Generally, PSRC comments and recommendations were considered helpful to local planning.

Plan review processes and criteria need to be clearer, more streamlined, and sensitive to local constraints. Providing greater clarity early in the planning process on certification criteria, particularly as they relate to regional, countywide, and local growth expectations, would help PSRC avoid the recent experience where conditional certifications related to Small Cities required a significant amount of board and regional and local staff time to resolve.



What Comes Next?

Taking Stock 2016 was timed to occur while the region's experience with major plan updates and regional plan review was still fresh. Lessons learned point to potential next steps for PSRC over the next several years that may include new or revised policies or actions, programs and procedures, and prioritization of resources.

Taking Stock 2016 identified issues for further exploration as part of a VISION 2040 update. The Regional Growth Strategy, infrastructure needs, housing affordability, centers, and climate change are among the priority policy areas for the regional plan update. Taking Stock 2016 highlighted the importance of providing forums for regional conversations and set the stage for further research and data analysis to address issues raised by participants.

PSRC should refresh and enhance its technical assistance for local planning. The agency could explore ways to provide guidance and hands-on help for jurisdictions of all sizes throughout the region. Technical tools and guidance for complex or emerging policy areas, such as climate change and multimodal concurrency, have regionwide benefits.

Prior to the next major plan updates due starting in 2023, PSRC should address concerns about the plan review process. Improvements could include an updated Plan Review Manual, early outreach and coordination around updates to countywide planning policies and growth targets, and guidance and assistance to local governments around issues that led to conditional certification of recently updated plans. PSRC could also work with its members toward a more rational timeline for state, regional, and local planning under GMA.

Complete report available on the PSRC website at: <http://www.psrc.org/our-work/plan-review>.