



Pierce County

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January 31, 2018

Josh Brown, Executive Director
Puget Sound Regional Council
1011 Western Avenue Suite 500
Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Mr. Brown:

Pierce County appreciates the work that went into the development of this draft Regional Transportation Plan.

Pierce County has conducted a detailed review of the draft plan and is concerned about certain elements contained within it. Pierce County believes the plan would be more inclusive of the needs of the entire region if:

1. Corridor congestion challenges were illustrated in greater detail;
2. Plan assumptions regarding road usage charges were listed, citing pros and cons; and
3. The transportation benefits of regionally equitable growth patterns were recognized

Each point is explained in more detail below.

Corridor Congestion Challenges

Like other parts of the region, Pierce County’s major freeway corridors are significantly more congested since 2007. Pierce County residents suffer from growing congestion on many state arterials.

We believe this problem deserves to be more prominently shown in the main body of the plan than Figure 23 (page 82 of the draft Regional Transportation Plan):

Figure 23. Corridor Travel Time

CORRIDOR	TODAY	2040 BASELINE	2040 PLAN
1 Bellevue to Seattle	41	43	41
2 Redmond to Seattle	49	50	49
3 Everett to Seattle	89	101	95
4 Tacoma to Seattle	85	106	96
5 Tukwila to Bellevue	56	57	55
6 Lynnwood to Bellevue	61	65	59
7 Silverdale to Bremerton	28	30	30
8 Auburn to Renton	34	41	38

While this is important information, it should be accompanied by additional context and visuals to more accurately reflect the mobility challenges faced by the region. A couple of specific suggestions are to (1) supplement this chart with a “heat” map of important corridors that illustrate average travel speeds or cumulative delay during peak travel periods; and (2) put congestion increases in historical context as is done in the WSDOT Corridor Capacity Reports.

It should also be noted where travel time improvements in the 2040 plan are the result of financial disincentives such as additional tolling and/or fees based on vehicle miles traveled. There is a major difference between reduced congestion because of increased transportation system capacity and reduced congestion because fewer people are driving.

Assumptions Regarding Road Usage Charges

The lynchpin of the plan’s financing strategy is a new road usage charge, but whether, how, and when the region will implement a fee based on vehicle miles traveled is very speculative at this point. It is also unclear if such an approach has public support or would be affordable to our constituency. The Washington State Transportation Commission is just now beginning a road usage charge pilot program, and there are many technical and policy questions still outstanding.

For instance:

1. Compared to a gas tax, how much more would a program like this cost to administer and from where would the money come?
2. Are the revenues collected dedicated solely for “highway purposes”?
3. Would road usage charge replace the gas tax or supplement it?
4. How would the state prevent fraud without violating citizen privacy?
5. What accommodations, if any, will be made to account for the disproportionate impact on those who cannot afford to live near employment centers (particularly in light of policies that concentrate employment growth in high-cost of living metropolitan areas)?
6. What subsidy programs would be available for low income households?

Without satisfactory answers to these questions, Pierce County is concerned—both about the negative impact road usage charges could have on our residents and whether these charges should be included as a key component in the regional transportation plan.

Transportation Benefits of Regionally Equitable Growth

The Regional Transportation Plan acknowledges the current VISION 2040 regional geographies, but it fails to highlight the transportation benefits of regionally equitable growth. We think it should.

Nearly half of Pierce County workers commute out of the county for work. If they didn’t have to, the entire region would be better off. It is a similar story in Snohomish and Kitsap, where a large portion of the workforce has to travel to Seattle and back each work day. This puts a tremendous amount of stress on the regional transportation system. Transit options that take commuters to and from major urban

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centers is one approach, but it would be better to have more job opportunities where people already live. We believe that more jobs locally within each county is ultimately better for families and communities and that the region should implement policies that encourage such job growth to occur.

Thank you for considering our comments on the draft Regional Transportation Plan. We would appreciate a response with your comments about each of our concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. Dammeier", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Bruce F. Dammeier
Pierce County Executive

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Douglas G. Richardson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Douglas G. Richardson
Chair, Pierce County Council