



## Purpose and Need

*This chapter addresses the purpose and need for the VISION 2020 Update, and the need for environmental review. It describes the role of VISION 2020 and its relationship to other long-range regional documents. It then describes the focus and objectives of the environmental review, as well as the development of “regional environmental baseline” that helps to draw together the regional environmental picture in order to raise the level of the environmental analysis.*

Additional information regarding the update process and regional setting are provided in the Fact Sheet and in *Chapter 3 – Introduction and Background*. *Chapter 3* also describes the criteria that will be used to evaluate alternatives in order to select a preferred growth alternative (and to evaluate the preferred alternative, once selected), and the role and structure of the preferred growth alternative and the new VISION document containing revised multicounty planning policies.

### A. Purpose of the VISION 2020 Update

The Puget Sound Regional Council is updating VISION 2020, the long-range growth strategy for the central Puget Sound region encompassing King, Kitsap, Pierce, and Snohomish counties. The VISION addresses Growth Management Act (RCW 36.70A) requirements for metropolitan areas to adopt guiding policies and strategies for land use, economic prosperity, transportation, the provision of adequate public services, and the protection of the environment. VISION 2020 contains the region’s multicounty planning policies that are required by the Growth Management Act.

The region’s currently adopted vision is to continue to develop economically diverse and environmentally healthy communities framed by open space and connected by a high-quality, efficient transportation system. The adopted vision supports more compact, people-oriented living and working places, and seeks to reverse trends that have created increased numbers of low-density, auto-dependent communities. It focuses a significant amount of new employment and housing into cities with mixed-use centers that are served by an efficient, transit-oriented, multimodal transportation system. A key part of the VISION 2020 strategy has been to contain growth by restricting the expansion of urban areas and conserving surrounding farmlands, forests, and open spaces.

The purpose of the update is to:

- Extend the VISION to 2040 to allow it to continue to lead growth management efforts in the region, and to respond to the needs of 1.6 million more people and 1.1 million more jobs in the region between today and 2040.
- Engage in a public discussion of growth, its impacts, and the region’s preferred strategy for managing growth.
- Strengthen strategies and policies to add detail, clarity and to make implementing and monitoring easier.



- Support related regional goals and initiatives for growth management.
- Keep VISION 2020 current, relevant and useful to decision-makers and the public.

### RELATIONSHIP TO DESTINATION 2030

The current regional transportation plan, *Destination 2030*, was adopted in May 2001 and responds to federal and state requirements for improving transportation in metropolitan areas. *Destination 2030* serves as the transportation functional plan for implementing transportation goals identified in the VISION and is guided by the multicounty planning policies in the VISION. When *Destination 2030* was adopted, the regional VISION and its underlying assumptions about future population and employment growth remained constant. In the current VISION update, the transportation plan is remaining constant. In other words, a range of growth distribution alternatives are being analyzed to see (among other things) which is best served by the existing transportation plan. *Destination 2030* will be extended to 2040 and amended to address the preferred growth alternative.

### RELATIONSHIP TO THE REGIONAL ECONOMIC STRATEGY

The VISION update helps support the *Regional Economic Strategy (Strategy)*, which was adopted in September 2005. The *Strategy* serves as the VISION's functional economic plan and is guided by the multicounty planning policies. The VISION and the *Strategy* complement one another, as the *Strategy* provides the shorter-term implementation mechanism that is regularly updated, and the VISION provides the longer-term guidance that is updated less frequently. When the VISION is updated and the concepts from the *Strategy* have been integrated into it, the VISION and the multicounty planning policies will then provide guidance to future updates of the *Strategy*.

### OTHER SUPPORTING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The VISION is also intended to support a number of other goals and objectives related to growth management. These include transportation improvements and supporting actions for economic development and environmental management.

The update is also needed to consider new information regarding changes that have taken place over the last decade and a half since the original VISION was adopted. New information has been generated by current Regional Council forecasts and related data (including findings from *Puget Sound Milestones* reports), *Destination 2030*, year 2000 Census data, new local comprehensive plans (including new critical area ordinances), the formation of new cities, changes to countywide planning policies, new buildable lands analysis data, and new population and employment targets adopted by local jurisdictions. The update can also reflect major planning and management effects such as new transportation corridor studies and environmental impact statements (for example, the I-405 corridor), changes that have occurred as a result of Sound Transit's implementation and future plans, and local efforts to address Endangered Species Act listings in the Pacific Northwest.

## B. Need for Environmental Review

The Regional Council, as the lead agency for this environmental review, determined that the population and employment growth associated with extending VISION 2020 to 2040 would likely result in environmental impacts that need to be documented and mitigated. The Regional Council therefore issued a Determination of Significance in October 2003, pursuant to the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) under Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 43.21C.030 (2)(c).

This Draft Environmental Impact Statement represents a major milestone in the development of a revised and enhanced regional strategy. The public process for defining and evaluating VISION alternatives follows the procedures identified in SEPA Chapter 197-11 of the Washington Administrative Code, the SEPA Handbook, the Regional Council's adopted SEPA procedures and policies (EB-97-01), and the Council's Public Participation Plan.

PSRC's Determination of Significance in October 2003 marked the beginning of an extended public outreach and scoping process that extended to March 2004. PSRC's public outreach included a public opinion survey, workshops, public open houses, presentations to a diverse set of stakeholders, and more.

The scoping process was the most rigorous that the Regional Council has conducted. This expanded scoping process provided time to listen to Regional Council members, affected agencies, interest groups, tribes, and members of the general public in order to establish the scope of the update.

During the 5-month comment period, PSRC staff had contact with over 2,000 individuals, organizations, and local jurisdictions throughout the region, and received comments raising more than 1,200 points.<sup>1</sup> The public scoping comments expressed the following broad themes for the update:

- Build on the current VISION.
- Think long range.
- Be bold and provide regional leadership.
- Broaden the VISION to cover regional issues not currently addressed.
- Be specific when possible — for example, add measurable objectives to policies.

The scoping comments covered 25 broad areas; these were consolidated by PSRC’s Growth Management Policy Board into 10 issue paper topics for additional research. The issue papers took the concepts identified in scoping and turned them into concrete proposals for consideration in the update. These are discussed in *Chapters 3* and *7*, and were used in developing portions of *Chapters 5* and *6*. All the issue papers are found in *Appendix E*.

## FOCUS OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The VISION update is considered a non-project action. SEPA defines non-project actions as governmental actions involving decisions on policies, plans, or programs that contain standards controlling use or modifications of the environment, or that will govern a series of connected actions. This includes, but is not limited to, the adoption or amendment of comprehensive plans, transportation plans, ordinances, rules and regulations (WAC 197-11-704). An EIS for a non-project proposal does not require site-specific analyses. Therefore, the EIS provides qualitative and quantitative descriptions of the likely environmental effects that may occur with the alternatives.

This EIS focuses on the potential comparative impacts of a series of growth management alternatives appropriate to the scope of the alternatives being considered and the level of planning for the proposal (WAC 197-11-442). More information on how the analysis of impacts was conducted is provided in the introduction to *Chapter 5*.

Based on the comments received during the scoping period, PSRC identified the following objectives for the EIS process:

- To meet all relevant state requirements related to SEPA.
- To document the impacts of a series of growth distribution alternatives, and identify potential mitigation measures to address the regional environmental issues associated with absorbing 1.6 million new residents and 1.1 million new employees between today and 2040, and to identify strategies for sustaining the environment while providing for the needs of a growing population.
- To include an in-depth regional environmental baseline to document the state of the region’s environment and provide context for the analysis of the growth distribution alternatives, their impacts, and potential mitigation measures.
- To document the effects of the growth distribution alternatives and potential mitigation measures on low-income and minority communities.
- To include an analysis of cumulative impacts of the alternatives (similar to National Environmental Policy Act review).
- To evaluate and demonstrate environmental effects to the region through the use of “best practice” growth management and development techniques that direct growth into the urban growth area and focus on urban growth centers.
- To design and structure the document in a manner that makes it useful to a broad range of interest groups and agencies.

## THE REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL BASELINE IN THE DEIS

The Regional Council recognizes that we live in a fragile and interconnected global and regional environment. Puget Sound communities are connected by ecosystems, transportation systems, and the economy. The region’s economic

<sup>1</sup> Comments were transcribed and entered into a scoping database and summarized in a scoping report, entitled: *Scope of Environmental Review for the Update of VISION 2020*. Adopted July 22, 2004. Link: <http://www.psrc.org/projects/vision/pubs/scopingreport.pdf>.



health depends on its ability to get goods to market and people to their jobs. The region's ability to preserve and maintain open space and parks depends on the fiscal health of its communities. The way we develop land affects air and water quality, the character of communities, and the cost of roads and utilities.

The Regional Council desires to help provide leadership and stewardship in protecting this fragile and interconnected environment. Therefore, one of the primary objectives of this environmental process is to create a baseline regional environmental planning document that draws together the regional environmental picture, raises the level of regional environmental analysis, and can be used by others. This work is designed to provide a strengthened environmental policy framework that:

- Develops a regional environmental VISION that maintains ecological connectivity, decreases fragmentation of natural systems, and protects critical areas and resources.
- Supports the preservation of habitat for endangered and threatened species.
- Supports the maintenance and improvement of the quality of our air, soils, water, and natural systems.

The Regional Environmental Baseline is shown in *Chapter 2*.