

2017 Transportation Activity

The Whatcom region relies on a complex, multi-modal transportation network to get people and goods where they need to go, whether within the county, to other parts of Washington, or to Canada and other foreign countries. This section discusses the common non-motorized and motorized transportation modes used.

Non-motorized transportation

Walking

Walking was humanity's first mode of transportation and it remains the foundation of our modern transportation system. Virtually all personal trips include some walking, whether directly to one's destination, to and from a car or a bus stop, or through an airport terminal. Walking is also the least-expensive mode of transportation, and as such is available to almost everyone (for those who cannot walk due to a disability, a wheelchair often provides the same benefits). While walking is an excellent mode choice for short trips, it becomes less viable as the length of the trip increases. Because the distance between home and destinations such as work, school, shopping or other activities is often too far, walking as the *only* mode used for an entire trip accounts for about 11 percent of all trips made in Whatcom County. For urbanized areas where trip ends are closer together, walking rates are higher. In Bellingham, 24 percent of trips are one mile or less, and 12 percent of all trips are made by walking. For people with disabilities, those with lower incomes, and seniors and children, walking accounts for about 30 percent of all trips. Walking trips are also among the shortest in travel time, averaging about 14 minutes per trip.

Bicycling

Citizens, local jurisdictions and WCOG have made significant efforts to increase bicycling within the region. Throughout Whatcom County, three percent of trips are made by bicycle, but in Bellingham the city-wide figure is six percent. Furthermore, in the section of Bellingham that is west of Interstate 5 – where the streets are better connected, there are many employment and shopping destinations, and there is better bicycle infrastructure – 11 percent of trips are made using bicycles.

Motorized Transportation

Transit

WTA is the public transit provider in Whatcom County and operates the following transit services:

- **Fixed-route buses** provide service at designated bus stops on more than 30 routes throughout the County and serve the largest share of transit trips, ranging from 16,000 to 20,000 passenger boardings a day.
- **Paratransit** serves people with disabilities which prevent them from using fixed-route bus service. Paratransit service follows the same route network as fixed-route buses, but will pick up passengers at home or other locations within three-quarters of a mile from the regular route. On a typical day, paratransit service provides between 570 and 590 rides.
- WTA's **vanpool program** allows employers to lease WTA-owned vans for ride-sharing to their employees' worksite.
- **Zone service** provides limited transit service to rural communities in Whatcom County. Riders must make a reservation for this service, which provides from 170 to 230 riders per month.

Park-and-Ride Lots

In Whatcom County there are many park-and-ride lots at which people meet to form carpools or connect to a WTA bus. There are both designated park-and-ride lots and informal park-and-ride locations, such as shopping center parking lots (although their use as park-and-ride lots is often prohibited by the property owner). Dedicated park-and-ride lots exist at the following locations:

Figure 3: Whatcom County Park-and-Ride Lots

Passenger rail

More than 150 miles of track owned by [BNSF Railway](#) stretch between the cities of Seattle and Vancouver, British Columbia, and it is on these tracks that Amtrak's Cascades passenger rail service operates. Each of the Amtrak Cascades' two daily round-trips between Seattle and Vancouver stops in Bellingham, providing residents of Whatcom County with an alternative to driving north to Vancouver or to points as far south as Eugene, Oregon.

Ridership on the Amtrak Cascades service has steadily increased (9.5 percent per year) as funding partners add capacity and improve on-time performance. There is regional interest in increasing the number of cross-border round trips, and the City of Blaine is actively seeking a stop to serve residents of northwest Whatcom County as well as the heavily-populated Lower Mainland of B.C., particularly those communities south of the Fraser River.

As a result of federal legislation, since October of 2013, the states of Washington and Oregon own and operate the Amtrak Cascades service. While the states collaborate on managing Amtrak Cascades, each is responsible for operating the service within its own boundaries, with Washington also assuming responsibility for the service in British Columbia.

Passenger ferry

Whatcom County operates a ferry between Gooseberry Point on the Lummi Reservation and Lummi Island (which is not part of the reservation). The "Whatcom Chief" carries approximately 180,000 passengers and 110,000 vehicles annually.

The [Alaska Marine Highway System](#) operates ferry service connecting Bellingham to Ketchikan,

Alaska, a 38-hour trip via the Inside Passage. Annually, these ferries transport approximately 13,700 passengers and 5,600 vehicles from Bellingham to Ketchikan, and 12,000 passengers and 5,100 vehicles in the other direction. This level of activity has remained relatively steady for the last ten years.

In addition to these regularly scheduled services, private companies offer seasonal marine services leaving from Fairhaven and from Drayton Harbor in Blaine to locations in the San Juan Islands, Victoria B.C., and Semiahmoo Point in Blaine.

Passenger air

Bellingham International Airport (BLI) provides commercial passenger service from Alaska Airlines, Allegiant and San Juan Airlines. Passenger travel out of BLI grew steeply in the 2000s, peaking at 573,714 boardings in 2013, largely due to the airport's popularity among British Columbians living in the Lower Mainland. Since then, there has been a significant decrease in boardings, primarily as a result of the decline in the Canadian dollar.

A smaller airport is also located in Lynden that provides facilities for general aviation and light aircraft charter services. Also, a seaplane terminal known as Floathaven is located on Lake Whatcom.

Automobiles

As in most places in the U.S., the personal automobile is the primary mode choice for personal trips in the Whatcom region, accounting for about 80 percent of all trips. The average household in Whatcom County owns two motor vehicles (cars and/or light trucks) and generates about seven automobile trips a day, with an average trip time of just over 17 minutes.

Other passenger travel modes

The region is also served by private bus services (including Greyhound, Bellair charters and shuttles and Bolt Bus), taxi services, ride sharing (Lyft and Uber), and rental car companies.

Commercial vehicles

The amount of freight carried by commercial long- and short-haul trucks within and through Whatcom County is substantial because of international border crossings, urban area activities, marine port connections, industrial activity and agriculture. Annually, about 18 million tons of freight are carried through the region on Interstate 5. Under Washington's Freight and Goods Transportation System ([FGTS](#)) classification, there are several state routes and city road segments that are classified as either "T-1," FGTS's highest-priority rating (carrying more than 10-million tons of freight per year), or "T-2," carrying between 4 and 10-million tons annually.

Roughly 75 percent of all commercial and passenger vehicles traveling between British Columbia and Washington cross the border at one of Whatcom County's four principal ports-of-entry: Peace Arch-Douglas, Pacific Highway, Lynden-Aldergrove or Sumas-Abbotsford-Huntingdon, known collectively as the Cascade Gateway. Nearly 3,000 commercial vehicles cross through Cascade Gateway every day, carrying an average of more than \$30-million in trade goods. With 30 percent of commercial

trucks having a trip-end south of Washington State, the region's border crossings and highway system play an important role in both Washington's and the national economy, as well as the economies of B.C. and Canada. WCOG focuses on border transportation through its [IMTC Program](#), which addresses the needs of freight and how to expedite cross-border truck movements while maintaining environmental quality and the safety of the communities impacted by these trips.

Rail freight

Commercial freight is also transported across Washington by rail. Whatcom County's main rail line, operated by Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railway, serves the bulk of regional rail freight movement. An additional rail line - also owned by BNSF - stretches 46 miles from Burlington in Skagit County to Sumas, at which it crosses the border into Canada. This line currently carries freight cars only.

Studies of the rail system were conducted in 2002 and again in 2011 to examine the potential growth of both freight and passenger rail and better ways to utilize existing infrastructure. As highways in the region grow more congested, regional agencies continue to explore how a greater proportion of freight movements could be served by rail.

Marine cargo

The Bellingham Shipping Terminal on Squalicum Harbor, operated by the Port of Bellingham, provides a full-service marine terminal. Opportunities may exist to expand these services, which, depending on the commodities being transported, have some potential of reducing future demand on the region's highways. Landside facilities at Squalicum Harbor currently include a shipyard, rail lines, retail stores, seafood processing plants and cold storage.

Deep-water facilities are operated at the Cherry Point industrial area by Alcoa's Intalco Works, British Petroleum and Phillips 66.

Air freight

BLI is host to freight and mail transport operations, including freight airlines, freight forwarders, and trucking firms involved in air movement of freight.

