

Whatcom's Regional Transportation System Goals

To plan for our region's transportation future, we first need to know what our goals are – what we as a region want to accomplish with the strategies and investments we choose.

Regional goals

Whatcom Mobility 2040 draws on the transportation goals adopted in the comprehensive plans of WCOG's member jurisdictions: Whatcom County, the seven cities, the Lummi Nation and Nooksack Tribe – in establishing the goals for the Whatcom region. The transportation elements of all the jurisdictions' comprehensive plans were carefully reviewed, and the goals emphasized in each of them were compiled in a matrix to identify those shared by a majority of the jurisdictions.

Table 11: Regional Goals List

No.	Goal (and number of jurisdictions that established it as a goal in local comprehensive plans)
1	Safety (10)
2	Environmental quality (8)
3	Efficiency, effectiveness and system sustainability (8)
4	A multimodal transportation system (8)
5	Access and convenience (7)
6	Maintenance and preservation (6)
7	Freight transportation (6)

These seven regional goals – which largely overlap with the more numerous planning factors that federal and state law, respectively, require MPO and RTPO transportation plans to address – will take precedence in prioritizing project funding requests and developing performance measures and targets (see [Regional Projects](#)).

Safety. All ten of the Whatcom region's jurisdictions included safety as one of their transportation goals. The safety of all users of the region's transportation system – pedestrians, bicyclists, automobile drivers and their passengers, and truckers – must be maximized to the greatest degree practicable in the establishment of regional transportation policies and investment decisions.

A multi-modal transportation system. Residents of the region consistently express their support for a transportation system that provides mobility for people – *all* people – and not just those who drive. All modes of transportation should be considered when choosing among the many possible investments in projects and programs to meet the demand for travel and goods movement, and in

support of the other goals, notably efficiency and sustainability.

Efficiency, effectiveness and system sustainability. A program or project is *efficient* if it can be implemented for an appropriate cost relative to both its projected benefits (its *effectiveness*) and the cost of reasonable alternatives. It should also be *sustainable*, i.e., it will last as long (or longer) than projected and be able to be kept in a state of good repair and/or operated at or below its projected cost.

Environmental quality. Residents of the Whatcom region are second to none in their commitment to environmental quality, and, at the very least, they expect the environmental impacts of regional transportation investments to be neutral, if not positive. Energy conservation, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, habitat preservation and ensuring water quality are among the many environmental values that are of paramount importance in the region. Also important is consistency among transportation investments, land-use plans and economic development, which leads to optimal results.

Access and convenience: The region's transportation system is intended to serve all people and acknowledge and reduce barriers to mobility that exist for older adults, people with disabilities, and people with low incomes.

Maintenance and preservation: This goal complements the goal of sustainability: the importance of first choosing investments in facilities and programs that our region has the fiscal capacity to pay for and is willing to operate and/or maintain into the future, and then – as reflected in this goal – appropriately prioritizing the necessity of keeping our regional transportation system in a state of good repair.

Freight transportation: Given Whatcom County's adjacency to the Canadian border, along with the presence of two of the nation's premier trade corridors within its boundaries (Interstate 5 and the BNSF Railway), goods movement has a significant impact on the region's transportation system. Freight transportation is also an important consideration in all of the previously-listed goals, except "access and convenience."

State and national goals

Because of WCOG's dual responsibilities as both a federally-recognized metropolitan planning organization and as the state-designated regional transportation planning organization for Whatcom County, *Whatcom Mobility 2040* must consider and emphasize national and state transportation policy goals, in addition to regionally-adopted goals. The transportation goals of these three levels (regional, state and national) guide the Whatcom region's ongoing regional transportation planning process and are reflected in the strategies identified in this plan.

A basic requirement of metropolitan transportation plans prepared by MPOs is that they "consider factors described in [CFR §450.306](#) [the federal planning factors] as they relate to a minimum 20-year forecast period." Additionally, [CFR §450.324\(f\)\(2\)](#) notes that a plan's discussion of existing and proposed facilities emphasizes ". . . those facilities that serve important national and regional transportation functions." A notable recent addition to the original federal planning factors are seven "national goals" introduced as part of the National Goals and Performance Management Measures from the 2012 U.S. transportation funding authorization act known as "Moving Ahead for Progress in

the 21st Century,” which are included in the discussion below. In addition to national goals and the Whatcom regional goals discussed in the previous section, the Washington State Legislature has also adopted transportation policy goals.

Aligning regional goals with state and national goals

Among the three levels of government (regional, state, federal) there are four overlapping sets of transportation system goals, all of which are important. Table 12 organizes these four lists so that the state and national goals are grouped into sets that correspond to each of the seven Whatcom regional goals. This approach acknowledges the importance of the state and national goals and planning factors, but places them in a supporting and secondary role to the seven locally-developed Whatcom regional goals. As indicated in the table, the regional goals align neatly with all but five of the 24 state and/or national goals, those being economic vitality, security, resiliency, tourism, and reduction of project delivery delay. It should be noted that WCOG and its member jurisdictions acknowledge the importance of those five state and federal transportation goals that do not align with the Whatcom regional goals, but, unlike the others, they were not consistently mentioned in the transportation plans of Whatcom County’s local jurisdictions, which are the basis of the regional goals in *Whatcom Mobility 2040*.

Table 12: Relationship of Whatcom Regional Goals to State and National Goals

Whatcom Region <i>Seven most commonly listed goals, in jurisdictions' comprehensive plan transportation elements, in descending order of frequency</i>	Washington <i>Statewide transportation policy goals (RCW 47.04.280)</i>	United States <i>FAST Act planning factors 23 U.S. Code § 134(h)(1)</i> <i>National goals 23 U.S. Code § 150(a)(b)</i>	
1 Safety	<p>"Safety: To provide for and improve the safety and security of transportation customers and the transportation system."</p>	<p>"(2) Increase the safety of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users."</p>	<p>"(1) Safety: To achieve a significant reduction in traffic fatalities and serious injuries on all public roads."</p>
Efficiency, Effectiveness, & System Sustainability	<p>"Mobility (congestion relief): To improve the predictable movement of goods and people throughout Washington state, including congestion relief and improved freight mobility." <p>"Stewardship: To continuously improve the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of the transportation system."</p> </p>	<p>"(7) Promote efficient system management and operation."</p>	<p>(3) Congestion reduction: To achieve a significant reduction in congestion on the National Highway System. <p>(4) System reliability: To improve the efficiency of the surface transportation system.</p> </p>
2 Environmental Quality	<p>"Environment: To enhance Washington's quality of life through transportation investments that promote energy conservation, enhance healthy communities, and protect the environment."</p>	<p>"(5) Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, improve the quality of life, and promote consistency between transportation improvements and state and local planned growth and economic development patterns." <i>Also, see (9) below regarding storm water impacts.</i></p>	<p>(6) Environmental sustainability: To enhance the performance of the transportation system while protecting and enhancing the natural environment.</p>
A Multimodal Transportation System		<p>"(6) Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight."</p>	
3 Access & Convenience		<p>"(4) Increase accessibility and mobility of people and freight"</p>	
Maintenance & Preservation	<p>"Preservation: To maintain, preserve and extend the life and utility of prior investments in transportation systems and services."</p>	<p>"(8) Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system." <i>Also, see (9) below regarding reliability.</i></p>	<p>(2) Infrastructure condition: To maintain the highway infrastructure asset system in a state of good repair.</p>
4 Freight Transportation	<p><i>Freight included as part of Mobility and Economic Vitality policy goals.</i> <p>Economic vitality: To promote and develop transportation systems that stimulate, support, and enhance the movement of people and goods to ensure a prosperous economy.</p> </p>	<p><i>Freight included with FAST Act planning factors 4 and 6.</i> <p>(1) Support economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency.</p> </p>	<p>(5) Freight movement and economic vitality: To improve the national freight network, strengthen the ability of rural communities to access national and international trade markets, and support regional economic development.</p>
		<p>(3) Increase the security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users. <p>(9) Improve the resiliency and reliability of the transportation system and reduce or mitigate storm water impacts of surface transportation. <p>(10) Enhance travel and tourism</p> </p></p>	<p>(7) Reduced project delivery delays: To reduce project costs, promote jobs and the economy, and expedite the movement of people and goods by accelerating project completion through eliminating delays in the project development and delivery process, including reducing regulatory burdens and improving agencies' work practices.</p>

Applying regional goals to WCOG's transportation planning process

WCOG is in the early stages of applying *Whatcom Mobility 2040's* regional goals to its comprehensive, cooperative and continuing metropolitan and regional transportation planning process, but some initial applications have already begun.

Regional project selection

The Whatcom Transportation Policy Board is responsible for allocating funds from the federal Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) and Transportation Alternatives (TA) programs to projects in the Whatcom region. In recent years, approximately \$2.7-million in STBG funds and \$180,000 in TA funds have been available annually for projects requested by the Policy Board's member jurisdictions. For a project to be considered, the requesting jurisdiction completes the regional STBG funding application and submits it to WCOG by a prescribed date. All applications are compiled by WCOG so that they can be reviewed and ranked by the [Transportation Technical Advisory Group](#) (TTAG) using weighted selection criteria based on the regional goals in *Whatcom Mobility 2040*. TTAG's rankings are then considered by the Policy Board when it makes its funding decisions.

Project prioritization in the regional Transportation Improvement Program

Regional STBG and TA program funds are prioritized in the TIP based on the ranking they receive during the review and selection process. All federally-funded projects in the first four years of the TIP must be "fiscally constrained," i.e., all of the funding needed to complete the project must be identified. Projects programmed in the first year of the TIP are "priority one" projects, projects in the second year are priority two, etc., through the fourth year.

Identifying regional transportation corridors

As discussed in the [planning](#) section, WCOG uses the ranked regional goals as a way to support an ongoing discussion among its member jurisdictions and agencies about identifying a set of "regional transportation corridors" that connect population centers within the county (cities, unincorporated hamlets and tribal lands), and then developing operational and investment strategies to maximize the efficiency of those routes.