The Eleventh Annual Report on Progress in Implementing the King County Countywide Planning Policies

King County Benchmarks 2008 Transportation

Transit Ridership On The Rise

A transportation system that efficiently moves people and freight through the region is a key element in comprehensive planning in King County. In recognition of the fact that King County is the regional freight distribution hub as well as a major job and housing center, the Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs) promote a multi-modal transportation system that is based on regional priorities and includes an aggressive transit system and physical infrastructure planning that supports compact, urban development. These goals are increasingly important as the region anticipates growth in both population and freight movement over the next 30 years.

Analysis conducted by the Texas Transportation Institute indicates that peak-period commuters in the Seattle metropolitan area spent an estimated 45 hours delayed in traffic congestion in 2005, wasting 34 gallons of fuel per traveler, collectively costing the region an estimated $1.4 billion in lost productivity. However, among 39 urban areas with a population exceeding 1 million, Seattle's congestion has actually improved in the past decade, from fifth worst ranking in 1995 to 19th in 2005. Over the 10 year period, Seattle was one of only 10 metropolitan areas with an improvement in overall congestion.

While the Texas Transportation Institute models congestion data for the entire transportation system, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) monitors traffic conditions on the region's *most congested* commute routes. Using real-time data WSDOT found a clear worsening of peak-period congestion along key commute routes in King County, despite the relative improvement reported by the Texas Transportation Institute. As discussed in Indicator 41, commute times increased on 32 of the 38 monitored routes between 2002 and 2006.

Bucking national trends, a smaller share of King County's residents drive alone to work while more are using public transportation to commute to work. Between 2000 and 2007, public transit ridership increased approximately 16%, with 126 million boardings in 2007. Likewise, the share of resident workers that work from home has doubled since 1990, a rate of growth far exceeding the rate seen nationally.

Contributing to congestion on King County roads is an increase in freight being transported through the Puget Sound region. The Federal Highway Administration (FWHA) estimates that 477 million tons of freight, at a value of $371 billion, moved through Washington state in 2002 and anticipates that the volume of freight moving through Washington will more than double by the year 2035. With close to 70% of that volume being transported by truck and rail, Washington state's transportation infrastructure will be further taxed. Situated on a principal freight corridor, King County will likely experience much of that growth in freight volume.

Understanding the current challenges to the region's transportation system and expecting future growth to further tax the system, King County and its jurisdictions continue to use comprehensive planning as a means to provide an infrastructure that both fosters future growth and maintains the region's high quality of life as illustrated by the five indicators in this bulletin.

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