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**COMMUNITY PLANNING &  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT**

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## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Thurston County Planning Commission

**FROM:** Scott Davis, Transportation Manager (Thurston County)  
Michael Burnham, Senior Planner (TRPC)  
Allison Osterberg, Senior Planner (Thurston County)

**DATE:** October 17, 2018

**SUBJECT:** Comprehensive Plan Update: Chapter 5 - Transportation

### Background

Chapter 5 serves as the Comprehensive Plan's Transportation Element, as defined by the Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA), [36.70A.070](#). The chapter sets goals, objectives, and policies for roadway design and Level of Service (vehicle congestion) and bicycle and pedestrian facilities (bike lanes, sidewalks and multiuse trails). Additional sections and regulations relate to the rail, air, and bus network.

A project team of Thurston County and TRPC staff members drafted revisions to Chapter 5 during 2017 and 2018 as part of a periodic review required by RCW [36.70A.130](#). The proposed changes ensure that the chapter is consistent with the: State Transportation Plan; Regional Transportation Plan; County-Wide Planning Policies; Intercity Transit Strategic Plan, Regional Trails Plan, and, Thurston County Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The latter document outlines the 2017-2022 period for Thurston County's transportation program and includes ranked projects and estimated annual revenues and expenses.

### What public feedback has the Transportation chapter received?

Members of the public provided feedback to inform the Transportation chapter, including the newly revised goals, during the Open Houses for the Comprehensive Plan held in Spring 2018, and transportation issues came up in discussions with stakeholders in different settings.

Some of the main themes heard during those discussions were:

- Concerns about traffic congestion increasing as the county grows in population, and the impact that can have on the local economy.
- Desire for better transportation connections throughout the county that enable citizens of different abilities and means to use all available modes, both within the county itself and to travel into and home from other areas (ex. I5 Corridor, air, ferry, and train service).
- Support for designs that work for multiple modes of transportation: bike, pedestrian, as well as vehicles
- Desire to ensure that development in urban areas is dense enough to support public transit options.
- Recognition that the same level of service is not desirable in rural areas – there need to be transportation options for rural areas that do not conflict with rural character (wide road shoulders, etc).
- Concerns about the potential impacts of natural disasters, including flooding and earthquakes, and other potential emergencies on transportation infrastructure
- Recognition of maintenance needs, and kudos to current maintenance provided by county.
- Concerns about how new technologies, such as shared driving and autonomous vehicles, will be incorporated into transportation options.

The priorities of stakeholders and members of the public also were considered in the development of the plans that guided the update to the Transportation Chapter, such as the Regional Transportation Plan and Transportation Improvement Program.

### **What has changed in the Transportation chapter?**

Key changes to the chapter include: identified critical issues facing policymakers over the next two decades; amended policies so that they are consistent with the 2040 RTP and other applicable documents; updated maps, photos and graphics; and, recommended Level of Service for rural roads affected by urbanization. Such changes are consistent with what the project team heard from residents who attended comprehensive plan open houses in March 2018.

### **Critical Issues**

Where we live and work – and how we travel – impact how Thurston County’s transportation system meets the needs and expectations of a changing population. The county’s population is projected to grow by nearly 40 percent between 2018 and 2040. Commuting into and out of Thurston County is projected to double over the same period.

From 2006 to 2016, construction costs increased almost 53 percent. This means a \$1 million project in 2006 costs more than \$1.5 million as of 2016. Inflation, coupled with no increase in

the federal gas tax (a grant source on which Thurston County relies) means fewer funds for transportation investments.

Critical issues confronting decision-makers planning for the county's transportation network include how to:

- Finance the maintenance, preservation, and expansion of the transportation network as the traffic volume grows.
- Maintain acceptable operating service levels and a safe transportation network.
- Reduce automobile dependence and serve the needs of people who rely on public transportation services.
- Minimize environmental impacts associated with transportation systems.
- Adapt to new transportation technologies (e.g., electric and driverless vehicles).
- Preserve and promote options for passenger rail in the Puget Sound Corridor.

#### **Decision Points**

- Consider whether the draft changes to Chapter 5 are clear and sufficiently describe and capture the community's interests in housing, within the scope of the periodic update
- Review the revised LOS alternative for rural roadways affected by urbanization.