

FAQ's about the Regional Transportation Commission's Report

Main FAQs:

1. Who is the RTC?
2. What is the purpose of the report?
3. What is the primary finding of the report?
4. What are some other important findings?
5. What is the primary recommendation of the report?
6. What is the scope of work of the proposed PSRTC?
7. What is the financial authority for the proposed PSRTC?
8. What is the proposed composition of the PSRTC?
9. What is the process going forward for the proposed PSRTC?

Additional FAQs:

10. What demographic and other factors have led to the present situation?
11. What is the problem with our current financial resources?
12. What financing strategies can be utilized to make up the shortfall?
13. What is the problem with our current system of prioritization?
14. What did our focus group research reveal about the public's views on transportation and spending?
15. What other regions did you look at?

Main FAQs:

1. The Regional Transportation Commission ("RTC" or the "Commission") is a citizen advisory group created by the Washington State Legislature in Engrossed Substitute House Bill 2871, during the 2006 Legislative Session. RTC members were appointed by the Governor. RTC members, drawn from the four county area, include
 - Norm Rice, Co-chair
 - John Stanton, Co-chair
 - Mary Gates, King County
 - Dan McDonald, King County
 - Dwight Sutton, Kitsap County
 - Tim Farrell, Pierce County
 - Dave Johnson, Pierce Country
 - Gigi Burke, Snohomish County
 - Reid Shockey, Snohomish County
 - Doug MacDonald, WSDOT SecretaryBios are available at: <http://www.psrtc.wa.gov/commissioners.html>
2. The mission of the RTC is to provide recommendations to the Legislature and the Governor that will guide decision makers in their efforts to improve the governance and financing strategy for Central Puget Sound's transportation needs. The statute gave us the following directions: "To develop a proposal for a regional transportation governing entity more directly accountable to the public, and to develop a comprehensive regional transportation finance plan for the citizens of the Puget Sound metropolitan region."
3. Our current system of transportation governance delivers inadequate results, and will need fundamental systemic change to meet our state's transportation needs in the future. At this point there is no single agency in the region with the ability to meet the overall transportation needs of the region. In order to address regional needs, the system has to be structurally "re-knit" at the regional level.
4. Other findings included:

- The Puget Sound region is experiencing severe strain on its transportation system, manifested through several important indicators, especially congestion. Continued population and transportation demand growth in the region has combined with a 30 year history of under funding transportation in the region to create an impending regional transportation crisis.
 - The absence of unified regional transportation governance system has significantly contributed to the looming crisis. The region has been unable to effectively prioritize regional transportation projects on a multimodal basis, because there is no governmental entity responsible for prioritizing projects regionally across geography and modes.
 - There is a substantial shortfall in funding for regional transportation needs. Even if all presently identifiable revenue sources are tapped, there will be inadequate resources available to meet all of the identified needs in the Destination 2030 Plan. Therefore, the region needs to tap all available sources to finance transportation including new taxes and tolling. Tolling has the virtue of managing demand for transportation as well as generating revenue.
 - Our transit systems, initially developed to provide local service, now play a large role in regional transportation networks.
 - The policy of sub-regional equity introduces a sense of fairness, but can produce results inconsistent with prioritizing regionally.
5. We recommend that the State Legislature create a 15 member Puget Sound Regional Transportation Commission (PSRTC) which has authority and responsibility for planning, prioritizing and funding all modes of regional transportation for the four county area. The three regional agencies; PSRC, RTID and ST should be combined into this new agency.
 6. The new PSRTC should have responsibility for land use and transportation planning, prioritization and funding. It would absorb the responsibilities and succeed the organization of the PSRC as the Municipal Planning Organization (MPO) under federal law and the Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) under state law. The new PSRTC should be required to create an effective advisory body to actively involve and maintain strong relationships with counties, cities, ports, tribes, business, labor, transit agencies and other groups in the transportation planning process. The PSRTC should have the authority to implement regional demand management tools as a way of reducing demand and increasing revenue. The PSRTC should take responsibility for all State Roads within the region - "Roads of Statewide Significance" as well as "Roads of Regional Significance."
 7. The PSRTC should have the authority to generate revenue from tax and transportation user charges to pay for future transportation projects. The Legislature should allocate all money generated in the region from state transportation tax sources for regional projects – a "block grant" approach. Money collected within the region from State Motor Vehicle Fuels (MVFT) and State Motor Vehicle Excise (MVET) taxes should be prioritized, managed and allocated by the PSRTC. The PSRTC be granted broad authority to levy regional taxes sufficient to meet regional transportation needs, including regional property, sales local option fuel taxes and MVET. The PSRTC should also be granted authority to act as gatekeeper for any regional transportation tax or bond proposal going to the ballot, including any proposal above a threshold size. The PSRTC should be granted authority to set regional tolls on all roads over which it has jurisdiction and that the region retain all regional tolling revenue.
 8. The PSRTC should be a fifteen-member body, with nine elected and six appointed members. Nine elected, non-partisan commissioners would be chosen from proportional districts to ensure broad geographic representation. The remaining six commissioners would be appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate. The Governor would designate one of those members as chair of the PSRTC. Appointed members would be selected on the basis of expertise in relevant subject areas such as in planning, construction, finance and management, and would be geographically diverse if possible. While former elected officials should be eligible, current elected

officials would not. The commissioners should serve six year terms and be eligible to hold office for two full terms, with terms staggered. The PSRTC members should be well-paid part time positions.

9. The RTC itself has fulfilled its function, and officially terminated its work on December 31, 2006, with the release of the report. Co-chairs Rice and Stanton are briefing legislative leaders and the governor over the next few weeks. A formal meeting with Governor Gregoire is tentatively scheduled for the 23rd of January. Legislation is being drawn up that incorporates the Commissions findings and recommendations.

Additional FAQs:

10. Some of the demographic features contributing to the transportation problems are:
 - Rapid and continuing population growth, of an uneven nature.
 - Demographic suburbanization and a decentralized economy, resulting in increased distance for many residents to travel between residence and work. Between 1995 and 2003, King County added 69% of the region's new jobs but only represented 42% of the population growth.
 - Demand for transportation on key corridors has grown. Limited new road construction hasn't kept pace with population and employment, and vehicle miles traveled (VMT) has more than doubled.
 - Growth in VMT is partly due to 1) economy shifting from manufacturing based to service and information based 2) growing percentage of multi-purpose trips, nearly 85% of all trips in the region, to work or home to daycare centers, schools, and shopping destinations.
 - The growth in freight traffic, with the region becoming an important hub of the international economy.
 - Result is commuter congestion; delays are increasing and demands on key corridors are rising. Local arterials are crowded with drivers and freight attempting to escape highway congestion adding to local transportation costs.
11. There is a substantial shortfall in funding for regional transportation needs. Even if all presently identifiable revenue sources are tapped, there will be inadequate resources available to meet all of the identified needs in the \$134 billion for Destination 2030 PSRC has identified \$72 billion in available funding sources. Thus there is a substantial shortfall, estimated at \$62 billion, in additional resources necessary to fund planned investments.
12. The region needs to tap all available sources to finance transportation including new taxes, user fees, and tolling. Tolling has the virtue of managing demand for transportation as well as generating revenue. There is a vital need for new regional, non-tax sources such as user fees involving tolling, fare adjustments, and parking fees - that would be used as both a source of revenue and as tools for managing demand.
13. The region has been unable to effectively prioritize regional transportation projects on a multimodal basis, because there is no governmental entity responsible for prioritizing projects regionally across geography and modes. Overall regional prioritization is not possible with our current structures and agencies. Our region's transportation structure has evolved incrementally over decades with new agencies and new legislation added to address problems as they emerged. No one entity is able to view the needs of the region or the entire transportation system as their primary responsibility, nor is any entity an overall decision maker.
14. Transportation continues to be an area of high concern. All participants in focus group surveys felt it was a critical issue, and many identified it as the top issue. Traffic congestion was seen as the primary problem. When thinking of the problem, people were envisioning gridlock and traffic jams. Secondarily, road condition (potholes, exposed rebar) was a concern. The future "vision" for transportation in Puget Sound invariably revolved around some type of more robust mass

transit system. People might argue about whether light rail, monorail, subway or buses were best but most all agreed that significantly improved public mass transit was the solution. Some progress was seen. Sound Transit was credited with building light rail to the airport and the Washington Department of Transportation was seen as making some improvements with the nickel gas tax and noting them with signage. On the whole, a regional approach was considered most appropriate in addressing transportation problems and solutions. People felt that the "East-West divide" was simply too great to allow for many common statewide efforts. Many participants had no awareness of the current "system" and agencies involved. Others spoke with great concern about the lack of leadership and planning and of a sense of fragmented, competing efforts.

15. The Commission looked at two domestic and one international region facing similar issues. The Portland region utilizes a unique elected regional governance structure called **Metro**, which oversees land use and transportation planning. In Phoenix, a voluntary coalition of governments formed a joint transportation agency known as the **Valley Metro RPTA** to oversee the expansion of a regional bus system as well as the construction of a light rail system. Our international example was Vancouver, B.C., where an ambitious regional authority called the Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority, or **TransLink**, oversees planning for a multimodal system that includes light and commuter rail, buses, and ferries, as well as roads and bridges. In each case, we researched the market, received a report from our staff and heard a presentation from an executive from the agency. We also received staff presentations on San Diego.