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MEMORANDUM

TO: Snohomish County Planning Commission

FROM: Jay Larson, Supervisor III, and Nathan Howard, Senior Planner II

SUBJECT: Transportation Element (TE) Update 2024

DATE: August 7, 2023

Dave Somers
County Executive

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this staff report is to outline and provide information on staff recommended amendments to the Transportation Element (TE) of Snohomish County's GMA Comprehensive Plan. A briefing on the recommended amendments will occur at the August 22, 2023, Planning Commission meeting. The transportation policies currently exist in the General Policy Plan of the Comprehensive Plan. Staff is proposing incorporating those transportation policies, with the amended changes found in Attachment A, into the TE. Staff is also proposing repealing the existing TE and replacing it with the draft TE found Attachment B.

BACKGROUND

The Transportation Element (TE) is a component of Snohomish County's Growth Management Act (GMA) Comprehensive Plan and is prepared in accordance with requirements specified in the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 36.70A. Snohomish County's Comprehensive Plan is comprised of 12 elements that work together to guide county actions over a 20-year planning horizon. The primary purpose of the TE is to present a plan for transportation facilities and services needed to support the County's Future Land Use Map (FLUM). The TE recommends specific transportation policies and projects for the unincorporated Snohomish County to meet multimodal safety, capacity, and connectivity needs. Providing a wide range of choices in transportation services helps provide mobility for all people in Snohomish County. The TE works together with the Capital Facilities and Utilities Element to guide long-term provision for facilities managed by Snohomish County Public Works and provides the basis for the creation of the annual six-year Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

PROPOSED COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENTS

Key Changes in the TE

1. Reformatting and Reorganization

The currently adopted Transportation Element (TE) does not contain any of the transportation

goals/policies, which is typical for a TE. As part of the 2024 Comprehensive Plan update, these goals/policies are proposed to be incorporated into the TE. This change required substantial reorganization of the TE. The draft TE is organized primarily around each of the 9 transportation goals.

The reorganization of the TE provided the opportunity for the county to improve the readability and clarity. Extraneous information was removed in this draft. Language in the narrative that was more appropriate in policies, specifically the section on Level of Service (LOS) standards, were moved into policies. Language in the narrative and policies that are more appropriate and already in county code were removed. Because of the extensive reorganization and revision contained in this draft TE, staff is recommending the repeal of the existing TE and the adoption of a new TE, rather than simply amending the existing TE.

2. Multimodal Focus

Transportation planning in the United States has been shifting more towards a multimodal focus. Multimodal transportation incorporates planning for all modes of transportation, particularly improving active transportation (bicycle and pedestrian) facilities, and supporting the efficiency and effectiveness of transit. Changes to GMA, VISION 2050 and Countywide Planning Policies include an emphasis on this shift towards multimodal planning, and the draft TE incorporates a focus in multimodal planning to be consistent. This includes shifting to more of a Multimodal Level of Service (MMLOS) standard. More robust active transportation planning was incorporated into the draft TE, which includes new methodology for analyzing the stress/comfort level of bicycle facilities. The project list in the draft TE includes a mix of multimodal projects, including new roadways, roadway/intersection improvements, transit supportive projects, and stand-alone active transportation projects.

3. Environment and Climate Change

The development, use, and maintenance of transportation facilities can have large impacts on the environment, especially with water quality. Impervious surfaces from transportation facilities can cause runoff of pollutants, such as the emerging concerns around chemicals in tire dust impacting salmonid populations. Another major issue with salmon protection and transportation is fish passage. Culverts and other barriers that are a part of the county roadway system can restrict or completely block salmon and trout access to historic spawning and rearing habitat. Efforts to restore and recover salmon passages and projection is being done through road improvement projects and stand-alone projects that remove and replace barriers, and measures to improve water quality.

Climate change is a global issue influenced by many interrelated factors that have consequences for the Pacific Northwest, including Snohomish County. Its impacts have the potential to increase the risk of damage and service disruptions to transportation infrastructure such as roads and bridges. Limiting climate change will require substantial and sustained reductions in Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions. Climate change represents two distinct challenges for transportation planning in Snohomish County; reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases from transportation that contribute to climate change, and planning for the impacts of climate change on transportation infrastructure.

4. Transportation Projects

Described in this section are the county transportation system improvements recommended by Snohomish County through the plan period (2024-2044) needed to support the Snohomish County Future Land Use Map (FLUM) and the goals contained in the comprehensive plan update. Projects include intersection and road improvements to address safety and maintain level of service (LOS), high-capacity transit supportive projects to improve the speed and reliability of bus rapid transit (BRT) to access light rail, and standalone bike and pedestrian project as well road improvement projects that will significantly increase the County's active transportation network. The projects in the TE were identified using the following methods:

Planning-Level Analysis of Arterial Network

A planning level analysis was completed for the TE to assess the impacts of the future land use plan on future roadway performance. This travel demand forecast is based on the same population and employment forecast as used by the Land Use Element in the Snohomish County Comprehensive Plan. The planning level analysis used estimates to identify if there may be a potential Level of Service (LOS) deficiency. This evaluation process identifies potential future roadway deficiencies and provides the basis for developing improvement projects aimed at maintaining the adopted LOS standard.

Intersection Operations

Intersection improvements projects are identified where intersection operational improvements are necessary to address potential future corridor Level of Service (LOS) deficiencies or to address a potential future Inadequate Road Condition (safety) deficiency. Some projects to improve intersection safety were identified through the County's Road Safety Plan.

Travel Time Reliability on Key Transit Corridors

Using a reliability analysis, improvements were identified that would improve transit reliability on key Bus Rapid Transit corridors leading to future light rail stations. Travel time reliability refers to how consistent travel conditions are from day to day. This evaluation methodology does not explicitly measure the quality of the transit service but the predictable performance of the roadways on which that transit service is operating.

Active Transportation

Analyses were done using existing active transportation (bicycle and pedestrian) facilities, and gaps in the countywide bicycle map. These analyses included evaluating walksheds, Bicycle Level of Traffic Stress, and other gap analyses. Projects identified provide key connections to transit, schools, parks, centers designated on the Future Land Use Map (FLUM), and other important destinations. Projects were also identified which addressed major gaps in the urban trail network.

5. Funding Strategies

The intent of the financial strategy is to ensure that adequate funding is available for the transportation system improvements needed to support the planned land use and the policies

contained in the comprehensive plan, while at the same time maintaining the County’s adopted LOS standard and the public’s safety. As the cost of operations, maintenance, and capital projects increases, transportation planning seeks to identify sustainable funding approaches to fund the needed infrastructure improvements outlined in TE. The funding approaches are broken into two primary categories, those sources that exist under current laws, and those sources that would require legislative action.

ANALYSIS

The following analysis provides a summary of the proposed amendments compliance with state law, regional, countywide planning policies.

Compliance with State Law

The GMA requires mandatory elements to be included within comprehensive plans. The Transportation Element (TE) incorporates the requirements from RCW 36.70A.070(6). These requirements include the following:

- Estimated traffic impacts to state-owned transportation facilities
- An inventory of air, water, and ground transportation facilities and services
- Regionally coordinated Level of Service (LOS) standards for all locally-owned arterial and transit routes;
- LOS standards for state highways to gauge system performance
- Actions and requirements to bring into compliance locally-owned transportation facilities and services to meet established LOS standards
- Forecasts of traffic for at least ten years based on the adopted land use plan (*note: the draft travel forecast is not in this TE draft, 20-year forecasts for the three land use alternatives are contained in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) that will be released in September. The final 20-year forecast will be incorporated into the TE in 2024 after the release of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS)*)
- Identification of state and local transportation system needs to meet current and future travel demand
- An analysis of funding capability to judge identified system needs against probable funding resources
- A multi-year finance plan based on the needs identified in the Comprehensive Plan
- A discussion of how additional funding will be raised, or how land use assumptions will be reassessed, if probable funding falls short
- Intergovernmental coordination efforts and transportation impact assessment
- Strategies for reducing travel demand
- A pedestrian and bicycle component that encourages connectivity and promotes healthy lifestyles

The GMA planning goals in RCW 36.70A.020 also guide the development and adoption of comprehensive plans. The TE is specifically in compliance with the following list of GMA goals:

1. **Urban growth.** Encourage development in urban areas where adequate public facilities and services exist or can be provided in an efficient manner
2. **Reduce Sprawl.** Reduce the inappropriate conversion of undeveloped land into sprawling, low-density development
3. **Transportation.** Encourage efficient multimodal transportation systems that will reduce

greenhouse gas emissions and per capita vehicle miles traveled, and are based on regional priorities and coordinated with county and city comprehensive plans

5. **Economic development.** Encourage economic development throughout the state that is consistent with adopted comprehensive plans, promote economic opportunity for all citizens of this state, especially for unemployed and for disadvantaged persons, promote the retention and expansion of existing businesses and recruitment of new businesses, recognize regional differences impacting economic development opportunities, and encourage growth in areas experiencing insufficient economic growth, all within the capacities of the state's natural resources, public services, and public facilities
6. **Property rights.** Private property shall not be taken for public use without just compensation having been made. The property rights of landowners shall be protected from arbitrary and discriminatory actions
9. **Open space and recreation.** Retain open space and green space, enhance recreational opportunities, enhance fish and wildlife habitat, increase access to natural resource lands and water, and develop parks and recreation facilities
10. **Environment.** Protect and enhance the environment and enhance the state's high quality of life, including air and water quality, and the availability of water
11. **Citizen participation and coordination.** Encourage the involvement of citizens in the planning process, including the participation of vulnerable populations and overburdened communities, and ensure coordination between communities and jurisdictions to reconcile conflicts
12. **Public facilities and services.** Ensure that those public facilities and services necessary to support development shall be adequate to serve the development at the time the development is available for occupancy and use without decreasing current service levels below locally established minimum standards
14. **Climate change and resiliency.** Ensure that comprehensive plans, development regulations, and regional policies, plans, and strategies under RCW 36.70A.210 and chapter 47.80 RCW adapt to and mitigate the effects of a changing climate; support reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and per capita vehicle miles traveled; prepare for climate impact scenarios; foster resiliency to climate impacts and natural hazards; protect and enhance environmental, economic, and human health and safety; and advance environmental justice

Compliance with the Multicounty Planning Policies (MPPs)

The proposed revisions comply with the VISION 2050's Multicounty Planning Policies (MPPs) by focusing on multimodal transportation with an increased emphasis on improving transit reliability, and enhancing connectivity, safety, and comfort for pedestrians and bicyclists. Further compliance is demonstrated through proposed revisions around developing a transportation system that improves equity, safety, and the environment. The TE policy table (Attachment A) includes references to MPPs that prompted policy amendments in this TE update. Examples include:

- **MPP-DP-53:** Address nonmotorized, pedestrian, and other multimodal types of transportation options in concurrency programs – both in assessment and mitigation.
- **MPP-RC-9:** Recognize and give regional funding priority to transportation facilities, infrastructure, and services that explicitly advance the development of housing in designated regional growth centers.
- **MPP-T-4:** Improve the safety of the transportation system and, in the long term, achieve the state's goal of zero deaths and serious injuries.
- **MPP-T-7:** Fund, complete, and operate the highly efficient, multimodal system in the Regional

Transportation Plan to support the Regional Growth Strategy.

- **MPP-T-9:** Implement transportation programs and projects that provide access to opportunities while preventing or mitigating negative impacts to people of color, people with low incomes, and people with special transportation needs.
- **MPP-T-10:** Ensure mobility choices for people with special transportation needs, including persons with disabilities, seniors, youth, and people with low incomes.
- **MPP-T-13:** Increase the proportion of trips made by transportation modes that are alternatives to driving alone, especially to and within centers and along corridors connecting centers, by ensuring availability of reliable and competitive transit options.
- **MPP-T-17:** Promote and incorporate bicycle and pedestrian travel as important modes of transportation by providing facilities and navigable connections.
- **MPP-T-32:** Reduce stormwater pollution from transportation facilities and improve fish passage, through retrofits and updated design standards. Where feasible, integrate with other improvements to achieve multiple benefits and cost efficiencies.

Compliance with the Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs)

CPPs establish a countywide framework for developing and adopting county, city, and town comprehensive plans. The proposed amendments of the TE comply with the CPPs and help implement them within the county. The TE policy table (Attachment A) includes references to MPPs that prompted policy amendments in this TE update. Examples include:

- **CPP-DP-40:** The County...should address the safety, health, and well-being of residents and employees in countywide and local planning through...Provision of infrastructure that promotes physical activity...
- **CPP-TR-4:** The County...should establish processes and procedures for setting priorities, programming, and financing for countywide, regional and state transportation facilities and services consistent with VISION 2050, the Growth Management Act, and federal transportation legislation.
- **CPP-TR-5:** The County...should develop consistent transportation design standards for urban and rural areas throughout the County that address public transportation, roadways, ferries, walkways, bikeways, and access for people with disabilities, low-income and special needs populations, and that recognize differences among communities...
- **CPP-TR-7:** The County...shall employ professionally accepted methodologies for determining transportation levels of service that consider different development intensities for urban centers, other urban areas and rural areas, high-occupancy vehicle use and community values as reflected by the city and County comprehensive plans, and transit agency long range plans.
- **CPP-TR-8:** The County...shall establish concurrency requirements for land development by considering transportation levels of service and available financial resources to make needed transportation improvements.
- **CPP-TR-12:** Each local jurisdiction served by transit should, in cooperation with transit agencies, map the general locations of planned major transit facilities in their comprehensive plans and provide for transit-supportive infrastructure and programs...
- **CPP-TR-15:** The County...shall maintain, preserve and operate the existing transportation systems in a safe and usable state. The County and cities should collaborate on maintenance, management, predictable funding and safety practices...
- **CPP-TR-16:** The County...should plan strategically to integrate measures to reduce emissions that contribute to climate change in transportation planning...
- **CPP-TR-19:** The County... should prepare compatible rules and procedures to implement

transportation programs and projects that provide access to opportunities while preventing and mitigating potential adverse impacts to people of color, people with low incomes, and people with special transportation needs.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The GMA requires early and continuous public participation (GOAL 11 and RCW 36.70A.140). Public participation on the TE has been provided to date through:

- Snohomish County held open houses in 2018 and 2019 to help plan for transportation access in the vicinity of future light rail stations. Two online open houses were held in 2018, one from June 22 through July 23 and one from October 31 through November 30. An additional online open house was held July 1 through July 31, 2019. An in-person open house was held on July 25, 2019.
- Snohomish County held an online open house from September 27, 2019 through October 27, 2019 to inform active transportation planning
 - 2,840 people visited the online open house
 - 955 surveys were completed
 - 1,203 map comments
- An opportunity to provide comments on the scope of the EIS was provided through the SEPA Scoping period which began on November 1, 2021 and ended on December 3, 2021. Comments were received on the scope of the Transportation Element as well as the EIS.
- An opportunity to provide comments on TE preliminary draft policy amendments during a 30-day comment period from May 1, 2023 to May 31, 2023
- New information posted continuously on the 2024 Update project website

30-Day Policy Comment Period

The county received nearly 90 comments during the 30-day comment period on the TE preliminary draft policy amendments. The public comment themes are listed below, and a discussion of how public comments influenced the TE is also provided. All public comments can be found in the index of record.

Major Themes:

- Concerns about unwanted/unplanned rural growth and how transportation may impact that
- Concerns about congestions on State Routes within unincorporated Snohomish County
- Roadways specific concerns

Many of the themes discussed in the public comment letters were already incorporated into the draft TE. Public comments inspired changes to the proposed TE including clarification on rural transportation policies. Snohomish County is required to analyze impacts to the State Routes, which it has done, however, the identified improvements needed on State Routes falls under the jurisdiction of WSDOT.

All public comments and the county's responses can be found in the index of records.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The County issued a Determination of Significance (DS) for the 2024 update to the Comprehensive Plan on November 1, 2021. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) will likely be issued in September 2023. A Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) will be issued before adoption of the 2024 update to the Comprehensive Plan.

NOTIFICATION OF STATE AGENCIES

Pursuant to RCW 36.70A.106, a notice of intent to adopt proposed amendments to the Comprehensive Plan will be transmitted to the Washington State Department of Commerce for the entirety of the 2024 Comprehensive Plan Update to the Plan in September 2023.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends approval of the proposed transportation policy amendments and the findings contained in Attachment A. Staff also recommends repealing the existing Transportation Element (TE) and adoption of the new TE found in Attachment B, which incorporates the amended transportation policies.

ACTION REQUESTED

The Planning Commission is requested to hold a public hearing, consider the proposed draft Transportation Element found in Attachment B, and provide a recommendation to the County Council. The Planning Commission can recommend approval of the TE with supporting findings of fact as proposed or modified; deny the proposal; or amend the proposal with appropriate findings.

cc: Ken Klein, Executive Director
Kelly Snyder, PW Director
Doug McCormick, Deputy PW Director/County Engineer
Steve Dickson, TES Director
Matt Ojala, Engineering Manager
Deborah Bell, Senior Legislative Analyst

Attachments

- **Attachment A – Transportation Element Policy Summary Table**
- **Attachment B – Draft Transportation Element**