



# County Roads & Infrastructure

**PRESENTATION TO THE WASHINGTON STATE  
JOINT TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE**

NOVEMBER 17, 2021

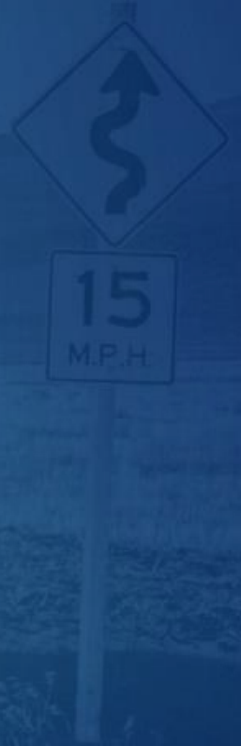
AXEL SWANSON – WASHINGTON STATE ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY  
ENGINEERS



# County Background

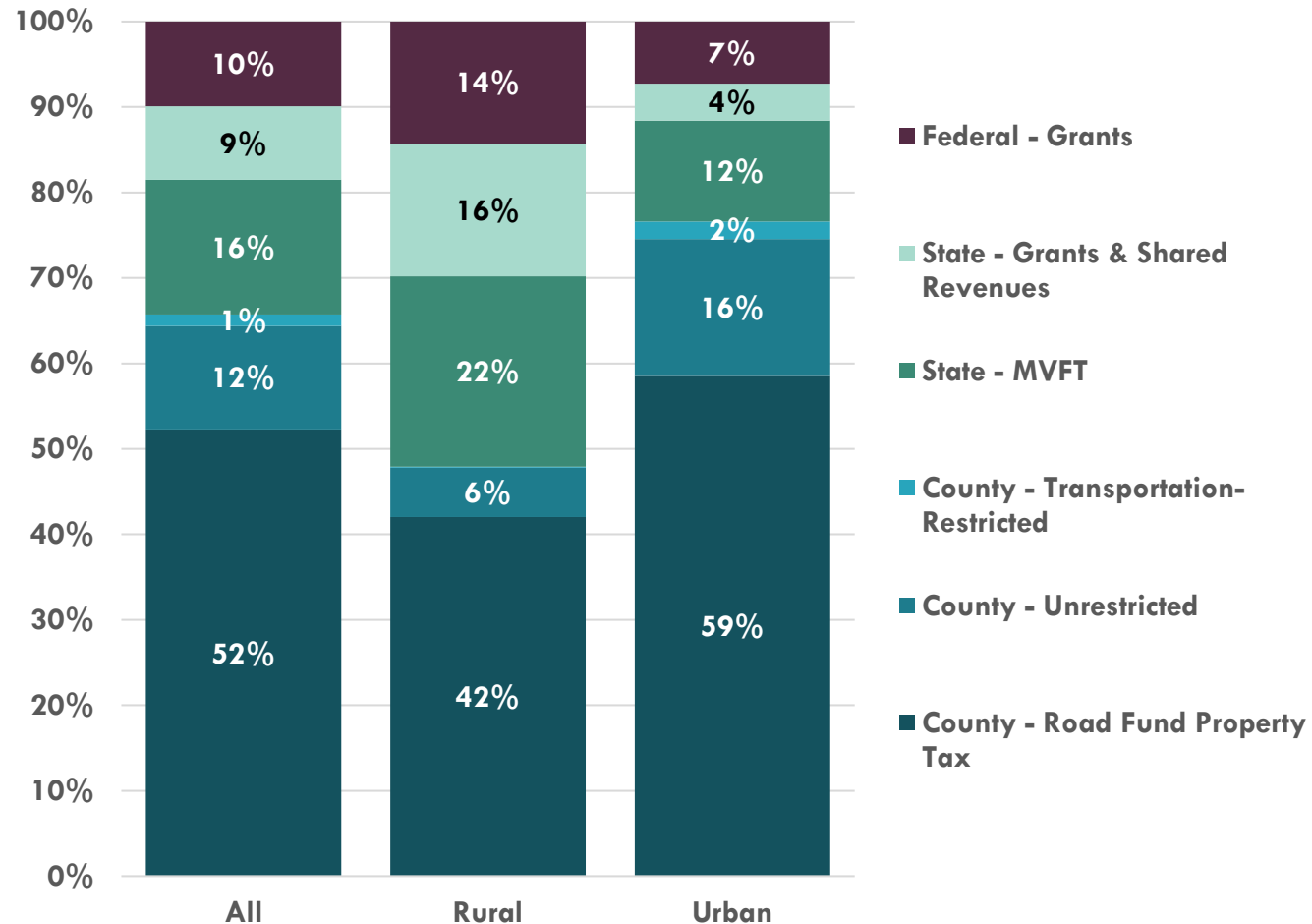
# County Roadway Responsibilities

- **39 Counties/39,000** centerline miles
- **59%** of Washington roadways
- **45%** of Washington bridges
- **4** ferry systems



# Counties are very different

- ▶ Geographic example: Okanogan County is 30 times bigger than San Juan County
- ▶ Population example: King County has 2.2 million residents and Garfield County has 2200
- ▶ Revenue example: Snohomish County has 41 times more transportation revenue than Wahkiakum County



## Rural & Urban Counties Transportation Funding Sources, 2014-2018 Average



# 2020 Revenue Study

Counties face **structural revenue challenges** to two key revenue sources, the county road fund property tax and state gas tax:

- Declining share of gas tax allocations.
- Reduced tax base from annexations and incorporations.
- Property tax one percent limit.
- Property tax road fund diversions and shifts.

Meanwhile, county transportation departments face **rising costs**:

- Deferred maintenance costs.
- Increasing gravel costs.
- Environmental regulations.
- Costs to replace bridges at the end of their lifespan.

The annual base funding gap for county transportation programmatic and capital needs is **\$719 million to \$1.23 billion.**

This gap is around **half of county needs** for programmatic and capital expenses.

Beyond this base funding gap:

- **Deferred maintenance.** Total road deferred maintenance costs for all counties are roughly **\$4.7 billion and \$6.3 billion**—around five to six times annual transportation expenditures across all counties.
- **Fish passage barrier removal.** At least **\$4.7 billion.**
- **Investments in safety, ADA, and active transportation.**





# Recommendations and Legislative Priorities

# Revenue Study Recommendations

**Increase investment for preservation and maintenance**

**Implement a federal fund exchange program**

**Increase the county share of the gas tax**

**Expand or enhance local county transportation funding options**

### State Shared Revenue

- Increase State shared revenue to Counties for transportation and infrastructure preservation and maintenance

### County Road Administration Board

- Increase funding for CRAB's Rural Arterial Program (RAP) and County Arterial Preservation Program (CAPP)

### Federal Fund Exchange

- Allow a federal fund exchange program

### Fish Barrier Removal

- Coordinate and fund the removal of priority fish barriers regardless of jurisdictional ownership

### Regulatory Reform

- Implement regulatory reform to create efficiencies and reduce costs



# Ongoing COVID-19 Challenges

**Workforce**

**Projects**

**Revenue**

**Uncertainty**

# Workforce Challenges

- **Impacts to employees and tough decisions for managers:**
  - Changing guidance and mandates
    - Masking, distancing, quarantining
    - Vaccine mandates
    - Contingency planning (reductions in workforce)
  - Ongoing turnover and hiring (shortages of drivers and operators)
  - Complex and rushed collective bargaining
  - Prolonged stress and fatigue
    - Increased personnel issues
    - Increased anger/speeding from citizens/drivers

# Construction Challenges

- **Impacts to construction, maintenance, and operations:**
  - Disrupted supply chains for equipment and supplies
  - Increased costs for materials resulting in change orders
  - Challenging discussions with contractors and oversight of contracts
  - Complex procurement and contracting decisions
  - Postponed or prolonged project timelines
  - All while managing other health/safety concerns unrelated to COVID (heat and wildfire smoke)

# Revenue Challenges

- **Impacts of unanticipated revenue fluctuations**
  - Decreases in direct distribution of Motor Vehicle Fuel Tax
  - Decreased or delayed grant funding or grant cycles
  - Influx of American Rescue Plan Act funding and need for increased program capacity (water/sewer/broadband)
  - New and more complex audit requirements
  - Understanding IIJA benefits and programs



# Long-term Challenges

- **The Impact of uncertainty:**
  - How have travel habits changed?
  - How long will these changes last, and how will they continue to impact the transportation system?
  - How will these changes continue to impact traditional sources of transportation revenue?
  - Should we/can we change how we forecast revenue and plan projects during this time of uncertainty?
  - What happens after one time funding is gone?
  - Will inflation exacerbate the existing County revenue problem?



*Questions?*