

## State Role in Public Transportation

### Task 2: Assess the Current State Role in Public Transportation (DRAFT)

## BACKGROUND

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### 1.0 Purpose and Key Findings

The Washington State Legislature wishes to identify the state role in public transportation and to develop a statewide blueprint for public transportation to guide future state investments. A final report will be developed in four stages over the six-month project duration. Each stage will be documented using a white paper format that provides an opportunity for on-going feedback with the JTC and the Public Transportation Advisory Panel assembled for this effort. The four white papers envisioned for this work are as follows:

- Unmet Public Transportation Capital and Operations Needs
- Assessing the Current State Role in Public Transportation
- Public Transportation Efficiency and Accountability Measures to Inform Future State Investment
- A Blueprint to Establish State Investment Priorities in Public Transportation

A final report that incorporates all white paper recommendations and findings will be drafted and submitted to the Joint Transportation Committee of the Legislature in December 2010.

### 1.1 Overview of Task 2 White Paper

This white paper presents information on and an assessment of the state's current role in public transportation. It includes a review of current state goals related to public transportation and provides an overview of current state policies, responsibilities and activities related to public transportation programs and funding. The goal of this paper is to outline the state's existing goals in public transportation and ensure a common understanding of its current role in meeting those goals and to suggest possible changes or new ideas that might be considered moving forward.

### 1.2 Summary of Task Purpose

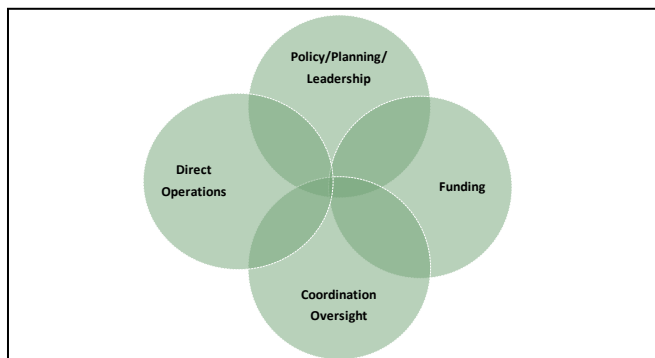
In order to provide direction for other study tasks, information in this white paper is intended to accomplish the following objectives:

- Summarize the state's current goals related to public transportation;
- Review the state's current activities and roles related to public transportation;
- Assess the state's activities in relations to state goals; and
- Identify key observations and questions related to the state's current role and possible future role.

### 1.3 Major Findings

States across the country are involved in public transportation in a variety of ways. Each has developed based upon its own unique identity and needs of the citizens they serve. However, regardless of their particular circumstances all actions and activities can be categorized under four general headings:

- Policy, Planning and Leadership
- Direct Operations
- Funding
- Coordination and Oversight



The review of Washington State practices indicates that the state serves many different roles related to public transportation. More importantly, the functions cover a broad spectrum of activities in each of the four areas of involvement. Examples of the things the state does today include:

***Policy, Planning and Leadership*** The state serves an active role in setting policy and direction. The transportation policy goals enacted by the Washington State Legislature establish a broad framework for transportation within the state. The state sets a long-range vision through the Washington Transportation Plan (WTP) that identifies the goals and strategies for the development of the overall transportation network. The State Legislature and the Governor have also adopted several policy objectives related to growth management, traffic congestion, and greenhouse gas reductions that guide expectations on the management of the transportation system. Finally, the state has provided a range of different ways and funding mechanisms for public transportation providers to be established and financed.

***Direct Operations*** The State is also a direct provider and operator of public transportation services through its ownership and management of high occupancy vehicle (HOV), state ferry, and park-and-ride systems. It also contracts for the operation of intercity bus and rail services.

***Funding*** In addition to authorized sources of funding public transportation providers can use to fund services, the state has also established a state grant program and plays a role in administering several small federal grant programs.

***Coordination and Oversight*** The best example of the state's involvement in this area is the active federal and state grant coordination program for meeting health and human service public transportation and rural mobility needs. The state is also a leader in developing VMT reduction programs that resulted from Commute Trip Reduction (CTR) legislation focusing on reducing single occupant vehicle work travel. This has included working with transit agencies to support and develop an extensive vanpool program.

In considering the state's future role, four key questions are raised for consideration:

1. Are existing state public transportation resources and funding focused on the right public transportation issues?
2. Do (or should) the current public transportation programs achieve Washington's six adopted transportation system policy goals?
3. How should public transportation unmet needs be identified and prioritized?
4. Are there state roles that should be eliminated, enhanced/ expanded or added to meet statewide goals or identified public transportation needs?

To answer these questions, this paper evaluates the current state role in four different ways:

- The extent of the state's involvement in each of the four role categories
- How the state's current role meets statutory transportation system policy goals
- How existing state public transportation programs meet statewide goals
- What unmet public transportation needs are related to statewide goals

From this analysis, there are several points that are raised for consideration.

From a **planning, policy and leadership perspective**, the state could consider expanding the scope of the Washington Transportation Plan to include a greater emphasis on public transportation as an integral element of the state's overall transportation network, including identifying specific goals and strategies. It seems apparent that public transportation will be a critical piece of the State's approach to meeting reduced greenhouse gases and vehicle miles of travel (VMT), as well as growth management act (GMA) goals.

From an **operations** perspective, the state ferry and HOV systems perform important public transportation and intermodal functions, particularly within the central Puget Sound and island areas, and will continue in the future to be an essential element of the public transportation network. In addition, with the recent receipt of federal high speed rail grant funding, it's likely that the state will expand its role in this area as well.

Beyond the funding that the state provides related to operating the systems described above, the state's direct public transportation **funding role** is very limited – at approximately 2 percent of the total public transportation funding in the state. Some have advocated that the state should provide more direct funding for public transportation. The state has also been asked to consider authorizing new local funding options and additional resources in the future. To begin this discussion, the state's current role is identified and the questions are asked, are these appropriate state roles to meet current and future state objectives and needs? As part of this discussion, the state may want to explore options that recognize the different needs and circumstances of rural versus urban systems and develop incentives/disincentives that further state policy objectives.

Finally, the State could reevaluate its role in **coordination and oversight**. It could develop programs/funding strategies that focus on improved public transportation linkages between communities and multimodal connections and expanded support of the integration between systems. In addition, it should evaluate and develop better linkages between state reporting requirements and meeting state goals as it considers the performance measures used to

evaluate public transportation effectiveness across the state. Combined with additional funding and/or other incentives, performance measures can be used to prioritize investments and ensure improvements are meeting key state public transportation goals.

The intent of this analysis is not to be prescriptive but to provide a framework for evaluating and exploring the state's current and future role and to raise possible areas for consideration. It's clear that Washington State plays an active role in policy and planning and operations and a significant role in infrastructure development. However, the areas of funding and coordination and oversight could be further enhanced. It's also important that during this re-evaluation that each existing and new role and program be evaluated against the backdrop of the statewide transportation system policy goals as established by the Washington State Legislature:

**Economic Vitality** – *To promote and develop transportation systems that stimulate, support, and enhance the movement of people and goods to ensure a prosperous economy*

**Mobility** – *To improve the predictable movement of goods and people throughout Washington State*

**Preservation** – *To maintain, preserve, and extend the life and utility of prior investments in transportation systems and services*

**Safety** – *To provide for and improve the safety and security of transportation customers and the transportation system*

**Environment** – *To enhance Washington's quality of life through transportation investments that promote energy conservation, enhance healthy communities, and protect the environment*

**Stewardship** – *To continuously improve the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of the transportation system*

## 2.0 Information Sources

Several information sources were used to help assess the current role of Washington State in public transportation. These sources included:

*Washington Transportation Plan (2007-2026 and Draft of 2011-2030 Update)*: The Plan provides information on state goals and policies for transportation of all modes.

*Public Transportation Division website*: <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Transit/overview.htm>. The website provides an overview of the state's Public Transportation Division current objectives and roles.

*United States Code (U.S.C.)*: The Code contains current federal law as adopted by United States Congress.

*Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)*: This document reflects implementing regulations as determined by the federal agencies, including the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT).

*Revised Code of Washington (RCW):* The Code contains current state law as adopted by the Washington State Legislature.

*JTC Transportation Resource Manual:* Several sections of this manual provided information on funding sources of public transportation.

### 3.0 Current State Role

States can play a number of different roles in providing for public transportation needs. These roles range from required functions such as being the recipient for federal pass through funding to active operational roles. We define the roles that states play in four different ways:

1. Policy, Planning and Leadership
2. Direct Operations
3. Funding
4. Coordination and Oversight

Figure 1 illustrates these various roles and shows that at times, various functions may overlap. Washington State's current role covers all four areas.

**Figure 1 – Four State Roles**

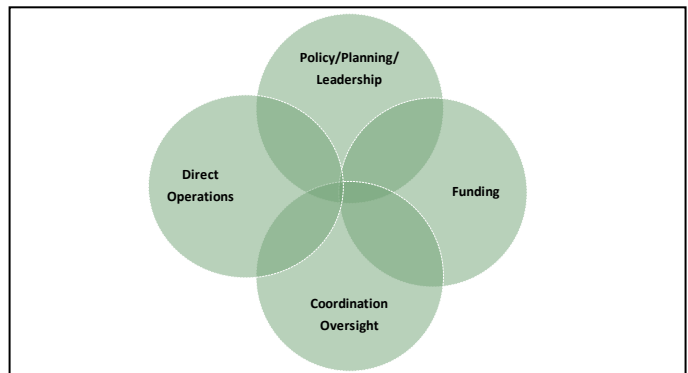


Table 1 below highlights some of the major functions currently played by the state. This paper will review the ways the state currently addresses public transportation and will identify some key areas for future discussion.

**Table 1: Summary of Current State Roles in Public Transportation**

Policy/Planning	Providing Services	Funding	Oversight/Coordination
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authorization of Transit Agencies</li> <li>• WTP</li> <li>• GMA</li> <li>• CTR</li> <li>• Greenhouse Gas Emissions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State Ferries</li> <li>• Intercity Bus and Rail</li> <li>• HOV System</li> <li>• Park-and-ride System</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State Authorized Local Tax Options</li> <li>• Federal Funds</li> <li>• State Multimodal Account</li> <li>• Other Direct State Funding                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ferries</li> <li>○ Intercity Bus and Rail</li> <li>○ HOV system</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TDPs</li> <li>• ACCT</li> <li>• Gray Notebook</li> <li>• Annual Summary of Public Transportation</li> </ul>

**3.1 State Role in Policy, Planning and Leadership**

Like all states, the Washington State Legislature, the Governor and the Transportation Commission play active roles in setting public policy that drives the direction and priorities for transportation in the state. From specific legislation, such as the Growth Management Act, to overall planning guidance through the Washington Transportation Plan, the state has established its key goals that are important to implementing, funding and managing the overall transportation system. Together, these “pieces of the puzzle” provide an overall framework from which the current public transportation role is defined.

In areas of the state without public transportation service, the state has provided two major areas of support. The first area involves state support for jurisdictions that are exploring new or expanded public transportation services. In addition, the state manages the federal and state grant programs that often provide opportunities to fund public transportation services in areas that may not currently be served by Public Transportation Benefit Areas (PTBAs) or other public transit agencies.

Table 2 below summarizes the various roles the state plays today in policy, planning and leadership.

**Table 2 - State Activities Relating to Policy, Planning and Leadership**

Major State Role	Key Elements under Each Role	Summary of Major Features
Authorizing Legislation for Public Transportation	Public Transportation Benefit Areas (PTBAs)	PTBAs comprise the majority of public transit entities in the state. The governing authority “consists of elected officials selected by and serving at the pleasure of the governing bodies of component cities within the area and the county legislative authority of each county within the area.” <sup>1</sup>
	County Systems	Counties (except those where a metropolitan municipal corporation performs the public transportation function) are authorized to create county transportation authority. These agencies must cover the entire county, including all cities and towns. Alternatively, a county is authorized to provide public transportation itself in unincorporated areas (except in areas where a PTBA provides that function).
	Metropolitan Municipal Corporations	Formed under state law to provide one or more public functions in metropolitan areas, including public transportation.
	Regional Transit Authority (RTA)	Two or more adjacent and highly-populated counties are allowed to form an RTA under the provisions of state law. <sup>2</sup> Sound Transit, the RTA serving the urban portions of Snohomish, King, and Pierce counties, was formed in 1993.
	Transportation Benefit Districts (TBDs)	TBD’s finance improvements to transportation infrastructure and equipment, such as state highways, principal arterials, high capacity transportation, and public transit systems, and transportation demand management programs.
State Programs relating to Public Transportation	Growth Management Act (GMA)	GMA <sup>3</sup> identified several goals to guide development and adoption of comprehensive plans and development regulations. These goals include encouraging efficient multimodal transportation systems based on regional priorities and coordination with county and city comprehensive plans.
	Commute Trip	While a state-mandate program, CTR involves joint

<sup>1</sup> RCW 36.57A.050

<sup>2</sup> RCW 81.112.030

<sup>3</sup> RCW 36.70A.070

Major State Role	Key Elements under Each Role	Summary of Major Features
	Reduction (CTR)	efforts involving the private sector, local jurisdictions and state agencies to help maximize the efficiency of the transportation system.
	Greenhouse Gas Reductions (GHG)	The legislation calls for WSDOT to work with the Washington Climate Advisory Team (CAT) and develop recommendations to achieve statewide goals relating to vehicles miles travelled reductions.
State Planning	Washington State Transportation Plan (WTP)	The WTP provides policy direction and prioritization of transportation investments. The current WTP covers the 2007 to 2026 timeframe. An update is underway to be completed by December 2010.
	High Speed and Intercity Passenger Rail (HSIPR)	The high speed ground transportation program was created with the recognition that forecasted population and employment growth along corridors would result in considerable increased demand. WSDOT develops a rail passenger plan that is coordinated with local jurisdictions and neighboring state and national governments.
	High Capacity Transportation (HCT)	RTA's and certain populous counties are authorized to develop HCT system and financing plans. State statutes identify planning and public involvement responsibilities for HCT development, along with voter approval and financing requirements.

**3.1.1 Authorizing Legislation for Public Transportation**

State statutes authorize the formation of agencies to develop and provide public transit services. These agencies include public transportation benefit areas, county transportation authorities, metropolitan municipal corporations, and regional transit authorities. This section briefly describes the legislation authorizing each of these types of public transit providers. Table 3 identifies the agencies that have been created under these authorizations.

Each public transportation entity, when formed, has a set of taxing mechanisms available for supporting identified projects and services. Neither the state, regional, or local agencies provide oversight or advise on the types or amounts of public transportation investments that are supported by local tax sources. While public transit systems prepare Transit Development Plans (TDPs) and Annual Reports each year, funding of programs through local tax support is not affected by contents of the TDPs and annual reports.



**Table 3 – Public Transportation Systems by Type of Authority**

<b>Type of Transit Authority</b>	<b>Transit Systems</b>
Public Transportation Benefit Area (PTBA)	Asotin County
	Ben Franklin Transit
	Clallam Transit System
	C-TRAN (Clark County)
	Community Transit (Snohomish County)
	Cowlitz Transit Authority
	Grant Transit
	Grays Harbor Transportation Authority
	Intercity Transit (Thurston County)
	Island Transit
	Jefferson Transit
	Kitsap Transit
	Link Transit (Chelan and Douglas Counties)
	Mason County Transportation Authority
	Pacific Transit
	Pierce Transit
	Skagit Transit
	Spokane Transit Authority
Twin Transit (Lewis County)	
Valley Transit (Walla Walla)	
Whatcom Transportation Authority	
Municipal Corporations	Everett Transit
	King County Metro Transit
	Yakima Transit
	City of Pullman
	City of Selah
	City of Union Gap
County Transportation Authority	Columbia County Public Transportation
	Grays Harbor Transportation Authority
Regional Transit Authority	Sound Transit

**3.1.2 State Programs Relating to Public Transportation**

There are three specific state statutes that have been enacted that establish policy goals and direction that either affect – or are affected by – public transportation. More specifically, in each of the cases below, public transportation can be considered integral to the successful achievement of the policy goals established in these statutes.

In addition, the state establishes policies related to the management of the high occupancy vehicle (HOV) facilities that it directly constructs and operates. These HOV lanes are located in the central Puget Sound region.

### ***Growth Management Act (GMA)***

GMA guidance does not mandate specific targets regarding transportation such as the extent of reductions in single-occupant vehicles (SOV) trips. However, GMA does require preparation of Regional Transportation Plans by regional transportation planning organizations (RTPOs). These plans can provide opportunities to identify transportation strategies, including public transit ones, to address and support future growth strategies in particular regions.

The Growth Management Act (GMA)<sup>4</sup> includes goals to guide development and adoption of comprehensive plans and development regulations. These apply to those counties and cities in Washington State that either required to, or choose to, plan under the Act. GMA goals included the following broad guidance for preparing comprehensive plans and development regulations:

- Urban growth: Encourage development in urban areas where adequate public facilities and services exist or can be provided in an efficient manner.
- Reduce sprawl: Reduce the inappropriate conversion of undeveloped land into sprawling, low-density development.
- Transportation: Encourage efficient multimodal transportation systems that are based on regional priorities and coordinated with county and city comprehensive plans.

As noted above, GMA guidance does not mandate any targets regarding transportation such as the extent of reduced single-occupant vehicles trips. However, GMA requires the preparation of Regional Transportation Plans to be prepared by regional transportation planning organizations (RTPO's). These plans can provide opportunities to identify transportation strategies, including public transit ones, to address future growth in particular regions. The plans can also meet federal mandates for regional transportation planning conducted by designated Metropolitan Transportation Organizations in larger urban area. Per GMA requirements, the Regional Transportation Plans are updated every four years.

GMA legislation requires RTPO's to work with local jurisdictions to identify guidelines and principles for transportation planning. These guidelines and principles provide direction to local jurisdictions in developing their local transportation plans. The guidelines and principles also enable any RTPO to determine whether the transportation elements in local plans are consistent with the regional transportation plan. This approach for regional transportation planning provides opportunities for including items relating to public transportation development at both local and regional levels.

Because GMA's emphasis is on reducing sprawl and managing growth more efficiently, public transportation is typically considered an integral element for implementing regional/ local growth management strategies. For example, the Puget Sound Region's Vision 2040 Plan

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<sup>4</sup> RCW 36.70A.070

states: “The region’s aggressive, long-range growth management and transportation goals depend on more efficient and effective public transportation services.”

### ***Commute Trip Reduction Act (CTR)***

CTR calls for management and monitoring programs affecting state highways. There is also direct state involvement in the funding of current CTR programs and WSDOT staff resources for the CTR Board.

The Washington State Legislature passed the Commute Trip Reduction (CTR) Law in 1991, incorporating it into the Washington Clean Air Act. The goals of the program are to reduce traffic congestion, reduce air pollution, and petroleum consumption through employer-based programs that decrease the number of commute trips made by people driving alone.<sup>5</sup> It includes several key goals:

- Improve air quality.
- Reduce traffic congestion.
- Reduce petroleum fuel consumption through employer-based programs that encourage the use of alternatives to driving alone.

While it is a state-mandated program, CTR involves joint efforts involving the private sector, local jurisdictions and state agencies to help maximize the efficiency of the transportation system. A CTR Board made up of business, government, and citizen representatives appointed by the Governor regularly evaluates the program’s performance, recommend ways to improve it, and report to the Legislature every two years. The last report was submitted in January 2010.

The CTR Efficiency Act of 2006 updated the initial statute. The update continues to emphasize a major employer role, but it also expanded responsibility for program success to local governments working with employers. The new law directed local jurisdictions to establish new goals for reducing drive-alone trips and vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and to develop plans and policies that could achieve those goals. The purpose was for jurisdictions to implement transportation-efficient land uses and supportive policies, investments, and partnerships that provide conditions leading to CTR success.

The CTR program’s focus is on work trips during the morning peak travel period that involve large employment sites and dense employment centers with congested areas. The program directs major employers in the urban growth areas of the state with the greatest levels of traffic congestion to implement programs to reduce the proportion of employees who drive alone to work. Local governments within these same areas may voluntarily expand the process through establishing growth and transportation efficiency centers (GTECs). These broaden the CTR program’s focus to smaller employers, students, and residents. The GTEC’s also provide an opportunity for public transportation agencies to serve as partners in trip reduction efforts.

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<sup>5</sup> Chapter 70.94 RCW

CTR strategies typically create incentives for people to take public transit (e.g., through employer subsidized transit passes) and disincentives to driving alone (e.g., through reduced parking and/or higher cost parking). The effect of these strategies is increased demand for public transportation. As with GMA, public transportation is a key element in successful implementation of CTR.

### ***Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction (GHG)***

The Legislature passed greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction legislation in 2008. This statute established specific targets for reductions in VMT with a long-range goal of a 50% reduction in VMT by 2050.

The greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction legislation<sup>6</sup> identified the following major elements:

- Directs the Department of Ecology (DOE) to develop and implement a program to limit statewide greenhouse gas emissions and submit it to the legislature for approval (See RCW 70.235.020(1)).
- Authorizes DOE to adopt rules requiring a reporting system to monitor greenhouse gas emissions.
- Authorizes DOE to develop a design for a regional multi-sector and market-based system to limit and reduce GHG emissions.
- Creates a green collar job training account to train and transition workers to clean energy jobs.
- Directs WSDOT to provide recommendations to reduce annual per capita VMT.

The legislation calls for WSDOT to work with the Washington Climate Advisory Team (CAT) and develop recommendations to achieve the following statewide goals relating to VMT reductions<sup>7</sup>:

- Decrease the annual per capita vehicle miles traveled by 18 percent by 2020.
- Decrease the annual per capita vehicle miles traveled by 30 percent by 2035.
- Decrease the annual per capita vehicle miles traveled by 50 percent by 2050.

The recommendations relating to VMT reductions also include a set of tools and best practices to assist state, regional, and local entities in making progress toward achieving these goals. Recommendations will identify current strategies to reduce VMT's in Washington, as well as successful strategies used in other jurisdictions. The recommendations will identify potential new revenue options for local and regional governments to finance VMT reduction efforts.

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<sup>6</sup> Chapter 70.235 RCW

<sup>7</sup> RCW 47.01.440

The legislation specifies that the CAT process include participation from regional transportation planning organizations, the Washington State Transit Association, the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency, and at least one major private employer that participate in the state's CTR program.

A number of strategies will be required in order to achieve the goals established by the state to reduce GHG and VM. Shifting more travel from single occupant vehicles (SOVs) to other forms of travel – including public transportation – will be essential and will increase demand for public transportation.

### **3.1.3 State Planning**

The state takes an active role in planning not only for its programs but also for public transit systems. The Washington Transportation Plan (WTP) includes goals specifically related to public transportation. The TDPs prepared by transit operators include information on how these goals are being addressed in the plans. Thus, state-related policies are being addressed in more localized public transit plans.

Although the legislature provided authorization for transit organizations, the state has been involved in implementation of actual public transportation programs. The state, through the Public Transportation Division of WSDOT, has played and continues to play a key and active role in supporting the efforts of all public transportation providers. WSDOT personnel have worked with local jurisdictions and stakeholders in identifying potential approaches to public transportation development. Some of this involvement includes working with MPO's and RTPO's on identification of public transportation investments as part of regional plans as well as demonstration programs that have led to implementation of transit services in areas previously not served by transit.

#### ***Washington Transportation Plan***

The state develops a long-range plan for that outlines policy direction and prioritization of transportation investments for the state. The current plan (2007-2026) reflects the six transportation goals adopted by the Washington State Legislature, which guide overall transportation activities and funding.

The state is currently in the process of preparing a 2011-2030 update to the WTP. A draft plan was issued for public comment and review in July with a final plan to be adopted in December.

#### ***Development of High Capacity Transportation (HCT)***

Beginning in 1990, Washington State began adopting legislation pertinent to the development of high capacity transportation systems in the state's major urban areas. As allowed by state law,<sup>8</sup> RTA's and certain populous counties are authorized to develop high capacity transportation system plans and financing plans. State statutes identify planning and public involvement responsibilities for high capacity transportation development, along with voter approval and financing requirements.

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<sup>8</sup> Chapter 81.104 RCW, also known as the High Capacity Transportation Systems Act

The state's role in high capacity transportation development is explicitly defined in statute as:

1. The state's planning role in high capacity transportation development as one element of a multimodal transportation system should facilitate cooperative state and local planning efforts.
2. The department of transportation may serve as a contractor for high capacity transportation system and project design, administer construction, and assist agencies authorized to provide service in the acquisition, preservation, and joint use of rights-of-way.
3. The department and local jurisdictions shall continue to cooperate with respect to the development of high occupancy vehicle lanes and related facilities, associated roadways, transfer stations, people mover systems developed either by the public or private sector, and other related projects.
4. The department in cooperation with local jurisdictions shall develop policies which enhance the development of high speed interregional systems by both the private and the public sector. These policies may address joint use of rights-of-way, identification and preservation of transportation corridors, and joint development of stations and other facilities.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Intercity and High Speed Rail Program***

The Legislature created the high speed ground transportation program in 1993 under Chapter 47.79 RCW with the recognition that forecasted growth in population and employment along transportation corridors would result in considerable increased demand on already congested corridors. WSDOT is required to develop a rail passenger plan and coordinate with local jurisdictions and neighboring state and national governments.

The goals of the high speed rail program are to implement high speed ground transportation with speeds in excess of 150 miles per hour between Everett and Portland, Oregon by 2020; Everett and Vancouver, B.C. by 2025; and Seattle and Spokane by 2030. These goals are to be met by improving depots, eliminating or improving grade crossings, enhancing train signals, revising track geometry, and improving service frequency. WSDOT is also required to develop a rail passenger plan and coordinate with local jurisdictions and neighboring state and national governments. The remainder of the chapter details facility acquisition and management, neighboring properties, and a number of issues related to the King Street Station in Seattle.

### **3.2 State Provided Transportation Services**

Washington State contracts with other entities to provide intercity bus and rail services and directly owns, operates and maintains the Washington State Ferry system that provides essential "roadway" connectivity across the Puget Sound. In addition, the state also owns and operates the state HOV system and has built several state-owned park and ride facilities

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<sup>9</sup> RCW 81.104.060

(operations and maintenance is transferred to local transit providers using the lots). Table 4 summarizes the direct operational role the state currently plays.

**Table 4 - State Roles Relating to Public Transportation Operations**

<b>State Provided Transportation Services</b>	State Ferry System	The legislature recognizes the state ferry system as a public mass transportation system under RCW 47.60.017. The system was established in 1951 and is the largest ferry system in the United States.
	Intercity Bus Program	The <i>Travel Washington</i> Intercity Bus Program is contracted by WSDOT to private operators to provide service between communities and timed connections to other intercity carriers. The three routes currently in operation include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the Grape Line between Walla Walla and Pasco,</li> <li>• the Dungeness Line between the Olympic Peninsula and Seattle as well as to SeaTac International Airport, and</li> <li>• the Apple Line between Omak and Ellensburg via Wenatchee</li> </ul>
	Intercity Passenger Rail	Intercity service in Washington State is legislated under Chapter 47.82 RCW. Amtrak Cascades service provides intercity connections between 18 cities from Vancouver, B.C. to Eugene, Oregon.
	High Occupancy Vehicle(HOV) System	Development of the HOV system is directed by Chapter 81.100 RCW to meet the need for mobility, growing travel demand, and increasing traffic congestion in urban areas.
	State Park-and-Ride Facilities	Under RCW 47.12.270, WSDOT is authorized to acquire property as well as construct, and maintain park-and-ride lots.

**HOV Lane Policies**

The state has both the authority to create as well as manage overall HOV system operations. There are two state statutes that give WSDOT the right to designate any lane or ramp for HOVs if it will increase the efficient utilization of the highway or will aid in the conservation of energy resources.<sup>10</sup> Currently HOV lanes are located on most of the major freeways in King County and southwest Snohomish County and are being expanded into Pierce County. WSDOT has established policies regarding the HOV system. The goals of the system are:

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<sup>10</sup> RCW 46.61.165 and RCW 47.52.025

- To maximize the people-carrying capacity of the freeway system by providing incentives to use buses, vanpools, and carpools.
- To provide capacity for future travel growth.
- To help reduce transportation-related pollution and dependency on fossil fuels.

Through HOV programs and policies the state seeks to make the best use of existing facilities by increasing freeway efficiency and promoting programs to move more people in fewer vehicles. Public transit systems operating in the three-county Puget Sound area use the HOV lanes as a way to improve speed and reliability of service and to improve operating efficiency for a number of their bus routes.

The state established performance standards to ensure that the system helps provide reliable travel time and dependability for transit users, vanpoolers, and carpools. The current performance standard states that a driver in an HOV lane should be able to maintain an average speed of 45 mph or greater at least 90% of the time during the morning and afternoon rush hour.

In order to maximize the use of the HOV network WSDOT recently completed a pilot project along the SR 167 corridor where single occupant vehicles are allowed to use the HOV network for a fee. High Occupancy Tolling (HOT) is being developed across the nation as a way to generate revenue and use pricing as a scheme to manage the capacity of some roadway segments in congested areas.

### **3.3 Funding**

One of the primary roles the state serves is as the pass through entity for many federal funding programs. Not all funds go directly to the state but this role is an essential function of the WSDOT Public Transportation Division. This section will describe in general the federal, state and local funding authorizations that are managed or authorized within the state related to public transportation.

#### **3.3.1 Federal Authorization**

Current federal funding for public transportation flow from the federal surface transportation authorization outlined in the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), which was enacted in August 2005. The project selection process for federal transportation funds is led by different entities, depending on the type of funding. For federal funds used for public transportation purposes, the state serves a variety of roles in the selection of projects and the distribution of funds. For some programs, the funds are allocated directly to the state for project selection, while the state has a more limited role in the project selection for other types of programs. In many cases, WSDOT, FHWA/FTA and the MPOs/RTPOs have developed an allocation process specific to the funding type.

Table 5 lists all the federal grants that come to the State and the state's role is project selection. Some grant funding is managed by the state others are passed through to other entities for project selection.



Note that SAFETEA-LU has many programs. However, because the focus of this study is on public transportation, not all funding programs are included in this paper. Discretionary programs where projects are selected at the federal level, such as the FTA Section 5309 New Starts/Small Starts program and Congressional earmarks, are also not included below unless the state has a role as a designated recipient or grantee.

All projects using federal funds must be included in the Metropolitan/Regional Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs) and the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). The public, federal and state agencies and other stakeholders are invited to participate in the development of the TIPs and the STIP.

**Table 5 – State Role in Federally Funded Projects**

<b>Major State Role</b>	<b>Key Elements under Each Role</b>	<b>Summary of Major Features</b>
Federally Authorized Funds: State Selects Projects	FTA Section 5310: Transportation for Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities Program	Distributed to each state according to its share of the special needs population. Funds are for equipment purchases. Projects must be derived from a local coordinated public transit human services transportation plan.
	FTA Section 5311: Formula Grants for Non-Urbanized Areas	Distributed to each state for the operating, capital and administrative expenses of providing coordinated public transportation services in rural areas.
	Federal Railroad Administration High Speed/Intercity Passenger Rail (HSIPR)	Eligible state-supported high speed and intercity passenger rail projects are identified and selected by WSDOT/Amtrak and are then submitted to USDOT for evaluation and approval.
	State Surface Transportation Program (STP)	Flexible funds that can be spent on a variety of transportation projects, including highway, rail and bus transit, bicycle, pedestrian, etc. Minimum of 10 percent set-aside from the state's STP apportionment to be used for Transportation Enhancements.
	Ferry Boat Discretionary	Eligible state ferry projects are identified and selected by WSDOT and are then submitted to USDOT
Federally Authorized: Local Agencies/Regions Select	Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ)	Projects that will improve air quality or manage congestion in federally-designated non-attainment and/or

Major State Role	Key Elements under Each Role	Summary of Major Features
Projects		maintenance areas.
	Regional Surface Transportation Program (STP)	Flexible funds that can be spent on a variety of transportation uses, including highway, rail and bus transit, bicycle, pedestrian, etc.
	FTA Section 5307: Urbanized Area Formula Program	Funds can be used for transit capital and operating assistance and are allocated by formula to urbanized areas. In smaller urbanized areas with a population of between 50,000 and 200,000, WSDOT selects projects.
	FTA Section 5316: Job Access and Reverse Commute Program (JARC)	Funds are used to address the transportation challenges faced by welfare recipients and low-income persons seeking employment. Projects to be funded must be derived from a local coordinated public transit human services transportation plan.
	New Freedom Program (FTA Section 5317)	Funds are used to assist persons with disabilities seeking integration into the work force and full participation in society. Projects to be funded must be derived from a local coordinated public transit human services transportation plan.

***State Selects Projects***

Some federal funding programs are allocated to the state, and the state has discretion (in cooperation with regional/local agencies) over the selection of projects to be funded with those program dollars.

In the case of the 5310 and 5311 programs the Public Transportation Division collects grant applications for both programs and provides a coordinated funding program so providers only need to submit one application.

***Local Agencies/Regions Select Projects***

In cooperation with WSDOT and federal partner agencies, local and regional entities select projects for many types of federal transportation programs. In most cases, the role of the state is limited. However for some programs, WSDOT does serve a role. These include:

- Urbanized Area Formula Program (FTA Section 5307): In smaller urbanized areas with a population of between 50,000 and 200,000, such as Bellingham, Longview and Yakima, WSDOT selects projects.

- Job Access and Reverse Commute Program (FTA Section 5316): Sixty percent of these funds are distributed to designated recipients in large urbanized areas. The remaining forty percent is distributed to states with one-half going to small urbanized areas with a population of between 50,000 and 200,000 and the other half (20 percent) going to rural and small urban areas under 50,000 in population. These funds are distributed by formula based on each area's share of eligible populations.
- New Freedom Program (FTA Section 5317): Sixty percent of these funds are distributed to designated recipients in large urbanized areas. The remaining forty percent is distributed to states with one-half going to small urbanized areas with a population of between 50,000 and 200,000 and the other half (20 percent) going to rural and small urban areas under 50,000 in population. These funds are distributed by formula based on each area's share of eligible populations.

### **3.3.2 State Funded and Authorized Taxes for Public Transportation**

The state provides funds for various projects that are funded through a variety of revenue sources that go into a state multi-modal account. In addition it has also authorized various taxing mechanisms for public transportation providers to levy. Some taxing sources are subject to voter approval.

#### ***State Funded Multimodal Account***

The Multimodal Transportation Fund was established during the 1990 legislative session to be used for general transportation purposes. Revenues are derived from a variety of fees and taxes on driver's licenses, light vehicle weight fees, a portion of the sales tax on automobiles and rental car taxes. This Fund can be used for programs such as transit, aviation, passenger and freight rail, and new transportation technologies, as well as for highway purposes.

A variety of public transportation services are funded through this account. These include programs such as Commute Trip Reduction tax credit and non-profit grant support, vanpool funding, flex car and other. In the past, ferry terminal investments and state rail system improvements, including freight improvements and even some highway investments have used this source of funding.

A major use of funding from this account has been to support public transportation investments in rural areas and for special needs transportation. Two grant funding programs that are funded through this account include:

*Regional Mobility Grant Program* – The Regional Mobility Grant program is mandated by RCW 47.66.030 with the purpose to foster local government support for funding “cost-effective projects that reduce delay for people and goods and improve connectivity between counties and regional population centers.” Such projects can include park-and-ride lots, peak hour transit service, service providing inter-county connections, or other capital projects aimed at improving transportation connectivity and efficiency. WSDOT must submit a prioritized list of projects to be considered for funding to the legislature each year by December 1<sup>st</sup>. WSDOT

must also report the status of grant projects already receiving funding every year to the legislative transportation committees.

*Rural Mobility and Paratransit/Special Needs Grant Programs* – State grant funds are distributed to transit agencies and other public transportation providers through the Rural Mobility and Paratransit/Special Needs Grant programs. Rural mobility funds are intended to improve transportation in rural areas where public transportation is limited or does not exist. Paratransit/special needs

The WSDOT Public Transportation Division uses this account and in particular these two programs as part of the consolidated grant process for the 5310 and 5311 programs.

***State Authorized Taxing Programs***

State statutes also allow public agencies that provide public transportation to levy certain local option taxes to support capital and operations. Transit districts, including PTBAs, counties, metropolitan municipal corporations, etc., throughout the state are authorized to impose a (with voter approval) sales and use tax of up to 0.9 percent<sup>11</sup>. Following the repeal of the local motor vehicle excise tax in 2000, the local transit sales and use tax became the primary funding source for transit districts in Washington State. Approximately two-thirds of transit district revenues are generated by this tax.

The statutory basis for these taxes is discussed in this section. Table 6 below summarizes the funding authorizations used to support public transportation efforts.

**Table 6 – Summary of State Authorized Local Public Transportation Taxes**

Type of Tax	Description
Sales and Use Tax for Public Transportation Providers	Transit districts, including PTBAs, counties, metropolitan municipal corporations, etc., throughout the state are authorized to impose a sales and use tax of up to 0.9 percent with voter approval.
Local Option Taxes for High Capacity Transportation Local Option Taxes for High Occupancy Vehicle Systems	RTAs and transit agencies providing high capacity transportation can levy and collect (with voter approval) a tax on employers, sales and use tax, and other sources. King, Pierce and Snohomish counties are eligible to impose (with voter approval) a tax on employers and a sales and use tax on rental vehicles.
Commercial Parking Tax	Cities and counties (unincorporated areas) are allowed to impose a tax on commercial parking to support a range of transportation purposes, including public transportation.
Local Option Taxes for Ferry Services	County Ferry Districts may impose a property tax of up to 75 cents per \$1,000 in assessed value (except in King County where the maximum

<sup>11</sup> RCW 82.14.045

	rate is 7.5 cents per \$1,000 in assessed value) to fund capital and operating costs. Voter approval is not required. PTBAs can also levy taxes (with voter approval), fees and tolls for passenger-only ferry service capital and operations.
Local Option Taxes: Transportation Benefit Districts (TBD)	TBDs can impose a variety of taxes, fees, charges and tolls to fund transportation improvements.
Business and Occupation Tax for Transit Districts	Transit districts are authorized to impose a business and occupation tax for operations, maintenance and capital expenditures. The rate for this tax is determined by the transit district, and voter approval is required.
Household/Utility Excise Tax for Transit Districts	Transit districts are authorized to impose a household/utility excise tax <sup>12</sup> for operations, maintenance and capital expenditures. The rate for this tax is determined by the transit district, and voter approval is required.

Local Option Taxes for High Capacity Transportation – The passage of Initiative 776 repealed the use of most motor vehicle excise taxes that were previously allowed. A sales and use tax on rental vehicles in lieu of the MVET is still allowed. A temporary exclusion was granted on certain motor vehicle excise tax revenues that were committed by RTAs for repayment of bond debts. There are also exemptions for certain types of employers, such as hospitals and schools.

Local Option Taxes for High Occupancy Vehicle Systems – King, Pierce and Snohomish counties are eligible to impose (with voter approval) a tax on employers<sup>13</sup> and an excise tax on motor vehicles<sup>14</sup> (and a sales and use tax on rental vehicles in lieu of the MVET). Similar changes, exemptions and exclusions are allowed as noted above.

Commercial Parking Tax – Certain types of vehicles, such as vehicles with handicapped decals and government vehicles, are exempt from the tax. The City of SeaTac generated over \$5 million from this tax in 2007.<sup>15</sup>

Local Option Taxes for Ferry Services – One-year excess levies are allowed with voter approval.<sup>16</sup> PTBAs can also levy taxes (with voter approval), fees and tolls for passenger-only ferry service capital and operations. A PTBA may impose some or all of the following revenue sources<sup>17</sup>:

- A motor vehicle excise tax<sup>18</sup>;
- A sales and use tax<sup>19</sup>;

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> RCW 81.100.030

<sup>14</sup> RCW 81.100.060

<sup>15</sup> *Transportation Resource Manual -2009 Edition* (State of Washington Joint Transportation Committee, 2009)

<sup>16</sup> RCW 36.54.140

<sup>17</sup> RCW 36.57A.210

<sup>18</sup> as provided in RCW 82.80.130

- Tolls for passengers and packages and, where applicable, parking, and;
- Charges or licensing fees for advertising, leasing space for services to ferry passengers, and other revenue-generating activities.

Local Option Taxes: Transportation Benefit Districts (TBDs) – The following revenue sources are authorized by statute<sup>20</sup>:

- A sales and use tax<sup>21</sup>;
- A vehicle fee<sup>22</sup>;
- A fee or charge on building construction or land development<sup>23</sup>, and;
- Vehicle tolls on state routes, city streets, or county roads, within the boundaries of the district, unless otherwise prohibited by law.<sup>24</sup>

### **3.4 Coordination and Oversight**

In addition to the role the Public Transportation Division plays in coordinating grant requests, the state is also involved in supporting programs that improve coordination. As this point their role in oversight is limited to the development of summary documents that describe the status of public transportation providers and the financial support to various programs.

Transit Development Plans (TDP) – The State requires public transit agencies to submit TDPs annually. The TDPs are intended to give an annual individual agency snapshot on their current operations and plans for the future. The TDPs are required to be fiscally constrained and to include a funding plan. The plan does not require transit agencies to identify needs that it would seek to address if additional resources were available. Some agencies include a summary of how they contribute to meeting state goals; however, this is not a requirement. The TDPs are used to encourage local level planning, provide coordination between local agencies, regional, and statewide planning, to educate and communicate to elected officials and the public, and as an information and reporting tool. Review of the current TDPs provided the following observations about connectivity between transit systems:

- Some transit systems have made progress in providing connectivity (e.g. the Tri-County Connector route operated by Skagit Transit). However, there are unmet needs associated with connectivity.
- While many systems are connected at transit centers, there is a lack of through service that would result in one-seat rides for customers.

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<sup>19</sup> as provided in RCW 82.14.440

<sup>20</sup> RCW 36.73.040

<sup>21</sup> in accordance with RCW 82.14.0455

<sup>22</sup> in accordance with RCW 82.80.140

<sup>23</sup> in accordance with RCW 36.73.120. However, if a county or city within the district area is levying a fee or charge for a transportation improvement, the fee or charge shall be credited against the amount of the fee or charge imposed by the district. Developments consisting of less than twenty residences are exempt from the fee or charge under RCW 36.73.120.

<sup>24</sup> Refer to RCW 47.56.820 and 47.56.850 for restrictions.

- For specialized human service transportation programs, lack of connectivity between services was identified as a major concern.

Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation (ACCT) – The Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation was created under RCW 47.06B with the purpose “to advance and improve accessibility to and coordination of special needs transportation services statewide.” The ACCT was created in recognition that special needs services suffer from many inefficiencies, preventing access to service in some cases. The ACCT is required to develop a biennial work plan which focuses on projects that identify and address barriers to coordinated transportation, focuses on results, and advocates for improvements for those with special transportation needs. The ACCT is also tasked with reviewing local plans developed by Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) for compliance with federal requirements. These plans are submitted every four years, and prioritized project lists related to human service and transportation are submitted for review by RTPO and MPO entities every two years.

ACCT also oversees the creation of local coordinating coalitions that are responsible for submitting an annual report to the ACCT detailing local efforts to coordinate transportation programs and services. The local coordinating coalitions must also report progress on identifying all entities serving persons with special transportation needs (public, private, non-profit, and community based groups), as well as identifying local service needs, gaps, barriers, and strategies to overcome them. Finally, per RCW 47.01.450, any new application for grants related to paratransit or special needs transportation services must also include an explanation of how the funding will be used to improve efficiency or coordination of special needs transportation. Furthermore, preference for grant funding will be given to applications which have been recommended by the ACCT.

Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plans – As part of revisions to federal law contained in SAFETEA-LU,<sup>25</sup> projects funded through the Transportation for Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities, Job Access and Reverse Commute, and New Freedom programs (FTA Sections 5310, 5316, and 5317) must now originate from a locally-developed coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan. In addition, in Washington State, WSDOT has directed that projects funded by FTA Section 5311 and the WSDOT-directed Coordinated Grant Program also be tied to the coordinated plans.<sup>26</sup> Grant program applicants must participate in the MPO/RTPO-coordinated planning process in their region. The Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation (ACCT) is responsible for recommending to WSDOT approval of the plans. Unlike the TDPs prepared by the transit agencies, many of these plans do identify unmet needs although it is not required and the costs of addressing these needs are not estimated.

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<sup>25</sup> 49 U.S.C. Sections 5302, 5303, 5310, 5311, 5314, 5316, and 5317; SAFETEA-LU Section 3046.

<sup>26</sup> *Special Needs Transportation Coordination Study - Final Report* (State of Washington Joint Transportation Committee, January 2009).

### Gray Notebook

The State develops a quarterly performance report on transportation in the state. This report is focused on highway, aviation, ferries, and freight – and only minimally on transit. The Gray Book links performance measures to the strategic plan, legislative and executive policy directions, as well as federal reporting requirements. It is connected to strategic planning, target setting, identifying improvement opportunities, and the state’s budgeting process. It includes some summary performance information on the ferry system including asset condition, farebox recovery, reliability and ridership.

### Annual Summary of Public Transportation

The Summary is a yearly report that provides a status of public transportation in Washington State. It contains data on transit providers throughout the state. The report is organized into four main sections that provide primarily a status profile of each provider. After a general overview, providers are group according to three categories: Systems serving Urban Areas; Systems serving Small Urban Areas, and Systems serving Rural Areas.



## State Role in Public Transportation

### Task 2: Assess the Current State Role in Public Transportation (DRAFT)

#### DISCUSSION OF STATE ROLE

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#### 4.0 Assessing the State's Current Role

With this overview as a backdrop, there are a few different ways to begin assessing the state's future role in public transportation. First, this paper reviews the state's current role in relation to the four role categories: Policy, Planning and Leadership, Direct Operations, Funding, Coordination and Oversight. Secondly, this report assesses the state's role in relation to its future investment goals. Third, it reviews how current state programs address overall state policy goals. Finally, we discuss its role in relation to addressing unmet needs.

This section is intended to generate ideas and discussion that will be further discussed with the Public Transportation Advisory Panel. This work and the work of the Advisory Panel will be incorporated into the Blueprint and the final report submitted to the JTC.

#### 4.1 Washington State's Involvement in Addressing State Role Categories

As summarized above, the state plays an active role in setting policy and providing authorization for the provision of public transportation services. In addition, the state provides a planning function through the WTP, directs construction of the HOV and ferry systems and supports the development of park-and-rides and transit centers. Correspondingly, Washington commits funding towards the operations of these programs and services. This includes addressing ferry capital and operating needs and managing the operation of the HOV network including the HOT lane system. It also contracts for the operation of the intercity bus and rail services with private bus operators and Amtrak.

However, while playing a significant and active role in funding the above services, direct state funding of other public transportation is limited to allocating the state Multimodal Account funds and some of the federal grant funds that the state receives. More specifically, excluding the funding directly provided to the systems noted above (HOV, ferry, intercity rail and intercity bus), the state's direct funding role represents approximately 2 percent of the total investment in public transportation systems in the state (i.e., public transit systems).

An example of the state's limited funding role in public transportation is summarized in Figure 2 below. Figure 2<sup>27</sup> outlines the total revenues and sources used for public transit operations in

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<sup>27</sup> Summary of Public Transportation – 2007 (Washington Department of Transportation, November 2008; page 5)

2007. It shows that about 75% of the operating funds are generated locally through local sales and other local option taxes and fare revenue. While some federal and state funds are from “capital” sources, these funding sources are considered “flex funds” and, in some circumstances, can be used for transit operations and preventive maintenance. As Figure 2 indicates, the state’s contribution to public transit operations in 2007 was approximately 2% of the total, approximately \$32 million.

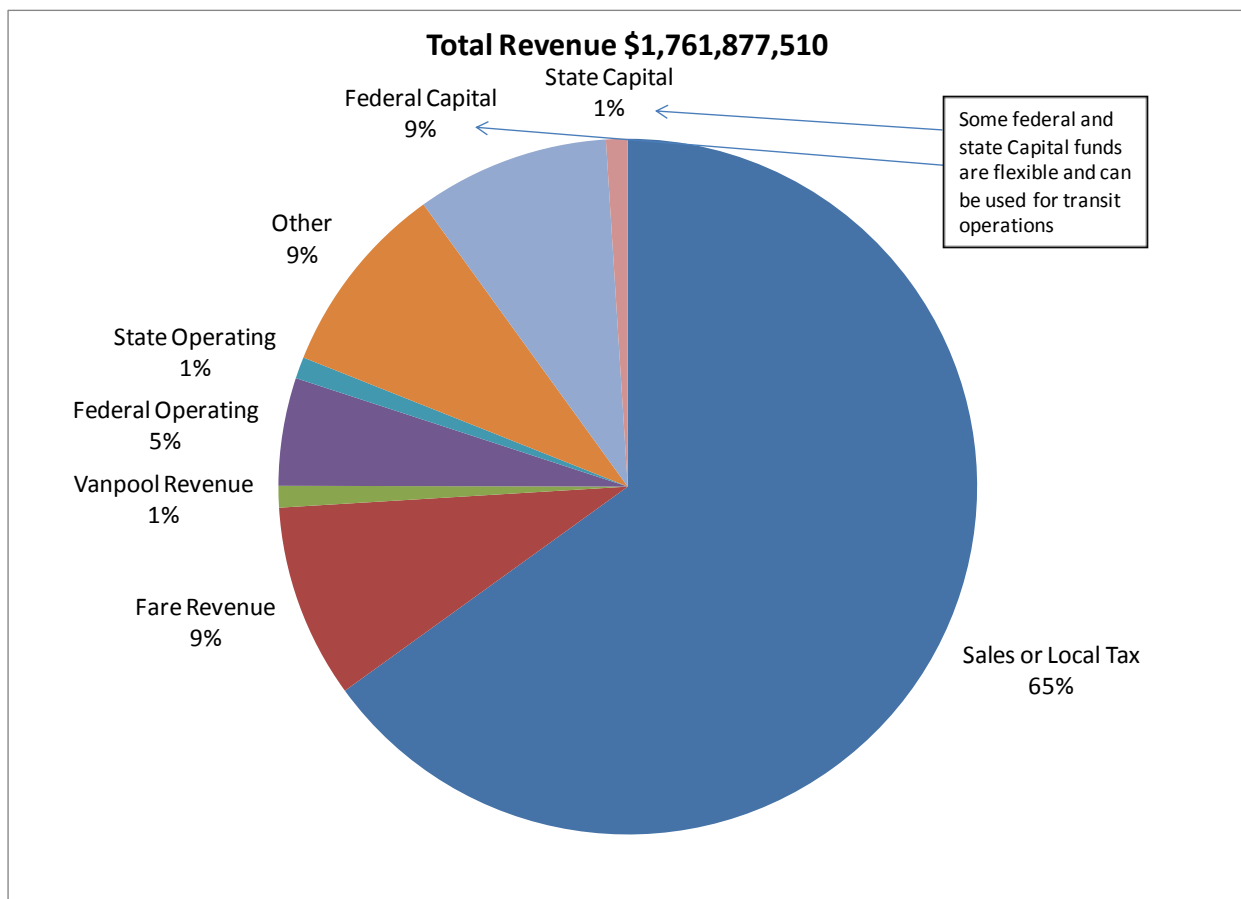
Funds provided and distributed by the state under the Regional Mobility and Public Transportation Grant programs also provides a perspective on the extent of state funding support for public transportation. For the 2009-2011 biennium, a total of approximately \$32 million in Regional Mobility grants was approved for 13 capital projects and operating programs in the state<sup>28</sup>. This funding represented 12 percent of the total funding necessary to support the programs. Of the Regional Mobility grant funds allocated for operations, the state support comprised approximately 29 percent of the programs’ total costs. For the grant funds allocated for capital programs, the state support comprised approximately 11 percent of total projects’ costs (it should be noted that several programs will involve implementation over multiple years).

The Public Transportation Grants program also includes a mix of capital and operating elements that are supported by the state, federal FTA funds or, in some cases, both. For the 2009-2011 biennium, a total of about \$36.7 million in grants was awarded. Of this, \$13.7 million in state funds was awarded and \$23 million in FTA funds was awarded. Of the state funds, a substantial majority, \$13.2 million or 96%, was directed to providing operating assistance for 54 public transportation systems (primarily smaller and more rural transit agencies) and non-profit organizations.

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<sup>28</sup> Regional Mobility Grant Program – 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2009 Report, WSDOT (October 2009)

**Figure 2 – Operating Revenues for Local and Regional Public Transportation Systems (2007)**



That being said, the state has made the most of this limited funding role. It leads an active coordination program for meeting health and human service needs extending the federal dollars to also expand improvements that meet the needs of smaller communities. It is also a leader in developing programs that resulted from CTR legislation focusing on reduction of SOV work travel. This has included the support and development, in cooperation with transit agencies, of an extensive Vanpool program.

**Discussion Point**  
*Are existing state public transportation resources and funding focused on the right public transportation issues?*

While the obvious question from this assessment is funding, there are also questions regarding whether these are the right areas for the state to be focused. If the state were to place greater emphasis on coordination of services, multimodal connections and service integration, would

this result in a different targeting of federal and local funds than what currently happens today? Alternatively, should the state give greater emphasis to ensuring a minimum level of service in rural areas and target its limited dollars accordingly? Should the state place greater emphasis on efficiency and play an active role in coordinating combined procurements for public transportation providers (e.g., vehicles, insurance, and fuel purchases)? Should the state place greater emphasis on the role that the private sector might play and create a consistent framework to address key issues? For example, if private providers are allowed to use publicly funded facilities (park and ride lots), is there a mechanism to ensure that such providers pay a reasonable share of the operations and maintenance costs of those facilities?

**4.2 Washington Transportation Plan**

As previously noted, this particular study is a timely one in that the Washington Transportation Plan (WTP) is currently being updated. Several strategic themes have been identified for the WTP Update. These themes are:

1. The State’s transportation system needs to work as an integrated network, effectively connecting across modes and jurisdictions
2. Preservation and maintenance of the existing transportation system is the most critical need
3. Washington faces a structural transportation funding problem and additional revenue is needed

The draft updated WTP 2030 is organized around six statutory transportation policy goals as outlined in RCW 47.04.280.4. Economic Vitality was added to the goals by the Legislature in 2010. These shared goals are applied across all modes and all infrastructure investments, however it is expected that achieving the goals will vary across the state.

ECONOMIC VITALITY	To promote and develop transportation systems that stimulate, support, and enhance the movement of people and goods to ensure a prosperous economy
PRESERVATION	To maintain, preserve, and extend the life and utility of prior investments in transportation systems and services
SAFETY	To provide for and improve the safety and security of transportation customers and the transportation system
MOBILITY	To improve the predictable movement of goods and people throughout Washington State
ENVIRONMENT	To enhance Washington’s quality of life through transportation investments that promote energy conservation, enhance healthy communities, and protect the environment
STEWARDSHIP	To continuously improve the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of the transportation system

With regards to public transportation, the current Washington Transportation Plan focuses almost exclusively on two of the state’s six goals – Mobility and Stewardship – identifying a significant number of investments. While some specific investments are identified to address

other goals, they are much more limited. However, if the state is to achieve growth management, commute trip reduction and greenhouse gas emissions policy objectives, there appears to be even a greater need to evaluate public transportation's role in meeting Environmental Quality and Economic Vitality.

In addition, the recent economic challenges have had a significant impact on the preservation of public transportation services. As with all state agencies, public transportation providers have had to very actively manage their funding in order to maintain existing service. Some systems have reduced service in terms of geographic coverage, affecting linkages between systems; and reduced service hours affecting access to service oriented jobs.

Thinking more holistically about public transportation's role in meeting overall state goals may lead to developing a different set of objectives, priorities or areas of emphasis in state public transportation involvement or funding. For example, concepts such as public transportation's role in emergency preparedness, or an assessment of safety issues related to public transportation, could lead to programs that would support addressing safety issues related to public transportation which would enhance the overall state system and address current provider requirements and needs.

#### **4.3 Existing State Programs**

As noted in the current WTP, the legislature has stated that, "the state needs to reestablish itself as a leader in public transportation" and that WSDOT should guide the increased integration of public transit and the highway system to increase corridor efficiency and connectivity between decentralized public transportation services. WSDOT, and in particular, the Public Transportation Division, is tasked with achieving this vision.

WSDOT contains several divisions that manage elements of the public transportation network such as the management of the HOV/HOT lane network, the Ferry system, the Passenger Rail Division and a separate Public Transportation Division.

The activities managed by the Public Transportation Division are perhaps the broadest, including the management and oversight of several different programs. The Division is tasked with general programs such as the development of a park-and-ride lot program, encouraging long-range transit planning, improving connections between RTPOs and transit agencies, and recommending best practices for integration of transit and transportation demand management approaches with regional and local land use plans. It is required to develop a statewide strategic plan that creates common goals for transit agencies and reduce competing plans for multi-jurisdictional service. Finally, Division staff participates in corridor planning, including freight, ferry system, and passenger rail planning.

The Public Transportation Division is responsible for implementing the policies and managing federal and state funding distributions according to federal and state guidance. They oversee the following programs based upon that policy direction. These programs directly respond to some goals outlined in the WTP, such as:

*Stewardship*

- Commute Trip Reduction (CTR) Program – Encouraging people to ride the bus, vanpool, carpool, walk, bike, work from home, or compress their work week, the CTR program helps make the transportation system work more efficiently.
- Trip Reduction Performance Program – Encourages entrepreneurs, private companies, transit systems, cities, non-profit organizations, developers, and property managers to provide services to employees that result in fewer vehicle trips arriving at worksites.
- Vanpool Investment Program – Encouraging increased use of vanpooling by the state’s commuters.

*Economic Vitality*

- Rural Public Transportation Program – Enhancing the access of people in non-urbanized areas to health care, shopping, education, employment, public services, and recreation

*Funding*

- Contracts and Grants Administration Program – Providing guidance to public transportation agencies on six-year, capital improvement and asset management plans.

In addition, there are programs that address some key elements of coordination and partnership. While not specifically identified as key recommendations they promote the effective use of existing resources. It may be worthwhile to understand how these programs help develop an effective and efficient transportation system. Conversely a discussion regarding the state’s role in providing basic mobility may also be worthwhile.

- Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation (ACCT) Program – Identifying and eliminating barriers to coordination, focus on results and establish advocacy for coordinated special needs transportation programs, policies and projects.
- Regional Mobility – Working to improve connections between transit services, and improve the integration between public transportation and the highway system.

*Discussion Point*

Do (or should) the current public transportation programs achieve Washington’s six adopted transportation system policy goals?

Similar to the review of the WTP, there are areas where no current programs exist in addressing state goals. Another question that might be asked, are these the right programs for addressing the state’s key goals and objectives. Finally, are there programs missing that could be useful to addressing state goals, or as discussed below, meet unmet needs.

#### **4.4 Meeting Public Transportations Unmet Needs**

A White Paper is being prepared to identify and assess unmet public transportation needs. This section presents information from the standpoint of state public transportation interests. Information on unmet needs include those identified in the current Washington Transportation Plan, the Transit Development Plans and the Coordinated Human Services Transit Plans.

##### **4.4.1 Unmet Needs in the Washington Transportation Plan**

The adopted WTP (2007-2027) identifies several unmet needs and estimated costs to meet these needs. Each of the needs relate to one or more of the major goals that the WTP is trying to achieve. The needs listed below focus on public transportation unmet needs. However, these needs are only identified in relation to two transportation system policy goal areas.

##### *Mobility*

- \$550M - Complete the high occupancy vehicle (HOV) system in the Puget Sound region) to reduce travel delay and increase travel time reliability for transit and carpools
- \$200M - Implement a park-and-ride program in coordination with transit systems, including alleviating overcrowding at existing lots, providing safety and security, and accommodating growing demand
- \$8M - Expand the existing web-based public transportation information system to enable people to plan detailed itineraries between communities throughout Washington and other states
- \$471.7M - Expand Amtrak *Cascades* intercity passenger rail service
- Increase funding to the Agency for Coordinated Transportation (ACT) by \$30M to support performance measurement and community coalitions of providers.
- \$20M - Improve services for special needs populations in both rural and urban areas through demonstration projects (\$20M)
- \$364M - Fund remaining needs for rural mobility grants to assist non-profit providers in areas of the state with limited transit service
- \$32M - Connect communities and rural areas to urban centers with bus service
- \$45.9M - Purchase more vans for the vanpool enhancement program

##### *Stewardship*

- \$20M - Expand the commute trip reduction tax credit program, increasing the number of small employers in the program
- \$20M - Expand the trip reduction performance program (part of Commute Trip Reduction) to fund cost-effective projects, implement recommendations to improve the program, and provide technical support to grant recipients
- \$32M - Provide incentives and support for local jurisdictions to develop Growth and Transportation Efficiency Centers, as employers located in these areas tend to have higher levels of trip reduction

- \$25M - Provide additional funds for Commute Trip Reduction County Support to help counties experiencing highway congestion integrate regional and local plans to reduce solo-driving commute trips
- \$10M - Educate the public and use marketing to increase travelers' use of commute options for Commute Trip Reduction
- \$12.5M - Develop and sustain a vanpool rideshare incentive program, using vanpool financial incentives and technical assistance

*Discussion Point*

How should public transportation unmet needs be identified and prioritized?

The projects identified above only cover two statewide transportation goals. In addition, they focus on a limited number of programs. Is there an overemphasis of some areas at the exclusion of others? Are there other programs or initiatives that should be considered in the future? Are there some that should be eliminated?

#### 4.4.2 – Unmet Needs Identified in Transit Development Plans

While the WTP provides direction on statewide unmet needs, more localized information is presented through Transit Development Plan's (TDP) and Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Plans. The reviews of these plans indicate the following major findings relating to unmet needs which could inform state public transportation goals:

- There is lack of **stable** funding for public transportation programs. While local taxes authorized by the state make up the major portion of transit funds, particularly sales tax, the passage of Initiative 695 and the current economic recession have resulted in significant long-term reductions of transit revenues. Several goals of the WTP such as **environmental quality** and **mobility** are being impacted by the resulting service reductions.
- Current services are being reduced and future expansions are being deferred. The existing public transportation network cannot be **preserved** and **mobility** for all users is being reduced.
- Current/emerging public policies combined with demographic trends are creating a need for more public transportation, not less. Some of these trends such as GHG reductions, congestion and the growing needs of an aging population are affecting the state's **environmental quality** and **economic vitality**.

It is important to note that the state does not require transit agencies to identify or estimate the cost of potential unmet needs when preparing their TDPs. Instead, the state requires that they be financially constrained. Seeking this information in the future could provide valuable information regarding potential future issues that may need to be addressed.



#### 4.5 Public Transportation In Meeting State Goals and Achieving State Policy

From the information provided in this paper there appear to be some key themes regarding the state's current role in public transportation. In addition, there are some questions that arise in thinking about the integration of public transportation into the overall transportation network.

- Infrastructure Development - There is a recurring theme in the state's role in providing basic infrastructure to meet the needs of public transportation providers. This crosses all areas and provider types. Roles include construction/management of the HOV system in the central Puget Sound region and the current grant funding coordination to support public transportation facilities in all areas, such as park and rides and individual vehicle purchases. In addition, from a rural perspective this could also include the provision for all-weather roads.

This role could be further enhanced by prioritizing all weather road investments based upon the provision of public transportation services. In addition, it could also include pilot projects that target key recommendation areas such as alternative fuel development and other developments that reduce reliance on fossil fuels.

A question raised that relates to public infrastructure investments (e.g. park-and-ride facilities) is to what extent, under what conditions and at what cost could private operators make use of these various facilities?

- Congestion/VMT Reduction - Another area that the state has spent considerable effort is in addressing congestion and VMT reduction. Several programs have been developed and funded to address peak congestion during work hours for major employers. Recent changes allow CTR to address potential trip reductions relating to smaller employers and non-work trips. These efforts support the effective management of the existing transportation network. Indirectly these programs address many key recommendation areas. Are there enhancements or different programs that should be considered that could address key state policies or goals such as greenhouse gas reductions or economic vitality?
- Specialized Public Transportation Services - The state plays a major role in the funding and development of specialized transportation services, including those programs being provided in areas that are not served by public transit systems. The aging population, particularly in rural areas of the state will likely place greater demands on traditional and non-traditional public transportation services. One question to consider is the extent to which state involvement will grow to meet these demands. Another area for the state to consider is what role it might play in better communicating the availability of these services and the eligibility requirements associated with them. The state could advocate greater federal government involvement in the reduction of barriers identified between services for Medicaid and non-Medicaid clients.

- Coordinated Public Transportation Planning - WSDOT reviews transit agency TDPs and evaluates grant applications for federal and state specialized transportation and regional mobility projects. The TDPs are to include information regarding intermodal connections that are being made. In one case, the state directly funds coordinated service between three transit operators serving Whatcom, Skagit and Island Counties. A question to consider here is: Can/should the state enhance or expand these activities to address interconnectivity across boundaries in other key areas of the state?

**Other Questions to Think About**

What goals are most important to the development of an effective public transportation network? Programs exist that address some state goals, however not all of them. Are these the right goals to address? Do the existing resources and programs effectively meet those goals?

*Discussion Point*

Are there state roles that should be enhanced or expanded to meet state goals or identified public transportation needs?

Other key transportation system policy goals include:

- Preservation – Public transportation is most effective and efficient when people and destinations are more closely congregated. While this isn’t always possible, there may be actions that the state can take to evaluate existing state agency policies to better link land use and facility siting decisions with transportation investments as identified in GMA. There are questions regarding concurrency and its’ impact on public transportation. In addition, there are questions regarding the state’s role in providing non-transportation state services in a way that are more easily accessible via public transportation.
- Safety – What is public transportations role in addressing emergency preparedness. Are there other public safety issues related to public transportation that the state should address?
- Economic Vitality – What elements of a public transportation network best support the state’s economy? Given that this is a newly-identified state goal (2010), what role should the state play in supporting or facilitating public transportation investments or services to support this new goal?
- Funding – Are federal and state grants being effectively targeted the highest priority state needs? Should existing funding be distributed broadly (so that there is equity) or, conversely, be more targeted in order to focus on key state goals?