



**CHAPTER 3**

**investment strategy**

### **A Focus on Regional Systems**

With the regional growth vision as a starting point, the major challenge facing the central Puget Sound region is advancing a transportation investment strategy that links immediate action with a long-range set of investment objectives. When faced with a large increase in the demand for trip-making over time, regional transportation systems begin to perform poorly if only small actions are taken to directly address additional travel demand. Poor system performance has considerable environmental, personal, land use, and congestion cost implications.

An effective investment strategy for the *Destination 2030* plan identifies the transportation systems that operate at a regionally significant scale and can influence the region's long-term growth, development and quality of life. These regional transportation systems are part of larger systems that connect to other parts of the state and nation, as well as part of local systems that provide access to land and daily activity. A rational, coordinated, and clearly defined approach to funding and programming for regionally significant systems, across all levels of government and all modes of transportation, is essential to the implementation of VISION 2020.

The *Destination 2030* investment strategy is in many ways dependent upon the successful development of new regional funding mechanisms that are flexible enough to allow investment in the full array of regional transportation priorities. Regional systems cannot be managed effectively without some significant ability to plan, prioritize, and implement change in a coordinated manner at a regional scale. Investment decisions are very much tied to questions of finance and pricing. It is possible to better balance transportation supply and demand through price, much as is done in most other areas of our economic lives. Yet for market incentives to work, people must be presented with viable travel options from which to choose. If transportation alternatives are not adequate, market incentives will be punitive, penalizing travel without offering substantially improved mobility.

## INVESTMENT PRINCIPLES

1. **The first priority should be to maintain, preserve, make safe, and optimize existing transportation infrastructure and services.** The most cost-effective infrastructure investments are usually those that maintain, preserve, improve safety, and optimize existing assets. A high level of maintenance and preservation of transportation infrastructure and services ensures that current assets continue to function properly and safeguard regional mobility into the future.
2. **Investments should emphasize continuity and complete discrete elements of the transportation system. Completing missing pieces of larger systems is a regional investment priority.** Regional transportation infrastructure and programs operate as large complex systems. When scarce resources only allow incremental investments in transportation infrastructure, the greatest benefits can be realized when functional continuity is achieved.
3. **Appropriate investments in all modes should be emphasized to provide an array of travel choices.** VISION 2020 calls for the development of a multimodal regional transportation system that emphasizes the need to provide mobility choices to help people access activities, goods, and services. Not all transportation modes and services are appropriate for all locations throughout the region. Planned investments should strive to provide basic mobility, and mobility alternatives while being sensitive to the scale and nature of supporting planned land uses and local preferences.
4. **Transportation investments should be directly linked with measurable transportation, environmental and land use outcomes, and should support the achievement of regional and state benchmarks.** Regional transportation investments are intended to achieve regional objectives. Transportation investments are intended to support the region's long range growth objectives (VISION 2020), ensuring growth can occur where and when it is planned. In late 2000, the state's Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation drafted transportation benchmarks that are intended to gauge progress in providing transportation services and benefits that people expect in exchange for public investment. The region will develop benchmarks and performance measures that will help assess the benefits of investments and help prioritize them to support regional policies.
5. **Cost effective transportation options to addressing identified problems should be demonstrated and implemented.** There is often more than one approach to transportation problem solving. Some approaches are more capital intensive while others primarily involve operational costs and policy/program changes. Project and program analysis should include estimates of all reasonably identifiable societal costs and benefits. Tools of analysis, such as system level least-cost planning, and project level benefit-cost analysis should be employed as appropriate, when making investment decisions.
6. **Compact development of designated urban centers, high capacity transit station areas, and other communities should be supported through direct investment.** Investments within, or connecting, designated Urban Centers and high capacity transit station areas that demonstrate support for urban center physical design guidelines are high regional priorities. VISION 2020 reflects a regional commitment to concentrating growth in compact, mixed-use communities that are connected to one another, and to their environs, through efficient and effective transportation systems. Transportation investments must reflect this growth commitment. Projects that serve and support greater concentrations of activity within the Urban Growth Area are also regional priorities.

The *Destination 2030* investment strategy consists of regionally significant multi-modal transportation facilities and services that are crucial to the mobility and access needs of the region. These facilities and services constitute the Metropolitan Transportation System. The *Destination 2030* investment strategy for the Metropolitan Transportation System establishes broad policy direction determining how intensely, or efficiently, infrastructure will be utilized, establishes investment priorities beginning with the maintenance and preservation of existing capital infrastructure and services, defines approaches to managing systems for greater efficiency, and outlines a corridor approach to making significant capacity investment decisions. The starting points for the investment strategy included in *Destination 2030* are investment principles that translate plan policy into an organized framework for investment decision-making. The investment principles serve as the foundation for a rational allocation of funds as they become available to implement *Destination 2030*. The Regional Council has an ongoing responsibility to periodically establish and evaluate programming criteria that reflect the investment principles. Programming criteria will be continuously refined as performance monitoring provides information about whether desired results are being achieved. Chapter 7 discusses performance monitoring and the importance of developing regional transportation benchmarks.

## Maintain and Preserve What We Have

The most cost-effective infrastructure investments are usually those that maintain, preserve, and optimize existing assets. Maintenance is work directed toward preservation of the existing roadway and related facilities and equipment as necessary for safe and efficient operation. Any minor surface treatments, crack sealing, etc., are considered to be maintenance. Preservation projects are more substantial and often involve structural resurfacing, restoration, and rehabilitation. Addressing environmental and congestion problems through capital intensive supply side solutions is expensive. When and where infrastructure capacity investments are needed, the greatest benefits are realized when the infrastructure is managed for efficient performance.



### MAINTAIN, PRESERVE AND IMPROVE SAFETY ON EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE

*Destination 2030* supports full funding to maintain, preserve, operate, and address safety concerns for existing infrastructure. If transportation maintenance and preservation needs are to be effectively addressed, dedicated and comprehensive funding for these purposes must be established. The Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation has recommended that the state "prioritize and fund all maintenance, preservation, and safety needs of the existing transportation infrastructure in the state, including operating and maintenance costs of rail, transit, and ferries." Proper maintenance and preservation of transportation infrastructure and services ensures that existing assets continue to function properly, and safeguards the basis of regional mobility into the future. All agencies and jurisdictions should be encouraged to demonstrate the use of maintenance management systems and, for roadways, pavement management systems.



Tacoma Dome Transit Center

## PRESERVE EXISTING LEVELS OF TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

*Destination 2030* begins by recognizing the vitally important role that transit and ferry services play in the functioning of urban and suburban communities, and looks to, as a baseline standard, preserve local services at levels prior to the elimination of state motor vehicle excise tax revenues. Ferry and transit services provide mobility and access for many of the region's residents. Historically, these services have constituted a basic public service component of urban life, representing a core mobility system for many of our young, elderly, disabled, and less affluent residents. Transit and ferry service also constitutes a core mobility service for select commuter markets, especially those commuter markets that include urbanized trip destinations.

## Optimize Systems

A combination of scarce public resources, difficulties associated with making large new infrastructure investments within mature urban areas, environmental and social constraints on building new roadway facilities, and consideration of the urban growth implications of adding transportation supply highlight the critical need for the region to make optimal use of existing facilities. *Destination 2030* includes programs that manage transportation systems for more efficiency and offer opportunities to meet travel demand through shorter, higher occupancy, off-peak vehicle trips (or using no motorized vehicle at all). These include vehicle trip reduction programs, as well as guidelines and tools to encourage transit and pedestrian-supportive urban design and development. Transportation system management services and technologies also help to manage the overall system. Existing transportation facilities should be managed efficiently even while the region makes significant investments in new capacity.

### PROVIDE HIGH OCCUPANCY VEHICLE PRIORITY

*Destination 2030* supports priority treatment for high occupancy vehicles. Higher vehicle occupancies mean that personal mobility is achieved at a greater level of system efficiency. Higher occupancies, in the form of transit, carpools and vanpools, result in lower traffic volumes, lower vehicle emissions, less costly investment in capacity over time, and less private resources dedicated to the maintenance of the region's private vehicle fleet.

*Destination 2030* includes the policies recommended by the Regional HOV Policy Advisory Committee in 1999. See Appendix 5. The regional policies endorse and recommend inclusion of the WSDOT HOV system policies and operational definitions, including speed and reliability, capacity, and carpools definition. The regional High Occupancy Vehicle system will, in part, be achieved through investment in the following HOV facilities:

- Core HOV network on regional freeways, including HOV bottlenecks
- Direct access for more efficient use of HOV facilities
- Arterial HOV investments that directly link to the core HOV facilities
- HOV by-pass lanes and priority systems on arterials, corridors, and within centers

### SUPPORT URBAN CENTERS AND HIGH CAPACITY TRANSIT STATION AREAS

*Destination 2030* calls for coordinating transportation and land use decisions to support transit and pedestrian-oriented land use patterns. Transit and pedestrian-oriented land use can promote greater transportation system efficiencies by minimizing growth in the number of people who drive alone and the number of vehicle miles traveled within the region. Research, conducted nationally and within the central Puget Sound region, shows that compact development and completeness of local street systems and sidewalks, along with block sizes, the location and orientation of commercial buildings, and other features of urban form and design, all influence the likelihood that people will walk or bike to transit stops, local services and jobs. *Destination 2030* provides specificity on the linkage of land use and transportation planning, as well as adds clarification and detail to existing policy. Investments in designated Urban Centers and high capacity transit station areas that reinforce urban design characteristics promoting mobility and access are high regional priorities. The policy framework and programming criteria that the region adopts every two years will reflect and recognize this commitment. Transportation investments that are particularly important to these regionally significant places include:

- Sufficient regional access, street density and layout to enhance connectivity and multi-modal mobility
- High quality, frequent transit service and station area transit facilities
- Clearly marked, safe, and convenient bicycle and pedestrian paths, sidewalks and routes, particularly those that link to services of the regional transit system
- Effective parking management

### DEVELOP TRAVELER INFORMATION AND MANAGEMENT TECHNOLOGY

Transportation system management strategies are meant to optimize the efficiency and effectiveness of our multimodal transportation system by managing congestion, increasing reliability, improving safety and providing convenient connections for people and goods. In particular, with the passage of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), new requirements have been placed on states and metropolitan areas to define, in greater detail, a logical system of integrated Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) projects. In addition, regional policies advocate the application of ITS technology to help solve transportation problems. "Regionally significant" ITS projects include those that will impact a significant number of travelers throughout the region.

## CONSIDER USING MARKET INCENTIVES TO OPTIMIZE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS

In the long run, reforming the way we price travel, at a system level, can improve transportation system performance on a regional scale. In most markets, prices efficiently allocate scarce resources. In transportation markets, roads are scarce resources that become congested when travel demand is higher than capacity on the roadway at particular times of the day. Efficient prices are a signal to drivers, providing information about the true costs of their travel. Congestion is the catalyst to expand or build facilities, but low charges fail to produce revenues sufficient to cover construction costs. Efficient pricing helps to manage congestion, reducing the need for new capacity, and produces revenues to build capacity when and where it is needed most.

### Invest in Capacity

Rapid regional growth and development have left our existing transportation systems overburdened. Regular travelers on many transportation corridors face significant travel delays on a consistent basis. Strategically identified additions in capacity are a top regional transportation priority, and support growth management objectives when designed and implemented appropriately. Major capacity investments are needed on many regional facilities. Reaching agreement upon the type, design, and implementation of significant capacity investments is a challenging and important process. Where regional capacity needs have been identified, but where specific project or program details are not yet determined, *Destination 2030* establishes a framework for guiding final investment decisions.

## A CORRIDOR APPROACH

*Destination 2030* recognizes the benefits from evaluating transportation investments within the context of broad transportation corridors that include interested and impacted communities. Transportation facilities do not exist in isolation, but are part of larger regional and state systems. Just as these corridors do not sit in geographic isolation, they also are pieces of many different regional transportation modal systems. Multimodal analysis of corridor level investments is an essential part of making sure the regional system needs are fully identified. The long-term performance of transportation facilities is also heavily dependant upon surrounding land uses. Addressing regional transportation issues in these broad corridors leads to a more comprehensive approach to problem solving. A corridor approach considers multiple facilities, transportation modes, strategies, jurisdictions, and includes a land use context. The objective of corridor-based analysis is to identify an effective mix of strategies, selected from a full range of capacity and system management approaches, that can demonstrate measurable results and that are consistent with the objectives of local and regional growth plans.

## GUIDANCE FOR MAJOR CAPACITY INVESTMENT DECISIONS

*Destination 2030* incorporates previous Regional Council policy commitments to pursue and help achieve reasonable mitigation of impacts on communities resulting from major transportation facility and service investments/improvements that are either regionally significant or of statewide significance. In addition, corridor level records of agreement should be encouraged, where appropriate, for large major corridor projects, whether they be freeway, transit or ferry. Records of agreement would document actions that will help implement the preferred alternative that resulted from the environmental and public review process. *Destination 2030* adds a commitment to utilize additional least-cost planning analysis and benefit-cost analysis, as input to regional decisions. Major transportation projects will need to include a project level financing plan which describes the manner by which the entire project may be completed.

Regional projects and programs are classified within *Destination 2030* as either "Candidate" or "Approved." "Candidate" investments are projects or program components occurring on regionally significant facilities (Metropolitan Transportation System), but which have one or more planning requirements that must be satisfactorily addressed before they are eligible to be formally approved in the region's metropolitan transportation plan for implementation. Projects designated in *Destination 2030* as "Approved" projects are then eligible to be included in the regional TIP for full project action/implementation phases such as final design, right-of-way acquisition and construction. The Regional Council will respect the due processes by which the sponsors of major projects have achieved "Approved" status, and will only reconsider "Approved" status if the sponsor finds that significant conditions have conclusively changed, and which cause the project sponsor to be incapable of continuing implementation in the general manner by which it was originally approved. Appendix 6 includes more detailed language that guides capacity investment decisions and outlines the process for changing project status from "Candidate" to "Approved."



Fauntleroy-Vashon-Southworth Ferry