

## Chapter 3

# Regional Land Use, Growth, and Transportation

### Introduction

Land use and transportation are intrinsically connected. Land development drives the need for transportation facilities and services on the one hand and on the other, the development of transportation facilities and services often attracts development. This linkage is at the heart of the Growth Management Act (GMA) which states (RCW 36.70A.020), “Ensure that those public facilities and services necessary to support development shall be adequate to serve the development at the time the development is available for occupancy and use without decreasing current service levels below locally established minimum standards”. This is a simple statement of purpose, but it is quite complex in execution. This chapter will discuss a number of the complexities, such as standard setting, funding, efficiency, and effectiveness.

### GMA Impact on Planning

Washington’s Growth Management Act contains thirteen planning goals. All of them impact the way that transportation planning is done, but seven of them more than the others. A brief discussion follows describing each of these seven goals and their impacts on transportation.

*Urban growth* – This goal encourages growth to occur within an urban growth area (UGA) in order to take advantage of public facilities and services that are in place.

*Reduction of sprawl* – This goal is the direct complement of the previous goal. By reducing sprawl the need to develop inefficient public service facilities, such as highways, is reduced.

#### **County Wide Planning Policy 1.3**

*Urban growth areas shall provide for urban densities of mixed uses and shall direct development of neighborhoods which provide adequate and accessible urban governmental service concurrent with development. The GMA defines urban governmental services as those governmental services historically and typically delivered by cities, and includes storm and sanitary sewer systems, domestic water systems, street cleaning services, fire and police protection services, public transit services, and other public utilities associated with urban areas and normally not associated with non-urban areas.*

*Transportation* – Transportation is one of the required components of the local comprehensive plan.

*Economic development* – A healthy economy is encouraged in all areas of the state, but particularly those areas that are experiencing inadequate growth.

*Environment* – As part of the goal to improve the state's environmental quality, transportation facilities should be designed to minimize negative impacts as well as provide efficient modes of travel, particularly within urban areas.

*Citizen participation and coordination* – The planning process should encourage the participation of citizens in the planning process and reflect public input in the decision making process.

*Public facilities and services* - Level of service standards must be set for each mode. Expanded or new facilities that meet these requirements must be in place within six years of new development occurring.

### **Regional Planning Process**

Chapters 1 and 2 describe the requirements for a regional transportation plan and a metropolitan transportation plan. Those requirements are met by employing a number of compatible strategies. The first is for the Skagit Council of Governments (SCOG) to have staff with expertise in the required areas to perform the work. The second is to organize and support two policy boards, one for the Sub-Regional Transportation Planning Organization (S-RTPO) and one for the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). Made up largely of local elected officials, these boards are the decision making mechanism for the respective planning organizations. A single technical advisory committee (TAC) provides direction to the staff and makes recommendations to the policy boards. The TAC is made up of representatives from the local governments, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), Skagit Transit (SKAT), the ports, the Tribes, and others. The TAC meets monthly and is supported by SCOG staff. SCOG staff is supplemented on an as-needed basis to either fill gaps in expertise for specific projects or to handle excess demands for services. Finally, SCOG has a public involvement plan that defines how interaction with the public will occur. That plan is described in more detail in the next chapter of this document.

A key element of the planning process in the region is the Skagit County planning policies. These policies are developed by the County in collaboration with the cities. The comprehensive plans of the cities are required to be consistent with these planning policies. The Growth Management Act defines eight required planning policies, which at a minimum must be addressed in their plans. One of those is transportation facilities and strategies.

Establishing level of service standards for transportation is a starting point for compliance with GMA requirements for transportation. Issues involved in establishing a system include: selecting a system of measurement; selecting a level of service that balances the ability to fund improvements with that of

providing acceptable service; and coordinating level of service standards and methods between agencies. Level of service is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. Setting level of service standards too high can result in the inability of agencies to fund needed projects. On the other hand, setting them too low can result in a poor level of service.

Efficiency is an issue of providing the facilities and services at the least cost. Effectiveness is tied closely to that of efficiency. Low cost solutions that do not solve the identified problems are not efficient, nor are they effective, by definition.

### **Forecasting**

This plan presents a look at what kinds of pressures that transportation system may be under in 20 years. In order to do that it is necessary to forecast what the population of the county and cities will be at that time, as well as how many people will be employed in the county and where those jobs will be located. The forecasting process starts by acquiring population targets from the Washington State Office of Fiscal Management (OFM), developed specifically for growth management planning. OFM provides a low, medium, and high population forecast for each county and incorporated area. The local agency must then use a forecast that fits within this range or justify why they have not. For Skagit County the 2025 forecasts are: low – 139,253; medium – 164,797; and high – 198,992. Working together the local jurisdictions adopted a forecast of just under 150,000.

Travel forecasts are based on predictions of land use as developed by the local governments. Establishing how much growth is expected within each jurisdiction is a process of balancing individual agency growth with overall countywide growth. The growth is next distributed into transportation analysis zones (TAZs). Within them residential growth is apportioned to types of housing, between single family and different densities of multi-family. Once this is done it is determined how many trips each residence will produce on a daily basis and to what zone these trips will be taken. The trips are then assigned to a mode (auto, transit, etc). Finally, it is determined what route will be taken. This is a fairly simplistic explanation of how computer travel demand modeling takes place.

For this planning effort the model upon which the work was based came from a model that we produced by consultants working for the WSDOT on the SR 20 safety corridor analysis from Sharpes Corner to SR 536. By the end of the planning cycle this model was incorporated into the SCOG's new model with some updated information.

### Source and Impacts of Land Use Patterns

Zoning is only one of the factors in determining where development will occur. If other factors are not also present, such as competitive land pricing, demand, and infrastructure, then it will not occur until one or more of these factors

changes. These and other factors are considered by local governments when deciding what type of zoning to assign different areas. Transportation can also be a

#### *The Land Use Transportation Connection*

*“The shape individual cities assume as they grow affects the transportation system by influencing travel demand and the provision of transportation infrastructure and services. In turn, the provision of services and infrastructure determines the relative accessibility of various land parcels and thereby affects land use decisions and urban form (NCHRP Report 365 Travel Estimation Techniques for Urban Planning, p 33, 1998).”*

factor in making these decisions. It is desirable to place growth where adequate transportation facilities already exist. It is also desirable to have growth occur where transportation can be most efficient. Thus, multi-family zoning should be placed where one or more transit lines exist to encourage this efficient mode. However, transportation is just one of many factors taken into account when making decisions.

### Metropolitan Area Linkage

The Metropolitan Planning Area does not relate directly to the urban growth areas (UGAs) of the GMA. However, if the UGAs have the desired impact on growth patterns the result should be two areas that are similar in size and shape. One of the MPO planning principles, “Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency” is compatible with the GMA goals and vice versa.

### Development Strategy

The Regional Growth Strategy is based upon the growth management plans of the local jurisdictions. It seeks to identify the common trends that run through each, or many, of the plans, while recognizing that the aspirations of each jurisdiction contributes to a diversity of elements in the regional strategy.

Each of the local plans has a different organizing structure. Some have a vision statement for economic development followed by goals and objectives. With others the vision statement may be implicit within the goals or other organizing structure.

Vision - At the heart of the Skagit County vision is the call for a diversified economic base to minimize the vulnerability of the local economy to economic fluctuations (CWPP 5.5). Each of the cities sees economic development as an essential element to a satisfying quality of life. However, every bit as important to that quality of life is the stewardship of the environment. In the towns of La Conner and Anacortes, maintenance of the small town identity is an explicit element of their vision. This is a common thread that appears in all of the comprehensive plans. Mount Vernon shares the same vision, while seeking to serve as a regional center.

The County Wide Planning Policies make it clear that resource and agricultural related activities are to be encouraged and that industrial development, while also encouraged, should not be located so as to interfere with resource extraction and agriculture. Tourism, recreation, and land preservation are to take second priority to resource extraction and agriculture. All of these policies and visions produce a picture of a county with a diversity of opportunities built around a core of traditional rural activities.