

3. Whatcom's Regional Transportation System Goals

To plan for our region's transportation future, we need to first establish our goals – what we as a region want to accomplish with our chosen strategies and investments.

Starting with the regional goals developed for the 2017 regional plan update (and slightly amended in 2020), WCOG undertook a robust public-engagement effort in the Spring of 2021 to solicit feedback on regional transportation priorities. A questionnaire (mostly conducted online but availed in alternative formats, too) was promoted for completion by all Whatcom region residents. To help ensure a sufficient level of participation, approximately 44,000 invitations were mailed to randomly selected Whatcom region residential addresses. 2,020 questionnaires were completed.

A primary purpose of this 2021 public engagement effort was to gauge how well the existing regional goals aligned with our community's current priorities and whether some updates should be considered by the Whatcom Transportation Policy Board. Using feedback from the questionnaire, the Whatcom regional transportation system goals were updated as follows. More information on questionnaire results and evaluation of updates to the goals is in **Appendix A**.

These seven regional transportation goals – which largely overlap with the longer list of planning factors that federal and state law require MPOs and RTPOs to address – will take precedence in prioritizing project funding requests and developing performance measures and targets.

1. Safety

The safety of all users of the region's transportation system – pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, automobile drivers and passengers, and truckers – must be maximized to the greatest degree practicable in the establishment of regional transportation policies and investment decisions.

2. Provide all types of transportation (multimodal)

To serve the growing number of trips and goods movement effectively and efficiently, our transportation network must provide and promote attractive and well-connected options for all types of trip-making: walking, rolling, biking, cars, buses, rail, ferry, trucks, etc. Operating a multi-modal transportation system means that we are striving to serve *trips* (people, goods, and services) as well as managing road capacity for *vehicles*.

3. Climate (greenhouse gas reduction) and environmental quality

Reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and more broadly advancing environmental mitigation and restoration (e.g., energy conservation, habitat preservation, and air and water quality) are outcomes of paramount importance in the region.

4. Maintain existing infrastructure in good, operating condition (preservation)

This goal indicates the Whatcom region's intent to ensure that existing transportation systems are kept in a state of good repair before pursuing system expansions. This goal includes the principle of sustainability – choosing investments in facilities and programs that our region has the ability and willingness to pay for, operate, and maintain into the future.

5. System efficiency and reliability (mobility)

High quality travel and goods movement as indicated by various measures such as travel time, travel-time predictability, reliability, and comfort. Our region's goal of optimizing mobility pertains to all types (modes) of transportation. Mobility depends on adequate transportation system capacity. To track progress on this goal (and other goals), WCOG emphasizes planning for the whole system's **operational capacity** for serving forecast increases in *trips* rather than a narrower focus on our roads' capacity for *vehicles*.

6. Access, equity, and economic opportunity

The region's transportation system should work for all people; should acknowledge and reduce barriers related to age (seniors and youth), income, and physical ability; and should connect people to resources, services, and opportunities critical to economic success (especially education and employment).

7. Freight and economic vitality

In addition to providing for the movement of people, our regional transportation system must provide for effective and efficient movement of goods and services and do so in a way that is consistent with our other goals listed above. A transportation network that enables transactions and the associated movement of products and services is essential to economic vitality.

3.1. State and National Goals

Because of WCOG's dual responsibilities as both a federally recognized metropolitan planning organization (MPO) and the state-designated regional transportation planning organization for Whatcom County, *Way to Go Whatcom* must consider and emphasize national and regional planning factors and Washington's transportation policy goals, respectively. This section discusses how the transportation goals of these three levels (regional, state, and national) can be applied as guidance for the Whatcom region's ongoing regional transportation planning process and to the strategies identified in this plan.

A basic requirement of MPOs is that they “consider factors described in CFR §450.306 [the federal planning factors] as they relate to a minimum 20-year forecast period.” Additionally, CFR §450.324(f)(2) notes that a plan's discussion of existing and proposed facilities emphasizes, “...those facilities that serve important national and regional transportation functions.” A notable recent addition to the original federal planning factors is seven “national goals” introduced as

part of the National Goals and Performance Management Measures from the 2012 U.S. transportation funding authorization act known as “Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century,” which are included in the discussion below. In addition to national goals and the Whatcom regional goals discussed in the previous section, the Washington State Legislature has also adopted transportation policy goals.

3.2. Aligning Regional Goals with State and National Goals and Planning Factors

Among the three levels of government (regional, state, federal) there are four sets of transportation system goals, all of which are important. Figure 2 organizes these four lists so that the state and national goals are grouped into sets that correspond to each of the seven Whatcom regional goals. This approach acknowledges the importance of the state and national goals and planning factors, but places them in a supporting and secondary role to the seven locally developed Whatcom regional goals. As indicated in the table, the regional goals align neatly with all but three of the 23 state and/or national goals, those being security, tourism, and reduction of project delivery delay. It must be pointed out that WCOG and its member jurisdictions acknowledge the importance of those goals that do not align directly with the Whatcom regional goals, but, unlike the others, they are not consistently mentioned in transportation plans of Whatcom County's local jurisdictions and even less in public input solicited through robust outreach in 2021. Security, tourism, and project-delivery delay are important, they are federally required planning objectives, and WCOG does support them in its work. This is explained in more detail in the Strategies section ([Section 6](#)).

Figure 2: Regional, State, and National Transportation Goals

Whatcom Region		Washington	United States	
Prioritized regional transportation goals informed by the region’s comprehensive plans, 2021 WCOG Regional Public Engagement Questionnaire, and approved by the Whatcom Transportation Policy Board.		Statewide transportation policy goals (RCW 47.04.280)	Planning factors 23 U.S. Code § 134(h)(1)	National goals 23 U.S. Code § 150(a)(b)
1	Safety	"Safety: To provide for and improve the safety and security of transportation customers and the transportation system."	"(2) Increase the safety of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users."	"(1) Safety : To achieve a significant reduction in traffic fatalities and serious injuries on all public roads.
2	Provide All Types of Transportation (Multimodal)		"(6) Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes , for people and freight."	
3	Climate (Greenhouse Gas Reduction) & Environmental Quality	"Environment: To enhance Washington’s quality of life through transportation investments that promote energy conservation, enhance healthy communities, and protect the environment."	"(5) Protect and enhance the environment , promote energy conservation, improve the quality of life, and promote consistency between transportation improvements and state and local planned growth and economic development patterns." Also, see (9) below regarding storm water impacts.	(6) Environmental sustainability : To enhance the performance of the transportation system while protecting and enhancing the natural environment.
4	Maintain Existing Infrastructure in Good, Operating Condition (Preservation)	"Preservation: To maintain, preserve and extend the life and utility of prior investments in transportation systems and services."	"(8) Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system." Also, see (9) below regarding reliability.	(2) Infrastructure condition : To maintain the highway infrastructure asset system in a state of good repair.
		"Stewardship: To continuously improve the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of the transportation system."	(9) Improve the resiliency and reliability of the transportation system and reduce or mitigate storm water impacts of surface transportation.	
5	System Efficiency & Reliability (Mobility)	"Mobility (congestion relief): To improve the predictable movement of goods and people throughout Washington state, including congestion relief and improved freight mobility."	"(7) Promote efficient system management and operation."	(3) Congestion reduction : To achieve a significant reduction in congestion on the National Highway System.
				(4) System reliability : To improve the efficiency of the surface transportation system.
6	Access, Equity, & Economic Opportunity	Economic opportunity is part of the WA legislative policy goal of Economic Vitality.	"(4) Increase accessibility and mobility of people and freight."	
6	Freight & Economic Vitality	Freight included as part of Mobility and Economic Vitality policy goals.	Freight included with FAST Act planning factors 4 and 6.	(5) Freight movement and economic vitality : To improve the national freight network, strengthen the ability of rural communities to access national and international trade markets, and support regional economic development.
		"Economic vitality: To promote and develop transportation systems that stimulate, support, and enhance the movement of people and goods to ensure a prosperous economy."	(1) Support economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency.	(7) Reduced project delivery delays : To reduce project costs, promote jobs and the economy, and expedite the movement of people and goods by accelerating project completion through eliminating delays in the project development and delivery process, including reducing regulatory burdens and improving agencies’ work practices.
			(3) Increase the security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users.	
			(10) Enhance travel and tourism	

3.3. Applying Regional Goals to WCOG’s Transportation Planning Process

WCOG is in the early stages of applying Whatcom Mobility 2040’s regional goals to its comprehensive, cooperative, and continuing metropolitan and regional transportation planning process, but initial applications have begun.

3.3.1. Regional project selection

The Whatcom Transportation Policy Board is responsible for allocating funds from the federal Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) and Transportation Alternatives (TA) programs to projects in the Whatcom region. Under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, approximately \$3.25 million in STBG funds and \$450,000 in TA funds are made available annually to invest in projects within Whatcom County, the seven cities, and tribal governments. For a project to be considered, the requesting jurisdiction completes the regional STBG funding application and submits it to WCOG by a prescribed date. All applications are compiled by WCOG so that they can be reviewed and ranked by the [Transportation Technical Advisory Group \(TTAG\)](#) using weighted selection criteria based on the regional goals in *Way to Go, Whatcom*. TTAG's rankings are then considered by the Policy Board when it makes its funding decisions.

3.3.2. Project prioritization in the regional Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

Regional STBG and TA program funds are prioritized in the TIP based on the ranking they receive during the review and selection process. All federally funded projects in the first four years of the TIP must be “fiscally constrained,” i.e., all of the funding needed to complete the project or project phase must be identified. Projects programmed in the first year of the TIP are “priority one” projects, projects in the second year are priority two, etc., through the fourth year.

3.3.3. Identifying regional transportation corridors

As discussed in the **Performance-based planning and programming** section of *Way to Go, Whatcom*, WCOG uses the ranked regional goals as a way to support ongoing discussion between local jurisdictions and agencies about identifying regional transportation corridors that connect population centers within the county (cities, unincorporated hamlets, and tribal lands) and then developing operational and investment strategies to maximize the efficiency of those routes.