



whatcom council of governments

# WCOG 2021 Public Engagement Questionnaire

## Report 1: Regional Goals

September 23, 2021

A screenshot of the 'What moves you?' questionnaire introduction page. The page has a white background with a blue header bar. The header bar contains the title '1 What moves you?' and a sub-header 'A brief introduction before you begin.' Below the header, there is a 'Welcome' sidebar on the left and a vertical navigation bar on the right. The main content area features a large image collage of transportation modes (bicycles, a train, a person on a wheelchair, a car, a bridge, a bus, a person walking) with a 'Begin' button. Below the image, the text reads 'Thank you for your perspectives on regional TRANSPORTATION needs. Whatcom County will be home to 60,000 more people in 20 years. Your input is critical for our elected officials as they plan future investments.' The text 'We depend on many types of transportation.' is followed by icons for various transportation modes: Roads (Car, Truck), Active (Walk, Roll, Bike), Transit (City Bus, Intercity Bus, Paratransit Van, Commuter Van, Bus Stop, Ferry), Aviation (Plane, Airport), Marine (Ship, Terminal), and Rail (Train, Rail Station). The vertical navigation bar on the right has five colored segments: blue (What's it all about?), yellow (Priorities today), green (Get it on the map!), and purple (Wrap-up).

## Introduction

As an early phase of the 2022 regional transportation plan update process, WCOG conducted a large-scale public engagement questionnaire during the months of April and May of 2021. This first report focuses on public feedback regarding what our region's goals should be when planning and investing in our transportation system.

### Questionnaire format, distribution, and response

Following an early conclusion that the questionnaire would be conducted primarily on-line, several internet-based survey platforms were evaluated for desired functions, price, and resulting data output. Product review resulted in the selection of MetroQuest. Well-known in the transportation planning community, MetroQuest offered the best balance of user engagement, intuitive interface, mapping features, high-quality output, and customer support.

A Spanish language version of the on-line MetroQuest questionnaire was also developed.

In addition to the on-line questionnaire, a document version (PDF) was available in various ways as needed – e.g. emailed to those who had concerns about entering responses on an internet-based form, printed and mailed to people who did not have internet access, and used in conjunction with a screen reader by those with visual impairment.

The questionnaire was promoted in multiple ways

- **Post cards:** mailed to one-third of all Whatcom County residential addresses (randomly selected) plus 100 percent mail saturation on USPS carrier routes matching census-tract data indicating low-income and traditionally under-represented ethnic groups. The total mailing list was over 40,000.
- **Press release** with press-kit.
- **Social media:** Facebook, LinkedIn, NextDoor, Twitter.
- **Partner websites & social media:** City of Bellingham, Whatcom County, WSDOT, Western Washington University, Whatcom Housing Alliance

When the questionnaire was closed at the end of May, **over 2,000 responses were recorded.**

## Regional Goals for the Transportation System

The starting point for any plan is to establish goals. While the current regional transportation plan has [seven goals](#) based on public input, the cited public dialog these goals are based on took place twenty years ago. This 2021 public engagement questionnaire provides a refreshed assessment of what Whatcom region residents want from their transportation system.

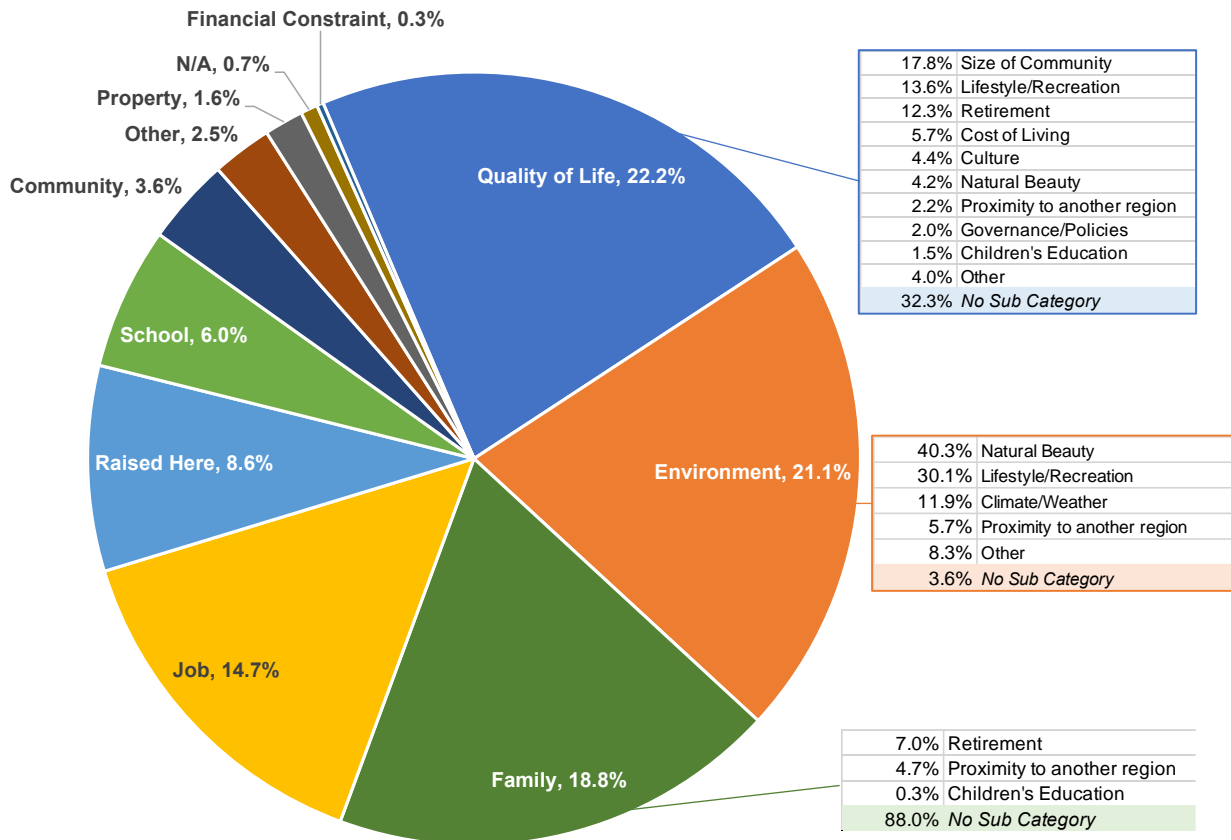
While the full set of questionnaire responses will continue to be synthesized and cross tabulated to help address a variety of planning questions about system improvement strategies, this first report homes in on information the Whatcom Transportation Policy Board can use when considering possible updates to our regional transportation goals. Thus, the following summaries focus on the initial sections of the questionnaire – broader contextual questions about the values underpinning people's choice to live in the Whatcom region, how people rank transportation relative to other broad categories of public investment, expectations of what should result from transportation investments (goals), recommendations of what elected officials can do to advance those goals, and finally, a ranking of the goals that are listed in the current regional transportation plan.

## Question summaries

### Q1: What is the primary reason you live in Whatcom County?

Open ended. n = 1,827

Categorized Responses with selected sub-categorizations:



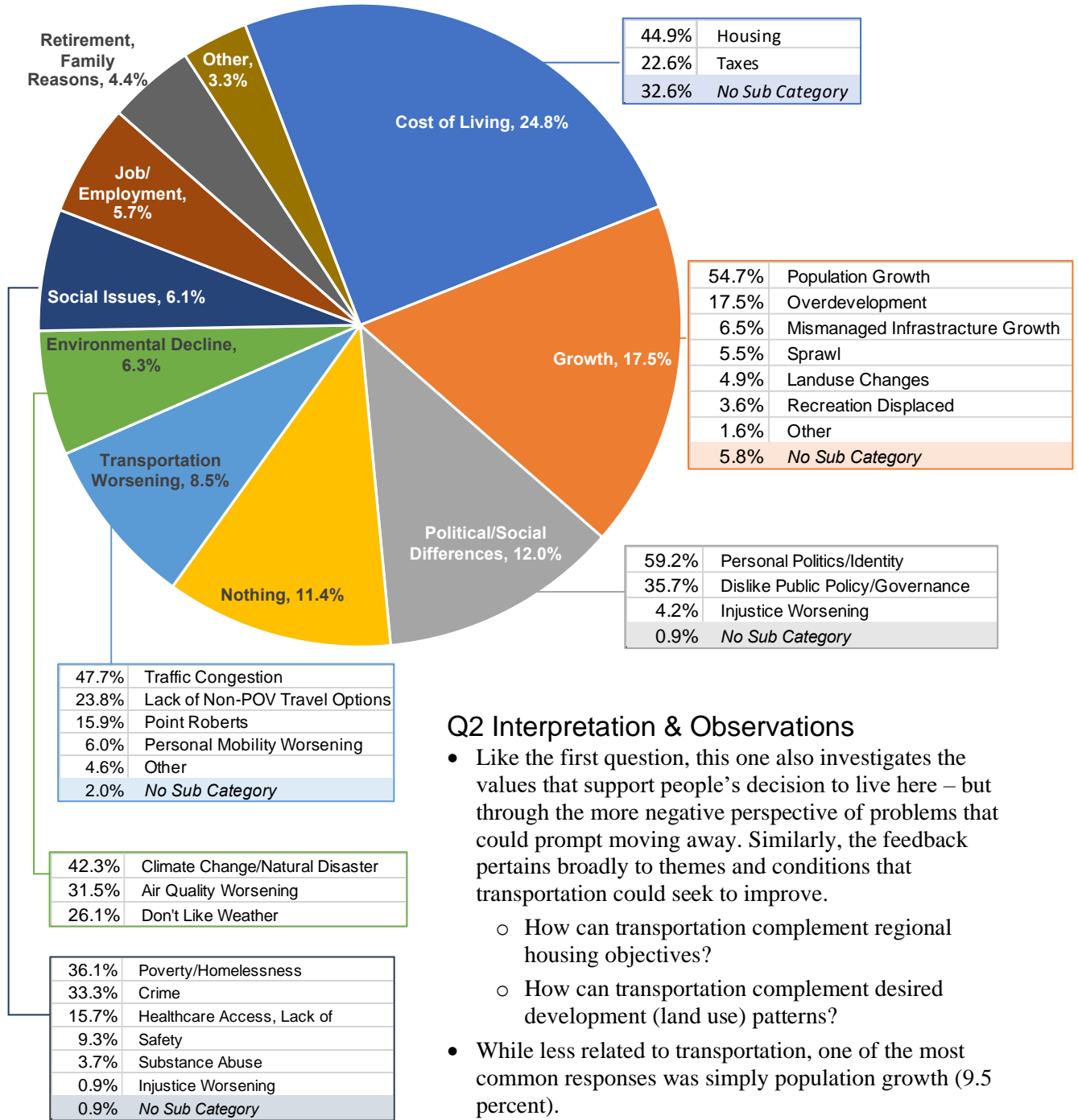
### Q1 Interpretation & Observations

- While transportation is not mentioned at all in this question, we can view this feedback as pertaining to those themes that transportation can support and/or that transportation investments should take care not to harm.
- While many reasons factor into a person's residential location (hopefully there's an element of choice involved), we assume that this is what is top-of-mind for that individual – i.e., it may also be true for an individual that, while the environment or recreational opportunities are most influential, other categories would compel them to live here as well.
- There is certainly some overlap with the identified categories. For example, Quality of Life was assigned to responses that lead with comments about general quality or that listed that phrase verbatim. Environment was assigned to responses that specified natural areas, habitat, outdoor recreation, etc.
- It is interesting to see Retirement emerge as measurable subcategory in two subcategories -- Family and Quality of Life.
- The subcategory "Proximity to another region" usually notes a reference to Canada.

**Q2. What about our region, or future change, could cause you to consider moving away?**

Open ended. n = 1,769

Categorized responses with selected sub-categorizations:



**Q2 Interpretation & Observations**

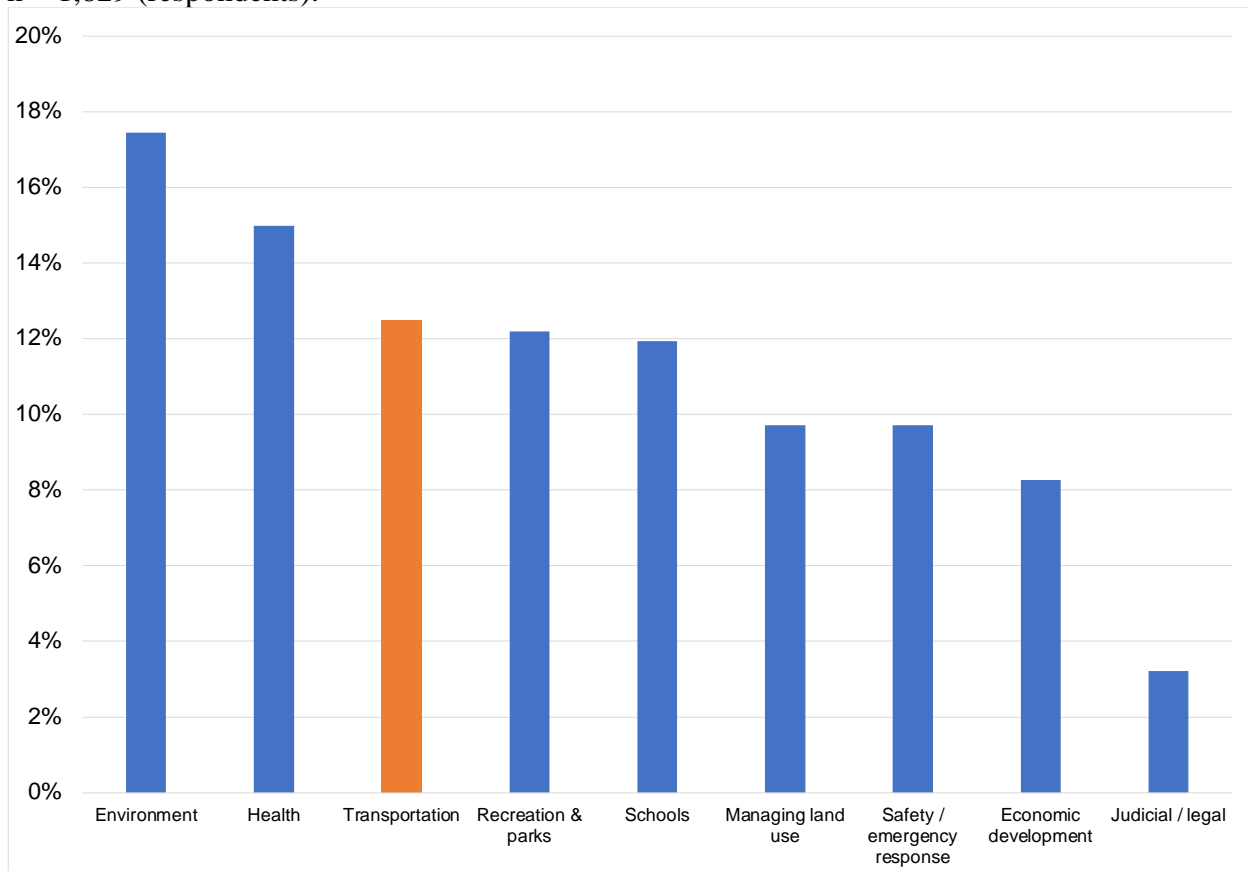
- Like the first question, this one also investigates the values that support people’s decision to live here – but through the more negative perspective of problems that could prompt moving away. Similarly, the feedback pertains broadly to themes and conditions that transportation could seek to improve.
  - How can transportation complement regional housing objectives?
  - How can transportation complement desired development (land use) patterns?
- While less related to transportation, one of the most common responses was simply population growth (9.5 percent).

Q3. Please select the 3 public investment categories that are most important to you.

Select  three

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Environment          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Safety / emergency response | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Schools                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Economic development |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Managing land use           | <input type="checkbox"/> Recreation & parks   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Judicial / legal            |   |

n = 1,829 (respondents).



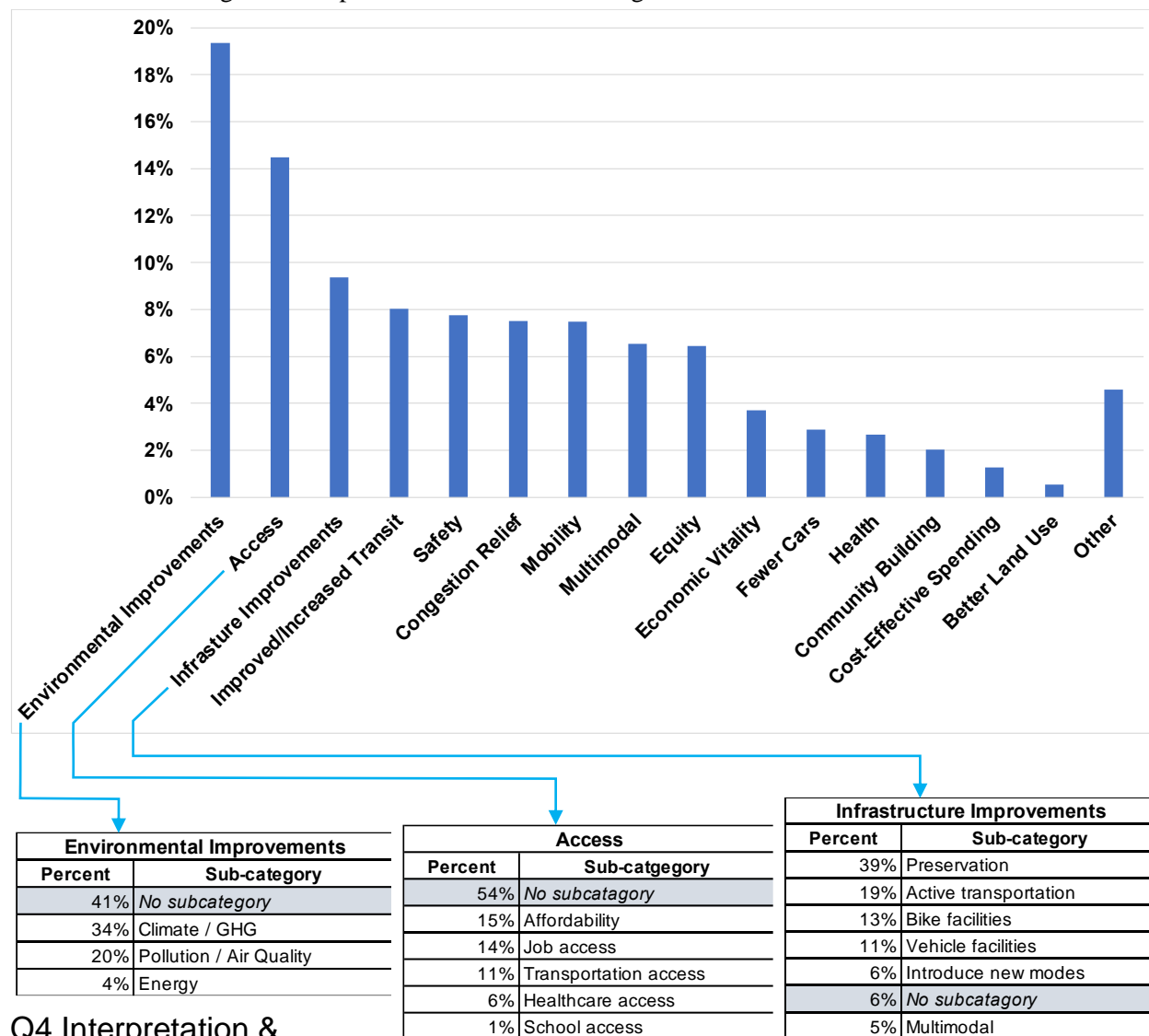
### Q3 Interpretation & Observations

- While this is the first question that mentions transportation (as a category of public investment), it's more of a transitional question from overall context to specific questions about transportation
- Transportation emerges as the third most important objective (among categories given to respondents) but can more reasonably be seen as tied for third with Recreation & Parks and Schools.
- Following strong showings in previous questions, Environment received the most attention here, too.
- Not that it would be surprising in any year but it's likely that the strong response to Health is influenced by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic – perhaps even more top-of-mind in April and May 2021 as vaccines were just starting to become more widely available to all adults.

**Q4. What do you believe are the most important outcomes for society that should result from public investments in transportation? Please list one or two.**

n = 1,344 (respondents). 2,371 answers (up to two per respondent).

Distribution of categorized responses & selected sub-categories:



### Q4 Interpretation & Observations

This is the first question directly asking about transportation. It was open-ended so as not to constrain feedback to a set list of goals. As with previous open-ended questions, written responses were batched into emergent categories and, depending on the comment and level of detail, sub-categories were also added to a large share of responses.

The terms used to label WCOG’s current regional transportation goals were used here as category labels when appropriate (e.g., Access, Multimodal, Safety, etc.). But many responses were specific enough and numerous enough to warrant their own category (e.g., Improved/Increased Transit). Other category labels reflect objectives that have not been discussed in previous plans but turned out to be top-of-mind objectives for measurable portions of respondents (e.g., Equity, Community Building).

## Comparing Current Whatcom Regional Transportation Goals with 2021 Questionnaire Results

While many categories were added to WCOG’s current regional goal list in order to summarize feedback in more detail, this expanded list of categories and sub-categories can be used to assess how the 2021 questionnaire feedback aligns with the goals listed in the current regional transportation plan.

Based on the distribution of Q4 categories and sub-categories, the following table groups responses (along with their percentage share of total responses) under the titles of *current-plan* goals. 2021 categories that did not match up with an existing goal are at the bottom of the 2021 column.

Current Regional Goals & Priority		Corresponding 2021 Questionnaire Outcomes (Goals)	
1	Safety	Safety	7.4%
2	Climate & environmental quality	Environmental Improvements	18.5%
3	Preservation	Preservation (subcat. of Infrastructure)	3.5%
4	Mobility (all modes & emphases on trip capacity)	Congestion Relief	7.2%
		Mobility	7.1%
		Vehicle Facilities (subcat. of Infrastructure)	1.0%
		Infrastructure Improvements (no subcategory)	0.5%
			<b>15.8%</b>
5	A multimodal transportation system	Improved/Increased Transit	7.7%
		Multimodal	6.3%
		Fewer cars	2.7%
		Active Transportation (subcat. of Infrastructure)	1.7%
		Bike Facilities (subcat. of Infrastructure)	1.1%
		Introduce new modes (subcat of Infrastructure)	0.6%
		Multimodal (subcat. of Infrastructure)	0.5%
			<b>20.6%</b>
6	Access	Access	13.8%
6	Freight transportation		0.0%
		Additional 2021 Questionnaire Outcomes (Goals)	
		Equity	6.2%
		Economic Vitality	3.5%
		Health	2.5%
		Community Building	1.9%
		Cost Effective Spending	1.2%
		Better Land Use	0.5%
		Other	4.4%
			<b>100.0%</b>

The current seven regional goals cover about 80 percent of the outcome statements (goals) given by respondents. Conversely (depending on how the responses labeled “Other” are treated), between 15 and 20 percent of the transportation goals given by respondents are not reflected by WCOG’s current transportation goals.

Using frequency as an indicator of relative importance, the 2021 questionnaire produces a different priority order of regional goals than the current WCOG transportation plan. The following table re-sorts the previous table based on the 2021 goal-category percentages to show the combined result of 1) aligning existing goals with 2021 questionnaire responses and 2) adding in 2021 categories that don't align directly with existing goals.

Current Regional Goals		Corresponding 2021 Questionnaire Outcomes (Goals)		
1	A multimodal transportation system	Improved/Increased Transit	7.7%	<b>20.6%</b>
		Multimodal	6.3%	
		Fewer cars	2.7%	
		Active Transportation (subcat. of Infrastructure)	1.7%	
		Bike Facilities (subcat. of Infrastructure)	1.1%	
		Introduce new modes (subcat of Infrastructure)	0.6%	
		Multimodal (subcat. of Infrastructure)	0.5%	
2	Climate & environmental quality	Environmental Improvements	<b>18.5%</b>	
3	Mobility (all modes & emphases on trip capacity)	Congestion Relief	7.2%	<b>15.8%</b>
		Mobility	7.1%	
		Vehicle Facilities (subcat. of Infrastructure)	1.0%	
		Infrastructure Improvements (no subcategory)	0.5%	
4	Access	Access	<b>13.8%</b>	
5	Safety	Safety	<b>7.4%</b>	
6		Equity	<b>6.2%</b>	
7	Preservation	Preservation (subcat. of Infrastructure)	<b>3.5%</b>	
7		Economic Vitality	<b>3.5%</b>	
8		Health	<b>2.5%</b>	
9		Community Building	<b>1.9%</b>	
10		Cost Effective Spending	<b>1.2%</b>	
11		Better Land Use	<b>0.5%</b>	
		Other	<b>4.4%</b>	
12	Freight transportation		<b>0.0%</b>	
			<b>100.0%</b>	

### Interpretation & Observations

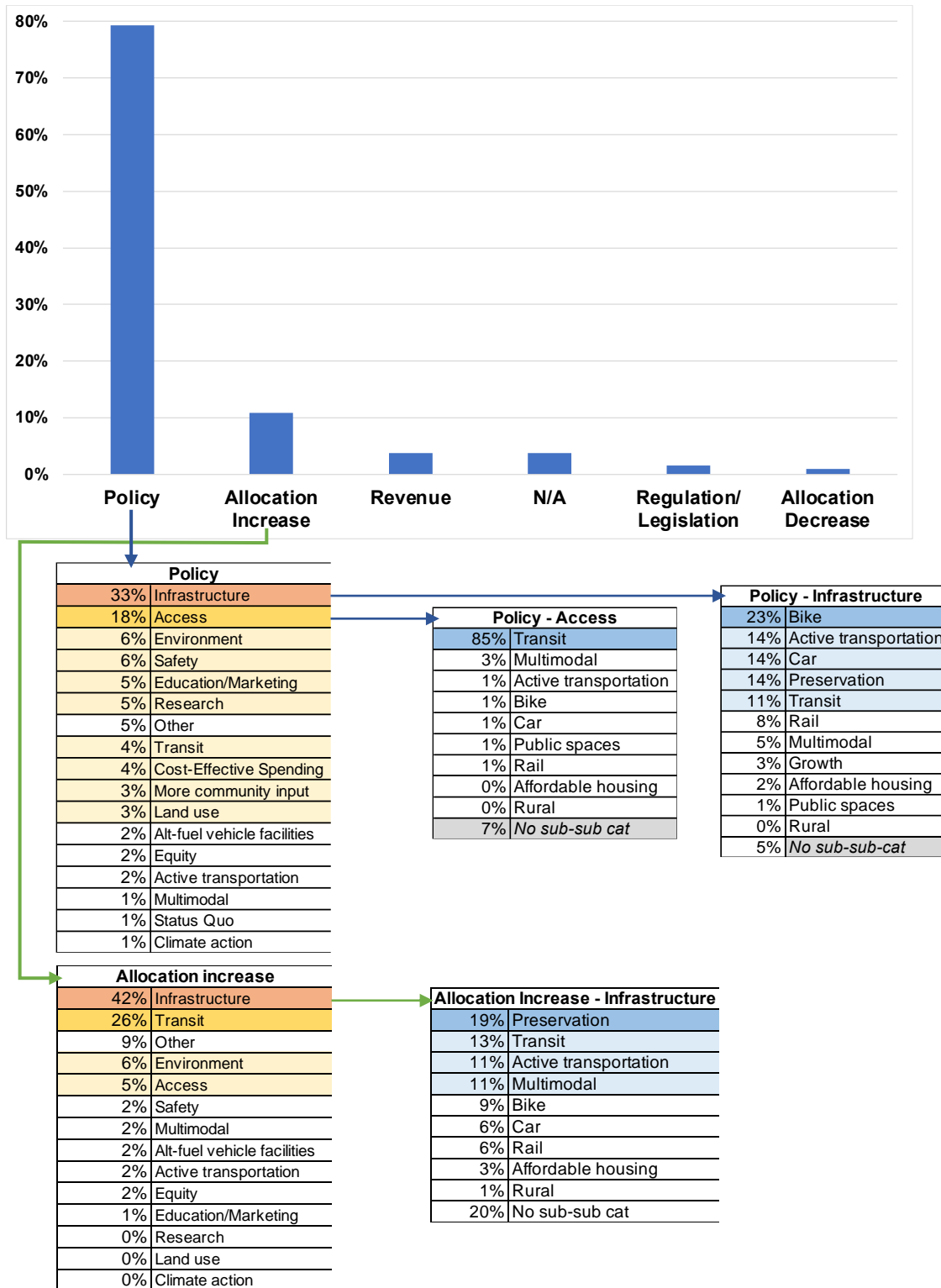
- Safety and Multimodal Transportation System swap places. Currently, Safety is 1<sup>st</sup> and Multimodal is 5<sup>th</sup>.
- Preservation is apparently not top-of-mind with the public.
- Taken on its face, when compared to the current list of seven goals, the 2021 results would suggest that there is sufficient interest in Equity that it could be its own goal.
- The relatively low but equal percentage interest in Preservation and Economic Vitality would have these two categories tied for an eighth goal.
- There is likely sufficient intersection between themes of Access, Equity, and Economic Vitality that subsequent discussion could look at how the plan-definitions of these terms could be updated and aspects of these three goals are consolidated if deemed appropriate.



**Q5. What are one or two things you would ask our elected officials to do to achieve the outcomes you listed in the previous question?**

n = 1,855 (respondents). 2,143 answers (up to two per respondent).

Distribution of categorized responses, selected sub-categories, and sub-sub categories.



## Q5 Interpretation & Observations

The intent of this question was for respondents to offer their ideas of how their elected officials (local, state, federal) could advance their priority outcomes (goals) – the legislative ingredients of high-level strategies to achieve the desired future transportation system.

Responses to this question provide useful information but not the *types* of answers that were hoped for. Instead of answers that identified or were relatable to one or more primary functions that elected representatives conduct on behalf of their constituents (e.g., budgeting, regulation, legislation, taxes & revenue, etc.) answers consisted mostly of (almost 80 percent) statements of support or project-level actions (e.g., “Elected officials could advance improvements to transit by ensuring transit is improved” or “...constructing better bus stops.”)

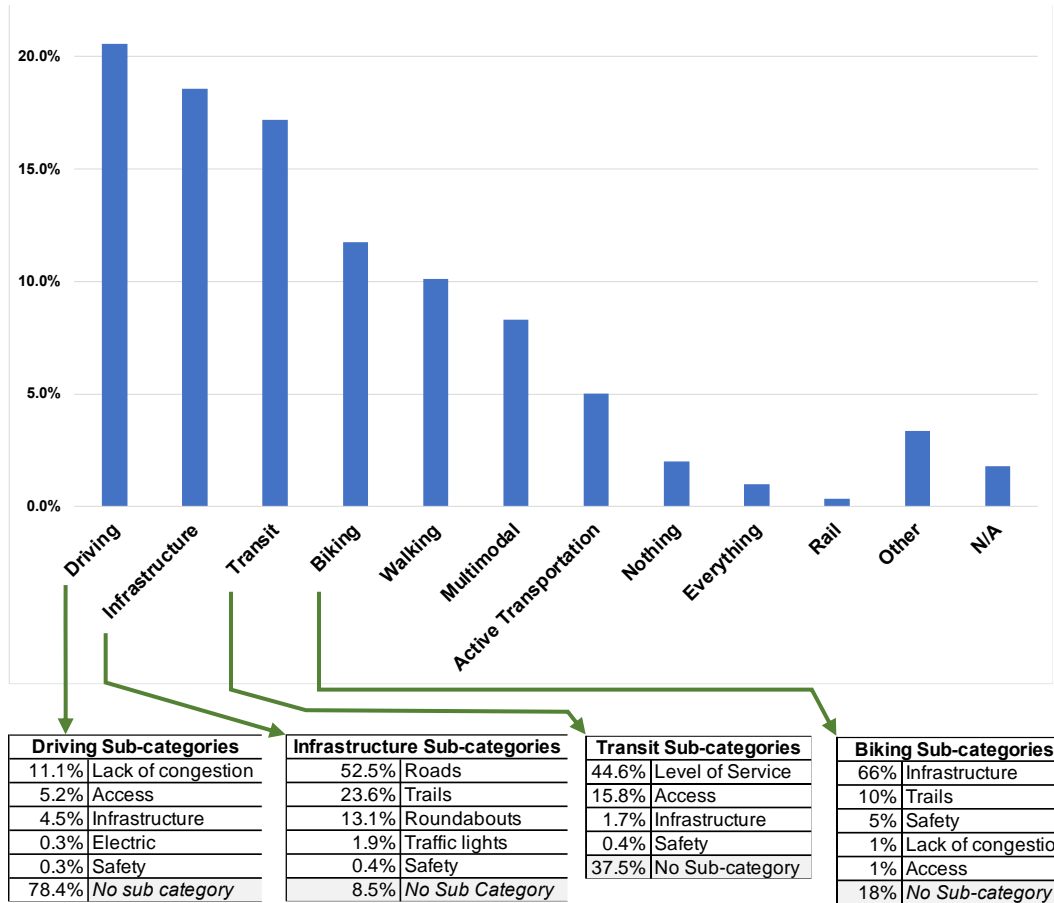
Thus, most of the responses were categorized as **Policy** – an indicator of emphasis but not specific actions by a legislator or legislature. Other categories that did indicate specific actions by elected officials are **Allocation Increase** – moving *existing* resources/funding to advance an outcome (Many respondents may have been advocating for new revenue but the conservative assumption, unless they described new revenue, was that they were advocating for a *reallocation existing revenue.*); **Revenue** – generating additional funding through taxes or fees; **Regulation/Legislation**; and **Allocation Decrease** – some respondents advocated reducing funding for bike lanes.

With the summarization of responses into the above categories, the Policy and Allocation Increase responses were subcategorized to provide a clearer (though slightly repetitive) connection to specific transportation priorities and actions.

- The largest subcategories of both Policy and Allocation Increase are actions on **Infrastructure**.
  - Within the Infrastructure subcategories, the types of infrastructure are diverse – all travel modes with most of those responses focused on **Bicycle** infrastructure and **Active Transportation** infrastructure (all active modes: bike, pedestrian, trails).
- Actions directed at improving **Transit** show up strongly both as the second highest percentage of Policy actions and second highest percentage of Allocation Increase actions. Under Policy actions, transit was often articulated in terms of access – enabling more people to get where they need to go: jobs, school, housing.

**Q6. Based on trips that you make - walking, driving, biking, bus, etc. - what is a part of the transportation system that: Works well?**  
 n = 1,396

Distribution of categorized responses and selected sub-categories.



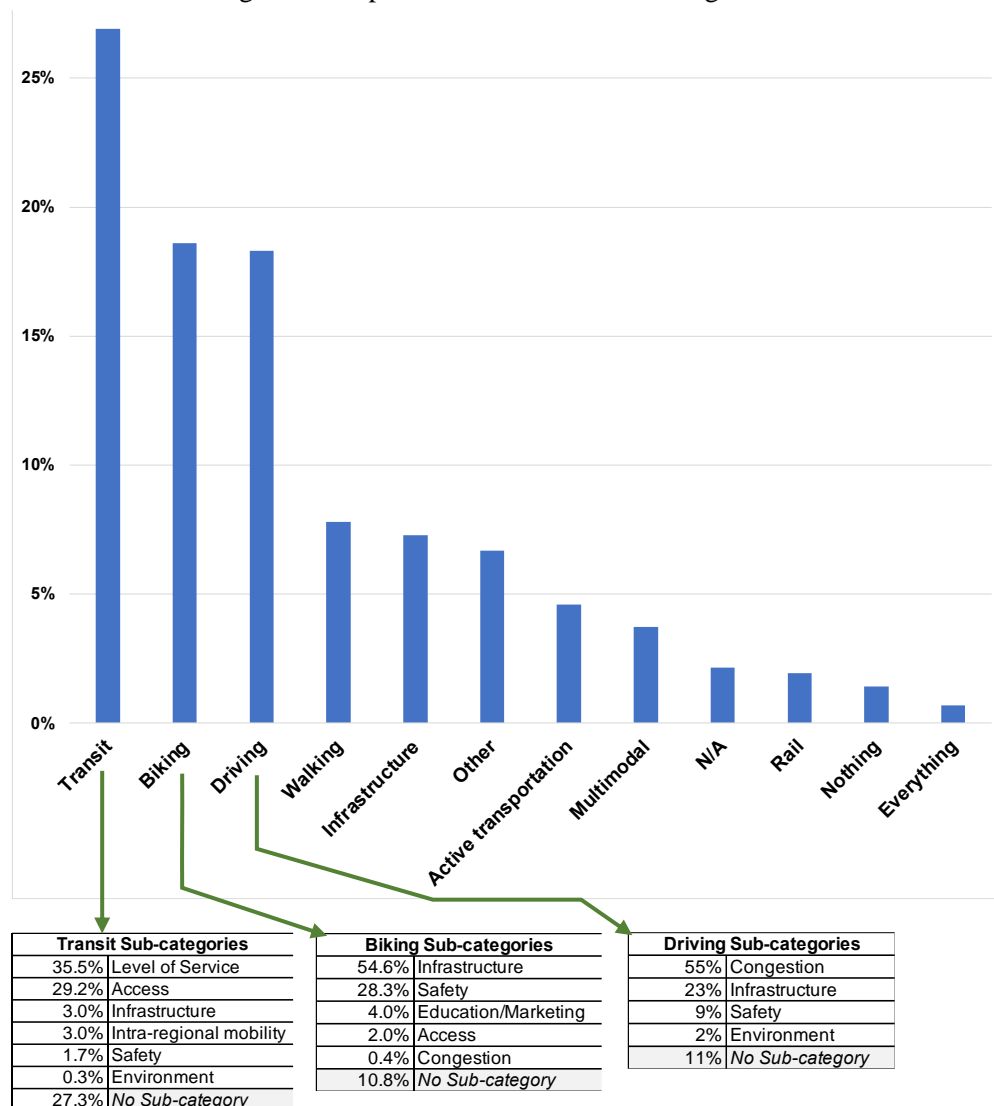
### Q6 Interpretation & Observations

This is the first of two questions asking respondents for general assessments of the current system. The open-ended responses were batched into emergent categories and subcategories shown in the summary chart and tables above. For “*What Works Well?*”:

- The results are well distributed. There are significant constituencies who point to various elements of the current transportation as working well for them: the ability to drive, the roads that support that, walking and biking options, transit, etc.
- The large percentage Transit subcategory, “Level of Service” captures comments indicating that WTA travel time and/or frequency was working well for them.
- The large percentage of Biking subcategory “Infrastructure” captures comments indicating approval of recent investments in bike lanes and other bike facilities.
- Another purpose of this question was to give respondents a chance to accentuate the positive before asking what about the system is not meeting their needs and/or expectations.

Q7. Based on trips that you make - walking, driving, biking, bus, etc. - what is a part of the transportation system that: Doesn't work as well as you would like?  
 n = 1,349

Distribution of categorized responses and selected sub-categories.

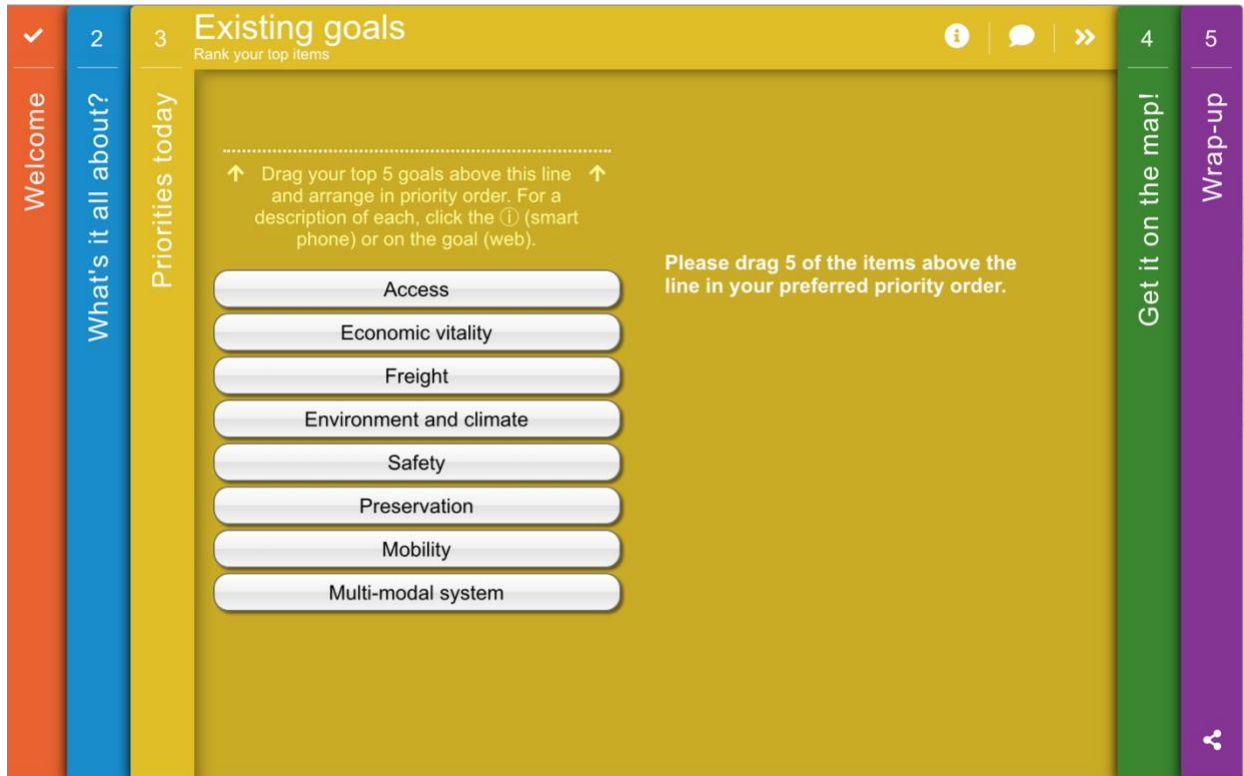


### Q7 Interpretation & Observations

- For “What Doesn’t Work Well...” the responses were still well distributed but definitely more concentrated on transit.
- To clarify the Transit subcategories (percentages of that 27 percent)
  - Level of Service (35%) – Frequency or travel time was not good enough.
  - Access (29.2%) – The bus doesn’t go where they need to go.
  - No sub-category (27.3%) –general statements of insufficiency.
- Biking, Driving, and Walking all returned similar parentages in the Works Well and Doesn’t Work Well questions.
- Infrastructure did show a difference with 19 percent identifying it as what Works Well and seven percent identifying it as What Doesn’t Work Well...”.

### Q8. Existing Goals

Up to this point in the questionnaire, respondents had not been told anything about the Whatcom region’s existing transportation system goals. This MetroQuest screen asked respondents to select five of the eight goals they considered most important and arrange them in their priority order (as explained on the image of the screen below).



For more detailed descriptions of each goal, text and a picture (as shown below) were displayed by clicking on each goal-button.

**Environment and climate:** Climate, air, water, habitat, etc.



**Freight:** Movement of goods and services, utility vehicles, etc.



**Safety:** Continued reduction of crashes and resulting death and injury



**Access:** The basic ability to travel to a destination as well as the principle that our transportation systems should be equally usable by all people



**Economic vitality:**

Transportation systems that support people's and businesses' travel and freight connections to jobs, customers, and transactions for goods and services



**Mobility:**

The quality of travel -- trip time predictability, reliability, comfort



**Multi-modal system:**

Facilities and operations for multiple types of transportation that work together: driving, buses, biking, walking, ride hailing services

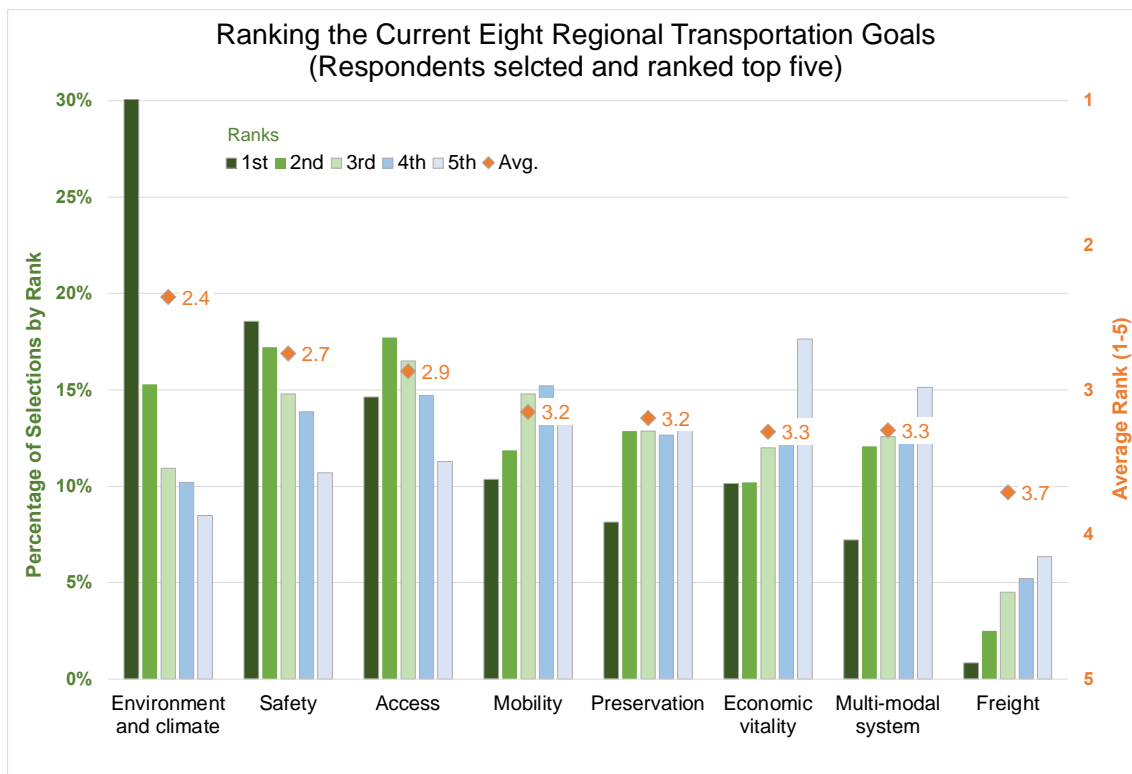


**Preservation:**

Keeping existing infrastructure and systems in good repair



**Q8 Summary Table**



**Q8 Interpretation & Observations**

- This was not an opened ended question. Respondents had to choose from the list of goals they were given.
- Like responses to earlier questions, Environment and climate are the highest percentage category.

- As a current check on existing regional transportation goals, this result would reprioritize them as follows.

Existing Prioritization	
1	Safety
2	Climate & Environmental Quality
3	Preservation
4	Mobility (all modes & emphasis on trip capacity)
5	A multimodal transportation system
6	Access
6	Freight transportation
(7)*	Economic Vitality*

2021 Questionnaire Result	
1	Climate & Environmental Quality
2	Safety
3	Access
4	Mobility (all modes and emphasis on trip capacity)
5	Preservation
6	Economic Vitality*
7	Multimodal System
8	Freight

\*Economic Vitality is the only *Washington State legislative transportation priority* not included in the Whatcom plan as a regional goal so was added to the list for this question.

- A notable difference compared the open-ended feedback on **Question 4** (Outcomes) is the much lower priority given here to a Multimodal System. This is likely a function of nomenclature. In summarizing responses to Question 4, we took respondents’ own words and categorized them. In that process, very few of the 20.6 percent of responses that articulated interest in multimodal transportation actually used the word “multimodal”. Rather, summarization of those results into the Multimodal category was based on respondents’ mention of the modes themselves (walking, bike, transit, trails, etc.). Even though more detailed descriptions of the terms used in this ranking question were available by clicking on the associated button, it’s more difficult to attribute this difference to raw inconsistency when 1) the answers to Question 4 are based in more careful, top-of-mind feedback and 2) the other rankings of goals in this question – goals which use more common terminology – align well with the Question 4 summary.
- Safety was ranked higher here than in the Question 4 summary – perhaps because, while very important, prevention of fatalities and injuries is not as top-of-mind for respondents when the question asked about “transportation outcomes.” This is likely a good illustration of the basic difference between summarizing open-ended responses and responses based on a pre-determined list of options.

## Next Steps?

There is much more data coming from the survey that will be used to inform discussion in the 2022 regional/metropolitan transportation plan (R/MTP) but this is the first step – providing this public feedback to the Whatcom Transportation Policy Board to inform its 2022 update of regional transportation goals, the foundation of the R/MTP.

- Do the results indicate that the current goals should be updated for 2022?
- If so, how should public feedback be considered alongside established policies, state and federal planning requirements, Policy Board objectives, etc.
  - Consideration of how regional goals then inform performance measures used to identify strategies and eventually inform project selection (Performance Based Planning and Programming).

## Some options for discussion

1. Do nothing – leave the current goals as they are for the 2022 plan update.
2. Start an evaluation of goals and their prioritization from ends of the spectrum:
  - a. A straight list of goals as augmented and reprioritized by the 2021 public feedback (pg. 7)
  - b. The 2021 questionnaire-based re-ordering of the existing goals (pg. 14)

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		Multimodal (subcat. of Infrastructure)	0.5%
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4	Access	Access	13.8%
5	Safety	Safety	7.4%
6		Equity	6.2%
7	Preservation	Preservation (subcat. of Infrastructure)	3.5%
7		Economic Vitality	3.5%
8		Health	2.5%
9		Community Building	1.9%
10		Cost Effective Spending	1.2%
11		Better Land Use	0.5%
		Other	4.4%
12	Freight transportation		0.0%
			<b>100.0%</b>

Existing Prioritization	
1	Safety
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2021 Questionnaire Result	
1	Climate & Environmental Quality
2	Safety
3	Access
4	Mobility (all modes and emphasis on trip capacity)
5	Preservation
6	Economic Vitality*
7	Multimodal System
8	Freight

3. Based on the 2021 feedback, consider some reprioritization and re-packaging with updated plan-definitions.

Example for discussion only – not a proposal.

Current Goals (not in current priority order)	Possible prioritization rationale	Updated to include:	Renaming?
1 Safety	Executive decision: Safety first.		
2 A multimodal transportation system	2021 feedback		Something other than "multimodal" ?
5 Access	2021 feedback combined with %-weight of Equity & Economic Vitality	Equity, Economic Vitality	Access & Equity
3 Climate & environmental quality	2021 feedback		
4 Preservation	Executive decision: All system components need to be preserved, etc.		State of Good Repair
6 Mobility (all modes & emphasis on trip capacity)	2021 feedback		System Efficiency & Reliability
7 Freight	2021 feedback		