

Whatcom Mobility 2040

Current Transportation Activities

Introduction

The Whatcom region depends on transportation activities on land, in the air and on the sea. This section discusses the common non-motorized and motorized transportation modes used.

Non-motorized transportation

Walking

Walking is the foundation of our transportation system. Most all personal trips include some walking; walk to a car, walk to a bus stop, walk from the bus or car to your destination. Walking is a mode by itself and the basic connection to the other transportation modes we choose. However, because distances between home and work, school, shopping or other activities are often too far, walking as the only mode accounts for about 11 percent of all trips in Whatcom County.

For urbanized areas where trip ends are closer together, walking rates are higher. In Bellingham, 24 percent of trips are one mile or less and 12 percent of all trips are made by walking. For people with disabilities, with lower incomes, and seniors and children, walking accounts for about 30 percent of all trips. Walking trips are also among the shortest in travel time at about 14 minutes per trip.

Bicycling

Citizens, local jurisdictions, and WCOG have made significant efforts to increase bicycling activity in the region. Throughout Whatcom County, three percent of trips are currently made by bicycle. In Bellingham, six percent of trips are on bike. This measure rises to 11 percent west of I-5 where there is greater street connectivity, higher land-use densities, more employment and shopping destinations, and substantial bicycle facilities.

Motorized Transportation

Transit

Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA) is the public transit provider in Whatcom County. WTA operates the following transit services:

- **Fixed route** buses provide service at designated bus stops on more than 30 routes throughout the county. Fixed route buses serve the largest share of transit trips and range from 16,000 to 20,000 daily boardings.
- **Paratransit** serves people with disabilities that prevent them from using fixed route service bus. Paratransit averages 570 to 590 daily riders.
- The **vanpool** program allows employers to lease WTA-owned vans for ride-sharing work commutes.

- **Zone service** provides limited transit service to rural communities in Whatcom through reservations. Services vary from 170 to 230 riders per month.

Park and Rides

There are many park and ride lots that serve as locations to use transit, carpool, vanpool and ride-sharing. In the Whatcom region, both managed and unmanaged. Managed lots exist at the following locations:

Whatcom County

- East side of Samish Way I-5 Interchange
- Birch Bay Square off of Birch Bay-Lynden Rd I-5 Interchange

Bellingham

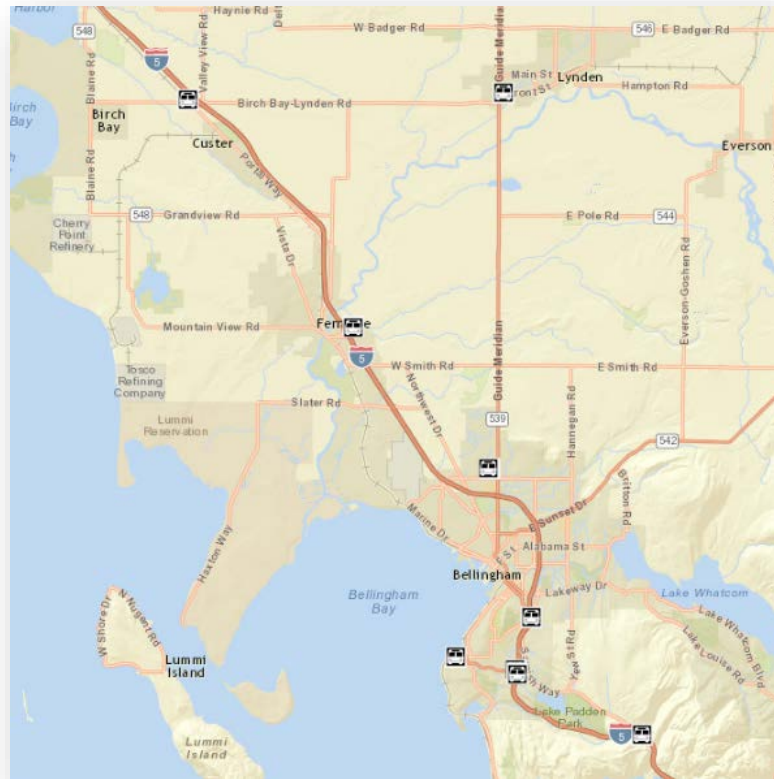
- Old Fairhaven Pkwy (SR 11) I-5 Interchange
- Harris Ave across from Amtrak-Bellingham Transit Center
- Lincoln St north of Samish Way I-5 Interchange
- Cordata Pkwy Transit Center

Ferndale

- West Axton Rd just east of Main St I-5 Interchange

Lynden

- Front St just east of Guide Meridian Rd (SR 539)



Passenger rail

Over 150 miles of track owned by Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway (BNSF) stretch between Seattle and Vancouver, British Columbia. This mainline provides valuable passenger transportation opportunities for connecting the larger regions outside of Whatcom County, and provides Whatcom County residents and businesses an alternative to the road network.

Ridership on the Amtrak Cascades service has steadily increased by 9.5 percent per year as funding partners add capacity and improve on-time performance. Two daily round trips operate between Seattle and Vancouver, B.C. and stop at Bellingham. There is regional interest in increasing the number of cross-border round trips.

Passenger ferry

Whatcom County operates the ferry between Gooseberry Point and Lummi Island, which carries approximately 180,000 passengers and 110,000 vehicles annually.

The Alaska Marine Highway System operates ferries out of the Bellingham Cruise Terminal. These ferries constitute part of the Alaska state highway network. The system carries about



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13,750 passengers and 5,640 vehicles annually out of Bellingham. Conversely, the ferry disembarks about 12,000 passengers and 5,138 vehicles annually into Bellingham. This level of activity has remained relatively steady for the last ten years.

In addition to these regularly scheduled services, private companies offer seasonal marine services leaving from Fairhaven and from Drayton Harbor in Blaine to locations in the San Juan Islands, Victoria B.C., and Semiahmoo Point in Blaine.

Passenger air

Bellingham International Airport (BLI) provides commercial passenger service from Alaska Airlines, Allegiant and San Juan Airlines. Passenger travel out of Bellingham grew steeply in the 2000s to the recent peak of 573,714 boardings in 2013. Passenger travel has since tapered due in large part to the changing relative value of the Canadian dollar.

A smaller airport is also located in Lynden that provides facilities for general aviation and light aircraft charter services. A seaplane facility, Floathaven, is located on Lake Whatcom.

Automobiles

Personal automobile trips account for about 80 percent of all trips. Whatcom residents own an average of two vehicles per household and make about seven daily trips in an automobile. The average auto trip takes just over 17 minutes.

As the primary choice used for travel, more details on current and future automobile impacts are outlined later in the plan.

Other passenger travel modes

The region is also served by private bus services (Greyhound, Bellair charters and shuttles, Bolt Bus), taxi services, ride sharing (Uber), and rental car companies.

Commercial vehicle

Freight carried by commercial long- and short-haul vehicles in and through Whatcom County is substantial because of international border crossings, urban area activities, marine port connections, and industries and agriculture. The region experiences up to 18 million tons of annual freight on I-5. Under the Washington State Freight and Goods Transportation System (FGTS) classification, Whatcom region has several state routes and city street road segments currently classified as T-1 (>10 million tons per year) or T-2 (4 - 10 million tons per year). T-1 and T-2 classifications are the highest priority for state and federal programs. Further details can be found at the Washington State Department of Transportation website – [Freight and Goods Transportation](#).

Roughly 75 percent of all commercial and passenger vehicle volume between British Columbia and Washington State passes through Whatcom County's international land-border ports-of-entry. Nearly 3,000 commercial vehicles cross through Whatcom County's four border crossings every day, carrying over \$30 million in trade.

With 30 percent of commercial trucks having a trip-end south of Washington State, the border crossings and highway system in the region has national significance in serving the needs of trade.

The effort of the regional planning program IMTC continue to address the needs of freight and how to expedite commercial movements while maintaining environmental standards and the safety of the communities these trips pass through.



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Freight rail

Millions of dollars of commercial freight is transported across Washington State by rail every day. Whatcom County's main rail line, operated by BNSF, serves the bulk of regional freight rail movement. An additional rail line, also owned by BNSF, stretches 46 miles from Burlington in Skagit County to Sumas in Whatcom, and crosses the border into Canada. This line currently carries freight cars only.

Studies of the rail system were conducted in 2002 and again in 2011 to examine the potential growth of both freight and passenger rail and better ways to utilize existing infrastructure. As highways in the region grow more congested, regional agencies have looked to see if a greater proportion of freight movements could be served by rail.

Marine cargo

The Bellingham Shipping Terminal provides a full-service marine terminal. Opportunities may exist to expand these services, which depending on the commodities being transported, have some potential of reducing future demand on highways.

Landside facilities at the Squaticum harbor currently includes a shipyard, railroad lines, retail stores, and seafood processing plants and cold storage.

Deep-water facilities are operated at Cherry Point by Alcoa – Intalco Works , British Petroleum and Conoco-Phillips.

Air freight

Bellingham International Airport (BLI) is host to freight and mail transport operations including freight airlines, freight forwarders, and trucking firms involved in air movement of freight.