

# WHATCOM HUMAN SERVICES TRANSPORTATION PLAN

## Access & Convenience for Everyone

Adopted October 13, 2022, by the Whatcom Transportation Policy Board



Developed by:

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# 1. Introduction

Human services transportation serves people with *special* transportation needs. Washington state law defines people with special transportation needs as “*persons, including their personal attendants, who because of physical or mental disability, income status, or age are unable to transport themselves or purchase transportation.*”

The Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG) updates the regional Human Services Transportation Plan (HSTP) every five years to identify our region’s transportation services gaps for people with special transportation needs. The HSTP also presents strategies and proposed investments to close those gaps.

The HSTP is important for the Whatcom region for several reasons. Primarily, it is a strategy for achieving the regional goal of **access and convenience**. By identifying funding priorities, the plan helps agencies put resources where they will help those who need it the most.

In addition, the WA State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) uses this plan to formulate its own HSTP strategies and to ensure that regional funding requests to the state’s Consolidated Grant Program have value in a community-based process.

In 2022, the HSTP has been updated concurrently with the Whatcom Regional Transportation Plan, a plan with a broader scope but one that also focuses on gaps and needs in our community. This plan, *Way to Go, Whatcom: Whatcom Region’s 2045 Regional & Metropolitan Transportation Plan*, forecasts transportation demand that our region will experience over the next 23 years and presents strategies to meet that demand in alignment with the regional transportation goals.

Some of the insights from *Way to Go, Whatcom* have been incorporated here to highlight the region’s most pressing needs. Correspondingly, this HSTP offers insights to the larger plan.

## About the Regional and Metropolitan Transportation Planning Organization

WCOG is the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for Whatcom County. This is a federal designation as part of 23 U.S. Code 134 for urbanized areas with populations over 50,000. With this designation, WCOG has access to federal transportation funding and is also required to follow a federally prescribed transportation planning process.

WCOG is also the Regional Transportation Planning Organization for Whatcom County, a Washington State designation created in 1990 as part of Washington’s Growth Management Act.

## 2. Community Outreach

Participation by representatives of the human services community is the most important part of an HSTP. In 2021 and 2022, outreach efforts have been challenged by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the inability to meet safely in person with large groups. Because public meetings were not possible, WCOG’s outreach to the community has been focused on the following methods:

- Individual interviews with stakeholders and members of the public via internet-based platforms (Zoom) and phone calls
- Feedback from a county-wide public engagement survey conducted in 2021 with a focus on under-represented communities
- Discussions with WCOG’s Community Transportation Advisory Group (CTAG), a forum for facilitated public participation in transportation planning, project delivery, and operations
- Discussions with participants in the North Sound Transportation Alliance (NSTA) especially around NSTA’s focus on healthcare and transportation.

## Engaging Stakeholders

Interviews were conducted with stakeholders and community experts working directly with the challenges of Whatcom County citizens with special transportation needs.

Interviews were conducted with the following individuals:

<b>Agency/Organization</b>	<b>Interviewee</b>
Bellingham School District	Jessica Sankey, Director of Teaching, Learning, & Wellness
Blaine – Birch Bay Park & Recreation District 2	Sheli Moore, Commissioner
Cascadia Connections	Kristin Nguyen, Vocational Programs Director
City of Bellingham	Holly Pederson, ADA Coordinator
Lighthouse Mission Ministries	Bridget Reeves, Chief Operating Officer
Lummi Indian Business Council	Kirk Vinish, Transportation Planner
Mt. Baker School District	Ben Thomas, Superintendent
North Sound Accountable Community of Health	Megan Tripp
Northwest Regional Council	Aly Horry, Medicaid Transportation Services

Opportunity Council	Lorena Shah, Community Services Manager
Skagit Council of Governments	Grant Johnson, Associate Planner
St. Paul Episcopal Alms Ministry	Pug Edmonds, Coordinator
WA State Department of Social & Health Services	Britney Miller, WorkFirst Supervisor
WA State Department of Youth & Children Services	Sunshine Nelson, Field Operations – Child Welfare
WA State DSHS Division of Vocational Rehabilitation	Catherine Herring, Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor
Whatcom Council on Aging	Molly Simon, Bellingham Senior Activity Center Director
Whatcom County Health Department	Ali Jensen, Program Specialist
Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA)	Mary Anderson, Transit Planner

The following questions were asked:

- What transportation services do you/those you work with use?
- What transportation services work well for you/those you work with, and which ones have gaps or issues that you would like to see addressed?
- Do you have any partnerships with transportation providers, or providers you/those you work with use regularly?
- Do you know of specific issues in Whatcom County for people who may have additional transportation challenges based on age, income, or disability?
- Do you/those you work with have transportation needs that go beyond Whatcom County boundaries?
- To meet your needs/the needs of those you work with, what would an ideal transportation system look like?
- Other comments/notes

In addition, transportation providers such as WTA and the school districts were asked:

- Vehicle types, capacity, numbers
- Coverage area

Summaries of all interviews are available upon request.

Interviews and email exchanges were also conducted with three public citizens and users of special-needs transportation.

In addition to this direct approach, WCOG solicited feedback through two other efforts in 2021/2022:

### 2021 Public Engagement Survey

In the spring of 2021 WCOG conducted a large-scale public engagement survey of Whatcom County residents to inform the *Way to Go, Whatcom* transportation plan. Over two thousand individuals responded.

Several questions asked in the survey effort have relevance to this plan. In addition to gathering information about what works and doesn't work in the Whatcom County transportation system, HSTP-specific data were collected. Data from the survey have been sorted based on:

- Age
- Income level
- Ethnicity
- Location of residence (rural vs. urban)
- Use of mobility device/disability

Results from this HSTP-specific analysis of survey responses can be found in **Section 4**.

### Way to Go, Whatcom: 2045 Regional/Metropolitan Transportation Plan

Every five years, WCOG and other regional transportation planning organizations (RTPOs) in Washington State, and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) nationally, are required to update a long-range regional transportation plan.

WCOG's *Way to Go, Whatcom: 2045 Regional/Metropolitan Transportation Plan* was approved in June 2022 by the Whatcom Transportation Policy Board.

One of the goals identified is 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).*

## Current Coordination Efforts

Several transportation and non-transportation service providers in Whatcom County have developed transportation partnerships. These include:

**DSHS Division of Vocational Rehabilitation** with:

- Local companies for car repairs (Rising Sun, Firestone, Les Schwab, Cursey)
- Nelson Driving School

- Taxi companies

**Mt. Baker School District** with:

- Other school districts in Whatcom County, as well as Sedro-Woolley and Burlington School Districts (in neighboring Skagit County).
- Yellow Cab

**Northwest Regional Council** with:

- Skagit Community Action and Island Senior Resources for volunteer drivers
- St. Joseph Hospital liaison
- Taxi companies

**Whatcom County Health Department** with:

- Whatcom Volunteer Center Veteran's Program

**Whatcom Transportation Authority** with:

- DSHS Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
- Lummi Transit
- Opportunity Council
- Skagit Transit (80x)
- Western Washington University

## Vulnerable Populations

In an effort to reach a broader base of vulnerable population and overburdened communities (previously referred to as underrepresented populations), a third of all Whatcom County residential addresses, randomly selected, received a postcard in the mail with easy-to-understand instructions on how to take the public engagement survey that helped inform this plan. To better represent those with special transportation needs, WCOG also identified U.S. Postal Service carrier routes matching census tract data indicating low-income and traditionally underrepresented ethnic groups. A postcard was sent to *every* household in those tracts. In all, over 40,000 households were contacted.

## Outreach Events

To solicit feedback, the draft plan has been shared with agencies and organizations representing special transportation needs populations to directly contact those most impacted by transportation challenges.

Feedback was also gathered at two open houses held virtually to present *Way to Go, Whatcom: 2045 Regional/Metropolitan Transportation Plan* and hear comments and questions. Feedback from this effort has been taken into consideration for this HSTP.

An online version of the plan has was posted and advertised during the open comment period. A print version was also been made available at WCOG's office and advertised for those who don't have computer access but do read the newspaper.

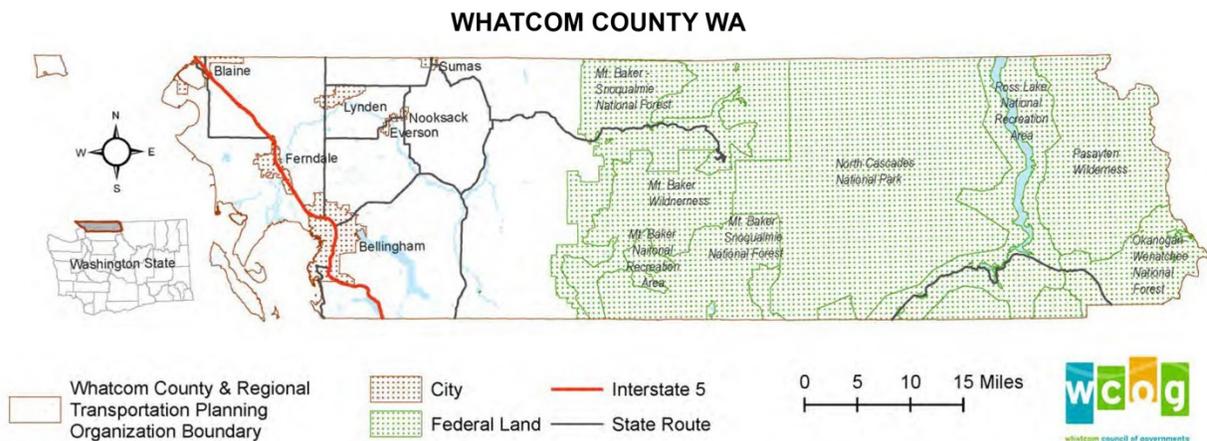
Discussions and feedback from the Whatcom Community Transportation Advisory Group (CTAG) regarding the draft plan also took place. Results were incorporated into the final version.

# 3. Regional Context

## Geography

This HSTP covers all of Whatcom County (Figure 1), including the cities and areas within the county boundaries: Bellingham, Blaine, Everson, Lynden, Nooksack, Sumas. It also covers rural communities including Birch Bay, Glacier, Kendall, Maple Falls, and Semiahmoo.

Figure 1: Map of Whatcom County, WA



## Population and demographics

### Whatcom County

Whatcom County's estimated 2022 population is 231,650. 63% of residents live in rural communities (unincorporated, Everson, Nooksack, and Sumas), and 37% in urban areas, with the biggest city being Bellingham (population: 93,910).<sup>1</sup>

### People with Special Transportation Needs

Any mode used by those defined as transportation-disadvantaged is considered special transportation. *Transportation-disadvantaged people are those who are unable to transport themselves due to physical or cognitive limitations, income status, or age (RCW 81.66.010).*

People who are not legally able to drive, do not have access to a functioning personal vehicle; those who require a mobility device to safely travel; those who may need assistance in

<sup>1</sup> April 1, 2022 Population of Cities, Towns and Counties, WA State Office of Financial Management, Forecasting and Research Division <https://ofm.wa.gov/washington-data-research/population-demographics/population-estimates/april-1-official-population-estimates>

navigating the transit network; and those whose living conditions or locations prevent them from easily accessing transportation options are all included in this need.

The challenges that transportation-disadvantaged people face are serious and affect many aspects of their lives. From getting to and from work on time, to attending school; doctors' appointments, picking up groceries and prescriptions, meeting with friends and assistance providers – all these basic transportation needs are often an overwhelming obstacle for residents due to their age, income, or disability.

To serve those in our community with special transportation needs, a robust public transportation system is required. Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA), the county's public transit agency, is the primary service provider for transportation-disadvantaged people. But just providing a countywide bus network isn't enough to provide equitable, safe, reliable, and affordable transportation. Well known additional human service transportation strategies include school bus systems, vans, and other private services for the elderly.

## Age

43% of Whatcom County’s population, an estimated 98,000 individuals, fall under the category of potentially needing special transportation (over 65 years of age and under 18 years of age.)<sup>2</sup>. As shown in **Figure 2**, Whatcom County’s population of seniors has risen dramatically, more than statewide, increasing 73% over 2010 population numbers. And 28% of the county’s population is below the legal driving age.

**Figure 2: Changes in Whatcom County & WA State Population by Age**

Source: WA State Office of Financial Management, Forecasting and Research Division: <https://ofm.wa.gov/washington-data-research/population-demographics/population-estimates/estimates-april-1-population-age-sex-race-and-hispanic-origin>

	Washington State			Whatcom County		
	2010	2021	Δ	2010	2021	Δ
<b>Total Population</b>	6,724,540	7,766,975	16%	201,140	226,300	13%
<b>Age Groups</b>						
0-4	439,657	434,901	-1%	11,337	11,403	1%
5-9	429,877	480,221	12%	11,265	12,998	15%
10-14	438,233	486,011	11%	12,059	13,564	12%
15-19	462,128	467,405	1%	15,905	13,882	-13%
20-24	461,512	502,213	9%	20,277	19,153	-6%
25-29	480,398	547,883	14%	14,019	14,115	1%
30-34	453,383	547,539	21%	12,150	12,893	6%
35-39	448,607	539,311	20%	11,676	13,134	12%
40-44	459,698	499,129	9%	12,319	13,229	7%
45-49	492,909	458,744	-7%	13,532	12,755	-6%
50-54	495,296	481,831	-3%	13,797	13,796	0%
55-59	453,078	485,316	7%	13,828	14,182	3%
60-64	382,087	492,371	29%	12,336	15,172	23%
65-69	270,474	448,682	66%	8,760	14,785	69%
70-74	186,746	370,830	99%	5,908	12,970	120%
75-79	142,068	237,822	67%	4,563	8,401	84%
80-84	111,118	143,674	29%	3,666	5,040	37%
85 +	117,271	143,092	22%	3,743	4,826	29%
<b>19 + Under</b>	1,769,895	1,868,538	6%	50,566	51,847	3%
	<b>% of total 2021 pop.</b>	<b>24%</b>		<b>% of total 2021 pop.</b>	<b>23%</b>	
<b>65 + Above</b>	827,677	1,344,100	62%	26,640	46,023	73%
	<b>% of total 2021 pop.</b>	<b>17%</b>		<b>% of total 2021 pop.</b>	<b>20%</b>	

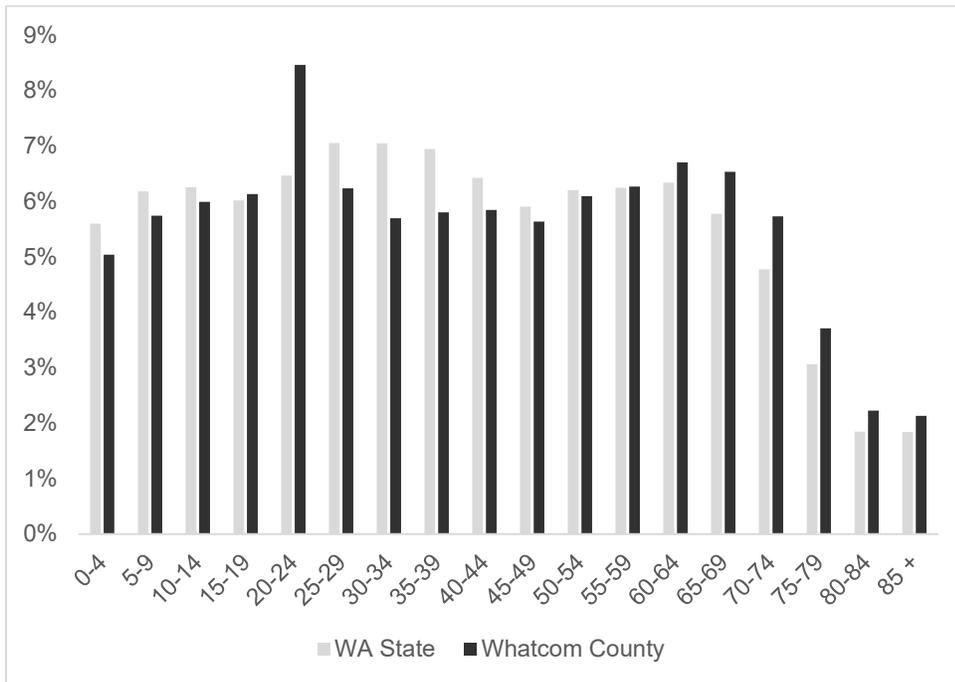
<sup>2</sup> Population Estimates by Age and Sex, January 2022, WA State Office of Financial Management, Forecasting and Research Division: <https://ofm.wa.gov/washington-data-research/population-demographics/population-estimates/estimates-april-1-population-age-sex-race-and-hispanic-origin>

**Figure 3** illustrates both the higher Whatcom proportions of senior residents but also emphasizes Whatcom County’s large proportion of post-secondary education students. Over 28,000 students live in Whatcom County while attending Western Washington University, Whatcom Community College, and Bellingham Technical College.

Children and seniors live in all income bracket groups. But it is important to note that 12% of children under the age of 18 and 9% of seniors over the age of 65 live below the poverty level.<sup>3</sup> This makes them more likely to face daily transportation challenges.

**Figure 3: Whatcom County & WA State Population by Age Group, 2021**

Source: WA State Office of Financial Management, Forecasting and Research Division: <https://ofm.wa.gov/washington-data-research/population-demographics/population-estimates/estimates-april-1-population-age-sex-race-and-hispanic-origin>



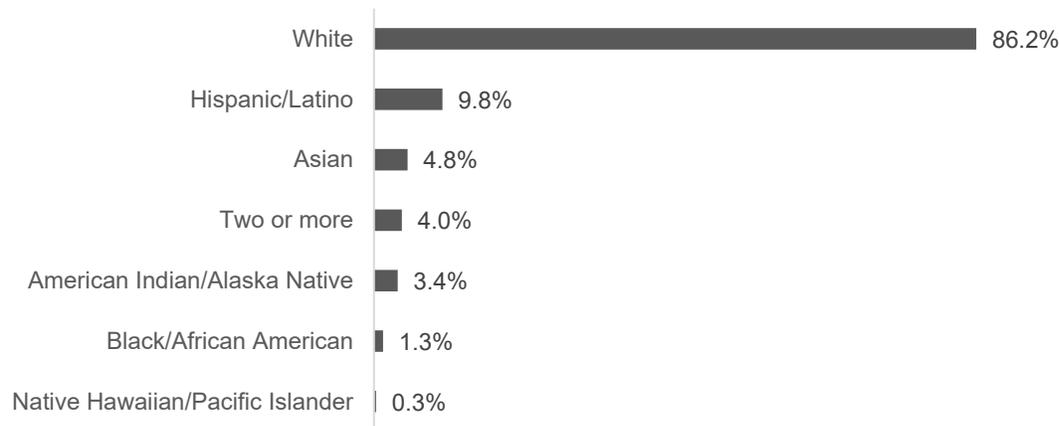
<sup>3</sup> American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2020, U.S. Census Bureau: <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/05000US53073-whatcom-county-wa/>

## Ethnicity

Whatcom County's population is predominantly White (86%), with approximately 14% of the population identifying with a different race or Hispanic Origin as shown in **Figure 4**.

Figure 4: Race and Hispanic Origin, Whatcom County, 2021

Source: Population Estimates, American Community Survey, U.S. Census, 2021:  
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/whatcomcountywashington>



12% of Whatcom County households speak a language in addition to/other than English at home, with the second most used language being Spanish.<sup>4</sup>

Challenges that persons of color (POC) face in Whatcom County range include greater income disparity and poorer health outcomes. The Community Needs Assessment completed in 2021 noted that POC who responded to their survey had higher rates of employment income loss during the COVID-19 pandemic (55%) compared to those respondents who were white only (40%)<sup>5</sup>.

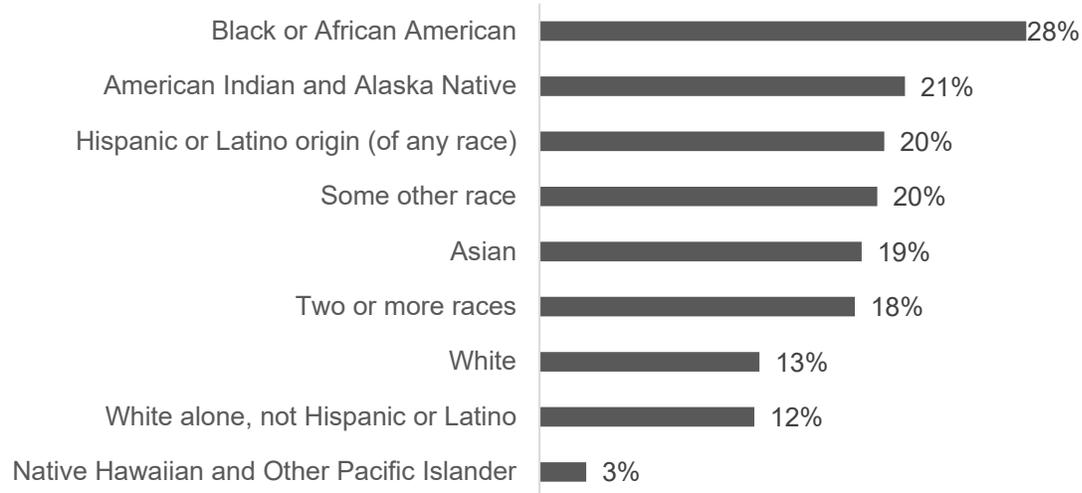
POC also had higher poverty rates than whites (excluding Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders) as shown in **Figure 5**.

<sup>4</sup> American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2020, U.S. Census Bureau:  
<https://censusreporter.org/profiles/05000US53073-whatcom-county-wa/>

<sup>5</sup> Prosperity Project 2021: A Community Needs Assessment, Aug 2021, Opportunity Council:  
[https://www.opcco.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Community-Needs-Assessment\\_09.15.21.pdf](https://www.opcco.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Community-Needs-Assessment_09.15.21.pdf)

Figure 5: Percentage of Whatcom County Residents Living Below Federal Poverty Level by Race and Hispanic Origin

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2020, U.S. Census Bureau:  
<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?t=Poverty&q=0500000US53073&tid=ACST5Y2020.S1703>



Compared to White persons in Whatcom County, Indigenous and migrant farmworkers have lower life expectancies at birth (White life expectancy at birth is 81.43 years; Indigenous population is 69.29 years; Migrant Farmworkers is 49 years).<sup>6</sup>

## Income Levels

14% of Whatcom County’s population live below the poverty line, a higher rate than the state average (10%) and the national average (13%).<sup>7</sup>

Income inequality is a reality in Whatcom County, where high-income residents in the top 5% earn 8.2 times more than the remaining 95% of the rest of Whatcom County. 54% of Whatcom County residents who filed taxes earn \$50,000 or less each year, with 31% earning under \$25,000 annually<sup>8</sup>.

The challenges for low-income households in Whatcom County have increased since the COVID-19 pandemic. A Community Needs Assessment completed by the Opportunity Council

<sup>6</sup> Racial Disparities in Whatcom County, January 2021, Chuckanut Health Foundation:  
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d12727cc999d40001434e6e/t/600b244531b83f4fd99095a1/1611342917904/Racial+Disparities+In+Whatcom+County+v1.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2020, U.S. Census Bureau:  
<https://censusreporter.org/profiles/05000US53073-whatcom-county-wa/>

<sup>8</sup> SOI Tax Stats County Data, 2019, U.S. Internal Revenue Service: <https://www.irs.gov/statistics/soi-tax-stats-county-data-2019>

in 2021 reported that 38% of surveyed households experienced a loss of employment income since March of 2020<sup>9</sup>.

The 22% increase in homeless persons in the county between 2020 and 2021 is also illustrative of the difficulties faced by low-income households. 859 individuals from 625 households experienced homelessness in Whatcom County as counted in the 2021 point in time survey completed last year. 75% of those individuals were sheltered (staying in emergency shelters or a transitional housing facility the night before the count). 25% spent the night before outdoors or in vehicles. And the number of families with children living in motels increased by 50% in 2021 (96)<sup>10</sup>.

Homeless families with children, referred to as families in transition (FIT), are also evidence of income disparity, high housing costs, and other equity challenges in the region. There are over 33,300 students in Washington State that are homeless, as defined by the McKinney-Vento Act:

*Individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence including children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping groups due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement; children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private space not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings; children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and migratory children who qualify as homeless.*

## People with Disabilities

Over 16,000 Whatcom County residents (7% of the population) are classified as working age individuals with disabilities<sup>11</sup>. Of those, an estimated 2,700 residents in Whatcom County may have a developmental disability<sup>12</sup>. These individuals live in various residential settings, from their own homes to supported living or skilled nursing facilities, group homes, and other settings. Many of these may not be easily accessible by public transit.

Paratransit service provided by Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA) is available for those whose disability prevents them from riding fixed route buses and serves individuals

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<sup>9</sup> Prosperity Project 2021: A Community Needs Assessment, Aug 2021, Opportunity Council:

[https://www.opcco.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Community-Needs-Assessment\\_09.15.21.pdf](https://www.opcco.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Community-Needs-Assessment_09.15.21.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> A Home for Everyone: Whatcom County Coalition to End Homelessness 2021 Annual Report, July 2021, Whatcom County Health Department: <https://www.whatcomcounty.us/DocumentCenter/View/57826/PIT2021>

<sup>11</sup> Disability & DVR Statistics Report, July 2017, WA State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation: <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/sites/default/files/dvr/pdf/2017%20Disability%20%26%20DVR%20Statistics%20Report.pdf>

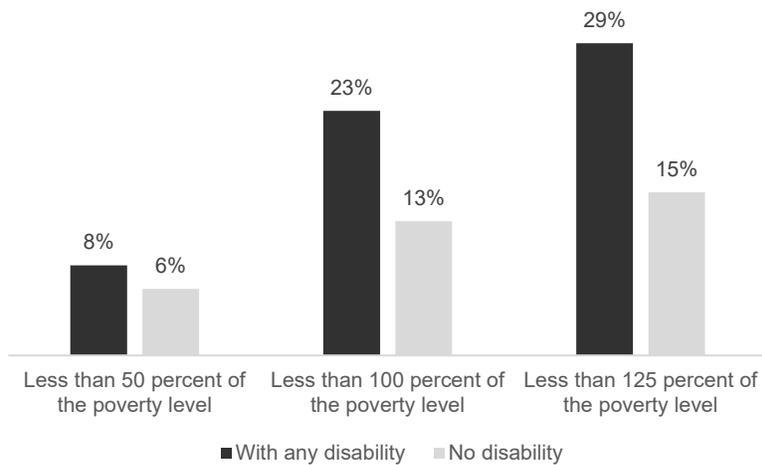
<sup>12</sup> Whatcom County Developmental Disabilities 5 Year Plan, 2019-2024, July 2019, Whatcom County Health Department: <https://www.whatcomcounty.us/DocumentCenter/View/18368/2019-24-Whatcom-County-Developmental-Disabilities-Plan>

living within .75 miles of a fixed route. In 2021, over 128,000 boardings were made using WTA paratransit<sup>13</sup>.

People with disabilities are more likely to live below the poverty level. As shown in **Figure 6**, almost 30% of individuals with a disability live on less than 125% of the U.S. poverty level (\$26,500 in 2021). This is nearly double the comparable number of individuals without a disability.

Figure 6: Percentage of Whatcom County Disabled Residents at Various Poverty Levels

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2020, U.S. Census Bureau:  
<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?t=Poverty&g=0500000US53073&tid=ACST5Y2020.S1703>



## Common Origins and Destinations of People with Special Transportation Needs

### Origins

Although *trip origins* in transportation planning typically refers to a starting point of any trip, for the purposes of this plan, *trip origins* will more narrowly refer to **where special needs transportation service users live**.

Using data from the American Community Survey of 2021, a map was developed to show the percentage of special transportation populations live (see **Figures 7-10**). These maps also have WTA fixed routes included as a layer to illustrate where WTA service may be missing. An interactive version of the map is available at:

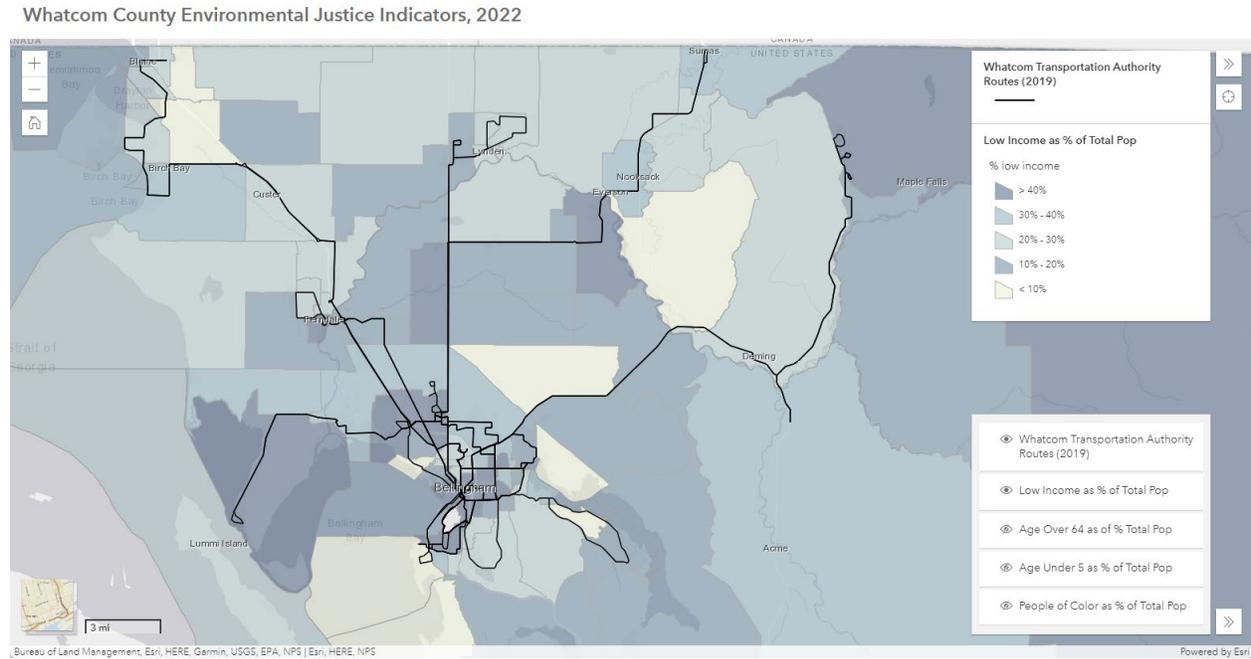
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<sup>13</sup> Whatcom Transportation Authority Service Performance Report, 2021, WTA:  
<http://www.ridewta.com/Published%20Docs/2021%20-%20Annual%20Performance%20Report.pdf>

<https://wcog.maps.arcgis.com/apps/instant/basic/index.html?appid=0faedcefb716423ca8deb6f3b0183915>.

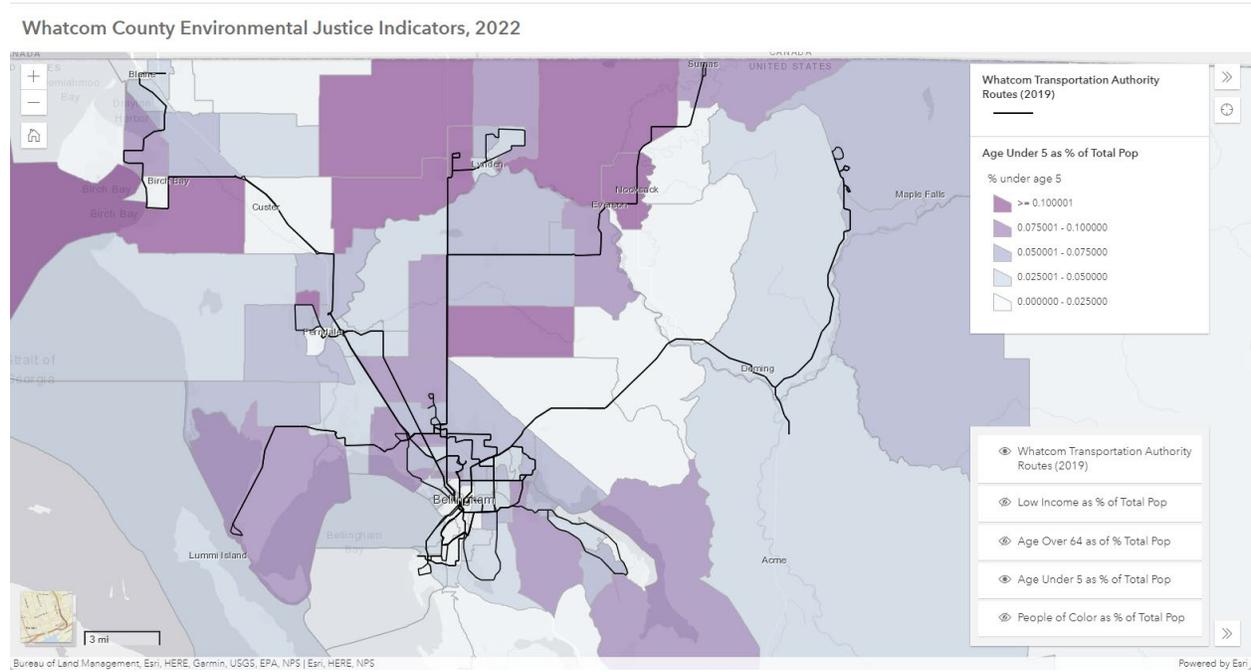
It is important to note that, while these summaries may help with prioritizing certain investments, individuals with special needs live everywhere. Therefore, the overall goal is for all transportation system components and services within Whatcom County to be accessible by everyone.

Figure 7: Public Transportation Dependent Populations, Low Income



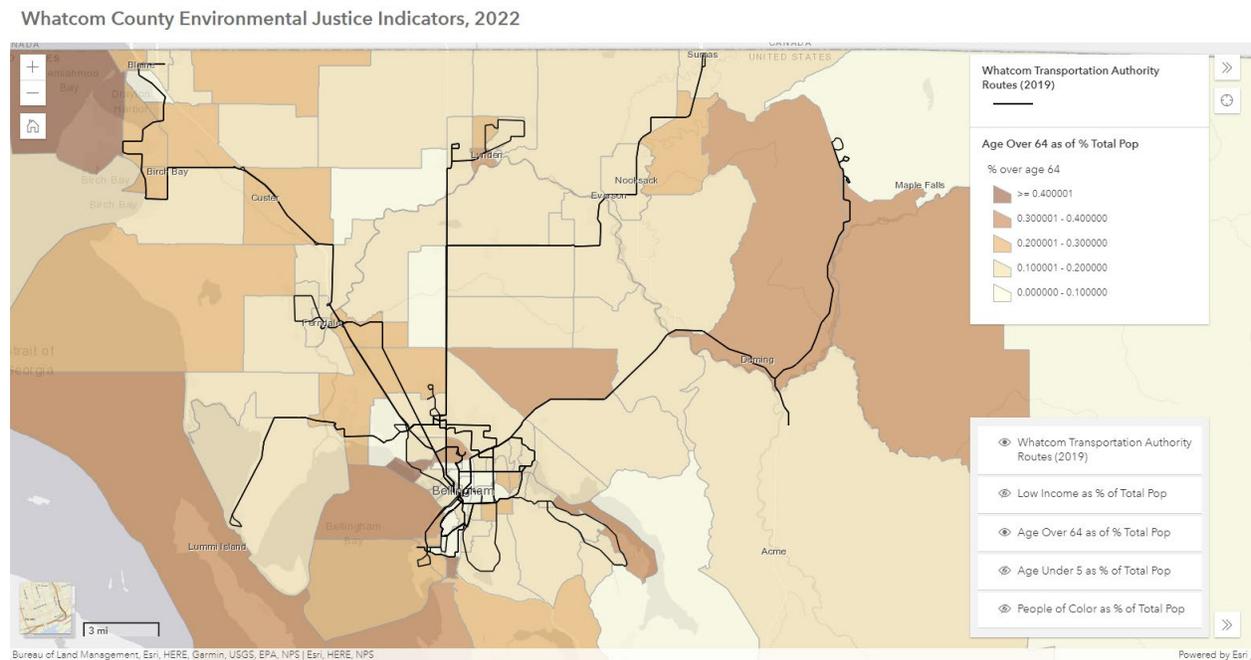
Source: EJScreen Demographic Indicators, 2021 Dataset, US Environmental Protection Agency:  
<https://www.epa.gov/ejscreen/overview-demographic-indicators-ejscreen>

Figure 8: Public Transportation Dependent Populations, Age Under 5



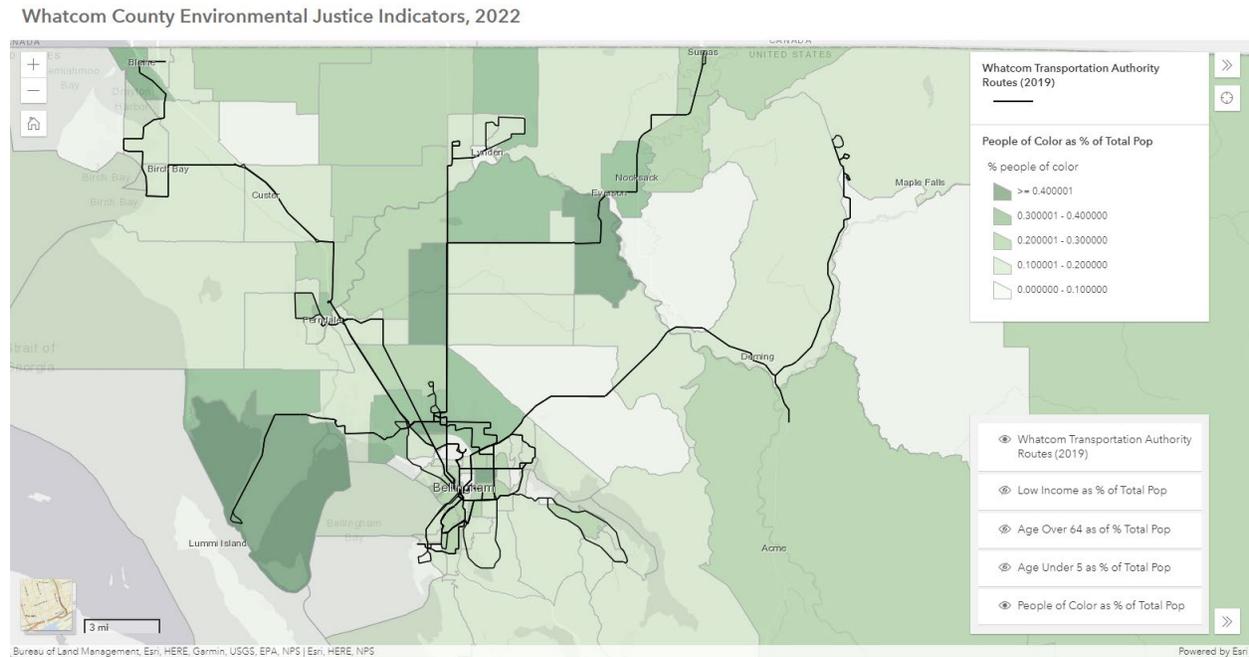
Source: EJScreen Demographic Indicators, 2021 Dataset, US Environmental Protection Agency:  
<https://www.epa.gov/ejscreen/overview-demographic-indicators-ejscreen>

Figure 9: Public Transportation Dependent Populations, Age Over 64



Source: EJScreen Demographic Indicators, 2021 Dataset, US Environmental Protection Agency:  
<https://www.epa.gov/ejscreen/overview-demographic-indicators-ejscreen>

Figure 10: Public Transportation Dependent Populations, People of Color



Source: EJScreen Demographic Indicators, 2021 Dataset, US Environmental Protection Agency:  
<https://www.epa.gov/ejscreen/overview-demographic-indicators-ejscreen>

## Destinations

People with special transportation needs travel to the same places as everyone else: employment sites, childcare facilities, schools, medical services, commercial areas, recreation areas, and more. Some special needs residents may travel more frequently to sites with specific services, including vocational training, medical and rehabilitation centers, senior and assisted living centers, residential shelters, and agency offices (i.e., DSHS).

The majority of all these destinations are in urban centers, primarily Bellingham. Other facilities are available in surrounding cities like Lynden, Ferndale, and Blaine.

## Considerations for Prioritization

Based on the census tract data relating to origins, and the locations of commo destinations, the following observations are worth noting:

- Services are predominantly located in Bellingham. While accessing locations by transit is easier within the city, for those individuals coming from outside of Bellingham there may be challenges ranging from carrying large loads of groceries, to trying to get to a place of employment before or after bus service is available.

- There are not many grocery stores or pharmacies in East Whatcom County, and the few locations that do have commercial services are not well connected by existing transit services.

# 4. Assessment of transportation services

## Existing transportation services

The full scope of the transportation system serving the Whatcom region is described the *Way to Go, Whatcom: 2045 Regional/Metropolitan Transportation Plan*:

<https://waytogowhatcom.org/system/>

While the predominant form of transportation in Whatcom is personal vehicles, there are numerous other options operating in the region. Highlighted services listed below include transit services that the U.S. Federal Transit Administration (FTA) refers to as a “family of transportation services.” Mobility management programs are also considered part of this family.

For those needing special transportation, the cost, accessibility, and/or schedule of these services impact their usefulness.

## Transit & Bus Services

Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA)

WTA is the public transportation provider for Whatcom County. They operate a variety of bus and van services:

- **Fixed route bus service:** 28 routes are served by a fleet of buses serving regular stops on a published schedule. Fare is \$1.00 per ride for the general public and \$0.50 for those with a reduced fare card or over 65 years of age. Youth aged 18 and under, or still enrolled in high school, and seniors over 75, ride fare-free. Both Western Washington University (WWU) students and Whatcom Community College (WCC) students all receive bus passes that may be used on all WTA routes.
- **Paratransit:** WTA’s paratransit service provides door-to-door transportation to riders whose disability prevents them from riding the fixed route bus system. Paratransit pickups and drop-offs may occur within  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile of any fixed route, and the hours of operation mirror those of fixed routes. This service is available for those who qualify only.
- **On demand:** WTA offers an on-demand service in specific areas – currently only in Lynden city limits. Rides may be hailed using a mobile app, online, or by phone, and fares match fixed-route service. Hours of operation are 7:15am to 7:30pm during the week and 8:00am to 5:30pm on weekends. All vans are wheelchair accessible.

- **Flex service:** Certain routes may venture off-route within specific flex service areas. These better serve rural areas where fixed schedule bus stops are few and far between. Three routes currently offer flex service., No additional fare is charged. Reservations are required.
- **Zone service:** WTA's zone service provides limited transit service to rural areas of Whatcom County. Anyone in these designated areas may request a ride. Rides require advanced reservations and are only available to each zone on certain days of the week.
- **County connector:** WTA partners with Skagit Transit and Island Transit to provide public transportation connections between Whatcom, Skagit, Island, and Snohomish Counties. Both WTA and Skagit Transit serve the 80x portion of the connector (between Bellingham and Mt. Vernon).
- **Vanpool:** The vanpool program allows groups of people (three per day minimum) to lease a WTA-owned van for the purpose of commuting to and from a common worksite. The group as a whole pays a fee based on monthly mileage.

## Lummi Nation Transit

The Lummi Nation provides wheelchair-accessible, fare-free public transit. Routes connect the reservation to the City of Ferndale and connect to WTA's #50 route to Bellingham. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Lummi Transit operated an on-demand service with mixed results. Full regular, fixed-route service is once again in place, although the routes are flexible and may be able to assist tribal members with more door-to-door service as needed.

## School District Bus Services

Each of Whatcom County's eight public school districts provides bus service to bring students to and from regularly scheduled classes, and for extra-curricular activities and sporting events.

School districts are also responsible for providing transportation to students currently living outside the district due to a variety of circumstances, including being a family in transition, foster care, or another factor.

## Private School Shuttles

Of the 28 private schools in Whatcom County, only five provide bus or van shuttle services. Lynden Christian School is the largest with over 1,000 students. Some schools offer special programs or activities that result in students traveling several miles each way.

## Intercity Buses

Several private companies offer service between Whatcom County and other regions in WA State and the country.

**Airporter Shuttle/Bellair Charters** provides service along the I-5 Corridor between Bellingham and SeaTac Airport. As well as seasonal services to Mt. Baker ski area.

Their schedule provides an efficient connection between Whatcom and other regions, but the price may be too high for some potential riders.

**Greyhound** provides trips from Bellingham to many destinations through Washington State and the rest of the United States, with up to five trips a day are made along the I-5 corridor.

**Flixbus** includes direct routes from Western Washington University in Bellingham to Vancouver B.C., Everett, and both downtown and the University of Washington in Seattle.

Ticket prices for these options are lower than rail but may still be prohibitive for some travelers.

## **Passenger Rail**

### Amtrak Cascades

In a typical year, Amtrak Cascades offers passenger rail service between Seattle and Vancouver, B.C. twice a day. This service is funded jointly by Amtrak, the WA State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), and the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT).

Ridership declined during the pandemic, and service has been limited to thru-way buses as of the writing of this plan. Amtrak has announced it will resume rail service in September 2022.

For people with special transportation needs, rail service provides some inter-county connectivity to Mt. Vernon, Stanwood, Everett, Lynnwood, and Seattle. However, the two-trips/day schedule limits its usefulness. Ticket prices may also be too high for many.

## **Air Travel**

Regular flights from Bellingham to Seattle, San Juan Islands, and other destinations across the country are provided by Alaska, Southwest, Allegiant, and San Juan Airlines.

Charter flights may also be arranged to and from Bellingham.

## **Ferry Service**

### Whatcom Chief

The Whatcom Chief car ferry provides multiple trips per day between Lummi Reservation and Lummi Island. The ferry is operated by Whatcom County Public Works.

The County is in discussion with the Lummi Nation to look at infrastructure (dock) options for the ferry.

Fares are discounted for needs-based vehicles with drivers who need assistance based on age, disability, or income, and full-time students. Children under the age of 19 and Lummi tribal members ride fare-free.

The ferry may also provide special trips after regularly scheduled runs as needed.

## Non-Emergency Medical Transportation

### Northwest Regional Council

The Northwest Regional Council (NWRC) is Medicaid brokerage for Whatcom, Skagit, Island, and San Juan counties. They provide transportation to medical appointments. The most cost-effective transportation option is public transit, but in many instances NWRC uses alternative modes such as taxi (considered an ambulatory ride) or a cabulance (a non-ambulatory ride). In some instances, NWRC pays to taxi individuals between Bellingham and Seattle to receive specialized treatment, which can cost over \$500.

### Medical Transportation

Private non-emergency ambulance services such as Cascade Ambulance and Rural Metro are available to transport people to both local and distant hospitals and medical centers.

Medical flights and helicopters also operate out of Bellingham and can transport critical patients to emergency care hospital facilities. Medical emergencies in San Juan County may be transported by helicopter to St. Joseph Hospital in Bellingham, as well as to hospitals in other counties.

### VFW VA Hospital Shuttle

The VFW offers a free weekday shuttle service for Whatcom County residents who have Seattle-area hospital appointments. The van was purchased through fundraising by VFW volunteers. Volunteers also serve as drivers. Insurance and maintenance of the shuttle are provided by the Veteran's Administration.

The VA shuttle is **not wheelchair accessible**.

## Vans, Shuttles, and Cars

### Taxi Services

Various taxicab companies, limousine services, and transportation network companies (TNCs) like Uber and Lyft serve the region.

There are no wheelchair-accessible taxis in Whatcom County.

### Ride-Share Services

Internet-based carpool matching services are available. Individuals must register and make contacts through a service to share commute trips or for special events. As examples, carpool partners can be found with the [icarpool](#) app, and the website [rideshareonline.com](https://rideshareonline.com).

In addition, Western Washington University works with the [Waze Carpool](#) app to coordinate trips for students and employees. The university's Transportation Office may also help locate employee carpool partners.

## Community Group Transportation Services

Many places of worship, summer camps, assisted living residences, and non-profit organizations operate van or bus services to assist members of the community or organization members to attend events. Some of these services are operated on a volunteer basis. Hotels and casinos also offer shuttle services.

## Rental Vehicles

Rental companies offer personal cars and trucks, minivans, and shuttle buses to individuals and organizations as needed.

There are no rental cars that are wheelchair-accessible in Whatcom County.

## Bicycle Rentals

Bike rentals are available through many of the bike stores in Whatcom County, as well as companies like [Sun-E-Land Bikes](#) that rent e-bikes in Whatcom, Skagit, and Island counties.

# Transportation Services that Work

Interviews with regional stakeholders revealed what components of the public transit system are functioning well in serving those with special transportation needs.

**WTA's fixed route system** was hailed by many as an effective service within the urban areas. Frequency of service, the helpfulness of drivers, and access to free bus passes were listed as some of the reasons for this praise. Additional appreciation was given to some of the new technologies available for tracking bus locations, the advance notice for paratransit pick-ups, and the use of digital bus passes.

In addition, aspects of **WTA's paratransit service** also received acknowledgement.

**Transportation business partners** were called out for their willingness to work with county and state agencies, including local taxi companies, car repair companies like Les Schwab and Rising Sun Motors, and driving schools like Nelson's. When needed, school districts have successfully relied on taxi services for transporting children outside their existing service area.

**Amtrak Cascades** provides an accommodating atmosphere and easy access for wheelchairs and service dogs.

**Urban infrastructure** modifications such as crosswalks and new bike lanes were mentioned positively.

*Example 1: Disabled veteran going to the VA Clinic*

John, a U.S. Army veteran, must visit a doctor at the VA clinic in Mt. Vernon. He uses a wheelchair. Here are his options if he departs from the downtown Bellingham Station:

Service	Public transit
Depart time	7:40am (from transit center)
Number of segments	4 total: Home to transit center via bus or ride / Skagit 80x / Skagit #206 / walk .2 miles
Arrive time	8:41am
Total travel time	1 hour
Total cost	Approx. \$3
Possible to return same day?	Yes

Because WTA and Skagit Transit both have wheelchair-accessible buses for the 80x route, John can travel between Bellingham and Mt. Vernon to the VA clinic. However, there is a component that would require him to use his wheelchair on sidewalks to reach his destination (.2 miles).



**This trip can be completed with public transit.**

## Feedback from the Public Engagement Survey

1,970 individual responses were collected in WCOG's 2021 Public Engagement Survey. Respondents were a close representation of the larger Whatcom County population in terms of ethnicity and income level, although the population making less than \$25,000 were under-represented in survey results. The survey had a higher proportion of older respondents as compared to the actual population of Whatcom County. And a total of 11% of all respondents indicated that they or someone in their household uses a mobility device.

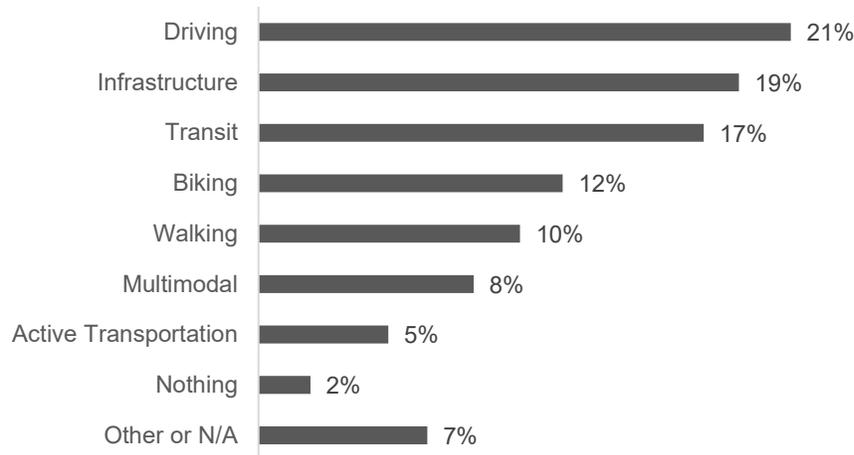
As a result, the respondents to the survey represent a good portion of individuals who may have special transportation needs (with the note that the percentage of respondents with income below the poverty level was less than the actual sub-poverty level population).

Respondents reported the highest approval for driving, existing infrastructure, and transit, as shown in **Figure 11**. For driving, the lack of congestion and access were specifically identified by many as strong points for the region. When asked for further explanation of what works well in the category of infrastructure, roads received the highest ranking followed by trails. Similarly, respondents that specified transit as being a success for the region specified that the level of service and access were strong points.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Public Engagement Survey for Whatcom County, 2021: Whatcom Council of Governments: <https://wcog.org/>

Figure 11: Transportation System Components in Whatcom that Work Well

Source: [Public Engagement Survey for Whatcom County, 2021](#); Whatcom Council of Governments: <https://wcog.org/>



## Transportation System Gaps

### Public Transit

Although WTA's fixed and paratransit route services received praise, there were also several issues brought up by stakeholders. The most common concerns were:

- Frequency of service to rural communities
- Hours of operation (late nights/early mornings/weekend hours)
- Access to bus stops
- Over an hour window of arrival times for paratransit
- Limited paratransit service area
- Multiple agencies' need for additional free bus passes to distribute to clients

WTA is aware of these challenges. Their *2040 WTA Long Range Transit Plan* concentrates on advancing equity within the community that is efficient and supports environmental goals. They intend to *"focus on providing access to opportunities and service to those who need it the most in the community."*<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> [WTA 2040 Long Range Transit Plan](http://www.ridewta.com/Documents/WTA2040.pdf), February 2022, Whatcom Transportation Authority: <http://www.ridewta.com/Documents/WTA2040.pdf>

In the WTA Plan, Goal 3 is to improve accessibility and mobility for priority populations. These strategies include:

- Partner with institutions, agencies, and municipalities to support low barrier fare policies that decrease transportation barriers for priority populations.
- Ensure all bus stops are ADA-accessible by 2040.
- Seek alternative funding sources, such as local, state, and federal grants to build ADA-accessible bus stops and to purchase and install bicycle and pedestrian amenities.
- Create an “Access to Transit” fund to support local projects that improve sidewalks, crossings, and other pedestrian infrastructure at bus stops.
- As new resources become available, focus them on areas serving priority populations.
- Advocate for land use policies that locate low-income housing and social services near frequent transit service.
- Ensure trip planning materials and other essential communications are accessible to people with disabilities, low literacy, low English proficiency, etc.
- Create a community rideshare program and support community groups that provide ridesharing options to priority populations.
- Revise service standards to incorporate equity measures and other adjustments to account for new data sources.

### The challenge of paratransit

Users of WTA’s paratransit services typically expressed appreciation for the program and an understanding of the costs inherent in providing such a service. Paratransit presents specific challenges to transit agencies, including but not limited to the following:

**Expense** – Paratransit costs six times more per rider than fixed route services and represents 33% of WTA’s total operating expenses.

**Flexibility vs. reliability** – One of the most repeated comments was a frustration in the scheduling of paratransit routes. Riders may have to wait up to an hour for pickup. This is partially due to paratransit’s route flexibility and ability to pick up and drop passengers off as needed. While more vehicles and trained drivers would alleviate this concern, the costs may be prohibitive.

**Cross-county travel** – Paratransit riders may have a need to get to a location outside of Whatcom County; however, the connectivity between Skagit Transit and WTA’s paratransit services is not like that of fixed route services. WTA is conducting a study of cross-county paratransit needs this year.

*Example 2: Medical appointment in Seattle*

Jane, who lives in Lynden, has a doctor’s appointment in Seattle. But she doesn’t have a personal vehicle or friend who is able to drive her at the scheduled time. Here are her options:

Service	Greyhound	Public transit	Amtrak	Uber/Lyft
<b>Depart time</b>	7:18am	7:18am	8:25am	Any time
<b>Number of segments</b>	6 total: WTA #26/ WTA #15/ WTA#1/ Greyhound LA/ CT #512/ Metro #345	6 total: WTA #26/ WTA #15/ WTA #80x/ ST #90x/ CT #512/ Metro #345	5 total: WTA #26/ WTA #232/ WTA #1/ Amtrak #5606/ ST E Line/ walk <i>half a mile</i>	1
<b>Arrive time</b>	11:45am	1:17pm	2:24pm	2 hours later
<b>Total travel time</b>	4.5 hours	6 hours	6 hours	2 hours
<b>Total cost</b>	Approx. \$30	Approx. \$10	Approx. #40	Approx. \$210
<b>Possible to return same day?</b>	Yes, using Bolt Bus and arriving at Lynden bus stop by 6:00pm; total cost over \$65	Yes, total travel will be approx. 4.5 hours and arriving at Lynden bus stop by 8:27pm	No	Yes – total travel cost will be over \$400

Jane must spend an exorbitant amount of money (hundreds of dollars), or she must take the entire day (12-hour minimum travel time with 5-6 transfers each direction) to make her appointment. Her appointment can only be scheduled for a one-hour window in the afternoon.

**✘ There are no viable options for making this trip without a car.**

## Mobility management projects

The Whatcom Council of Governments’ Whatcom Smart Trips program receives mobility management funding to conduct county-wide bus and bicycle travel training for 7<sup>th</sup> graders and seniors in partnership with WTA, school districts, and area senior centers.

After the 2018 HSTP identified a lack of knowledge about riding fixed route transit, WTA received Consolidated Grant funding to offer mobility management and travel training for seniors and persons with disabilities.

## Collaboration efforts

The Whatcom Unified Emergency Operations Center is a collaborative effort between the Whatcom County Sherriff’s Office Division of Emergency Management and the City of Bellingham Office of Emergency Management. The City of Bellingham maintains its [Emergency Operations Plan](#), and Whatcom County has its [Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan](#). Both plans acknowledge the need for coordination of transportation during emergencies, especially for vulnerable populations, and both entities have established agreements with WTA for emergency use of transit vehicles and drivers if needed.

## Service gaps and unmet transportation needs

The following table includes stakeholder responses to the question, “*which transportation services have gaps or issues that you would like to see addressed?*” Responses that were similar in nature are only listed once.

### Access

Challenging wheelchair accessibility of multiple roadway and parking locations

No way for someone needing wheelchair to stay out past 8:30 – no taxis, no transit

Gaps in the pedestrian network and access to bus stops

Lack of safe pedestrian/bicycle routes to park facilities

Accessible spots on bus quickly fill with strollers, walkers, wheelchairs; too few fold-up seats

Hospitals discharge patients after hours leaves them stranded; minimal taxi availability

Transportation a barrier for reaching substance abuse centers, mental health clinics, and testing locations; the more difficult transportation is, the more likely treatment fails

No wheelchair-accessible transportation to the VA clinic or hospital

Minimal good bike racks at senior facilities

Pedestrian-safe connections between new county residential communities not required

Number of individual cars driving students to and from school creates traffic problems

Lummi Ferry doesn't always meet schedule due to docks and ferry itself (infrastructure)

## Transit

There aren't enough buses to and from rural communities to urban centers

Fixed route has limited hours of operation, and limited weekend coverage

Connections between smaller cities must go through Bellingham (e.g., no direct Lynden to Ferndale service)

Paratransit service doesn't extend beyond 3/4ths of a mile

Paratransit limited to the flex route schedule, which may be limited to two days a week

Paratransit pickup/drop off window for rural regions is 1-1.5 hours and doesn't run past 7pm, so cutoff for service is 5 or 6pm

Paratransit pickup window makes work schedules difficult

Hospital and medical corridors are only served by one bus route with long gaps in schedule

There aren't enough routes between low-income apartments and the food bank

The East Whatcom bus route doesn't go into downtown Maple Falls

WTA doesn't go to all the Opportunity Council locations

There are safety concerns on the bus regarding other passengers

There are safety concerns about the downtown station for parents/family of developmentally disabled riders

Agencies run out of free bus passes

It's an administrative challenge to re-issue bus passes to those who get them through services

Many elderly riders don't qualify for paratransit yet need medical transportation

Some people may have a challenge scheduling on-demand trips in advance

Lack of awareness of all Lummi Transit services and features

No consistent definition of what a "trip" consists of between transit agencies

Transit's PTBA boundary limitations affect ability to serve certain communities

## Limited Options

Transportation Network Companies are not available throughout entire county

Hard to hire drivers and call-takers for Medicaid-qualified individuals

Transportation difficult for people with COVID

Transportation options have decreased since COVID (no Bolt Bus, no Amtrak train)

## Equity

Housing more affordable in the county, but less accessible

Hard to plan trips days ahead to get to food bank

Food access barriers for East County residents (travel long distance with perishables)

Demand exceeds Medicaid transport and staff capacity

Medicaid clients can't choose what doctor to visit, and can't visit outside region

Many prohibitive requirements for state agencies to help with vehicle repair/gas payments

Getting an ID can be a challenge for many and needed for several transportation solutions.

Challenges in getting to appointments when homeless

Homeless individuals may get a temporary housing voucher for a hotel in Skagit County

Day laborers often work odd hours and must walk miles at night after shifts.

Transportation between homeless communities and services and the hospital is difficult

Individuals take an ambulance to hospital when unnecessary because have no transport to a non-emergency clinic

Picking up prescriptions can be enough of a hurdle for people to stop using them

Cabs and TNCs are cost-prohibitive

Lack of flexibility in school bus system – no system for alternative addresses

New student may miss up to 2 weeks while bus route finalized

No unified definition of paratransit qualifications between transit agencies

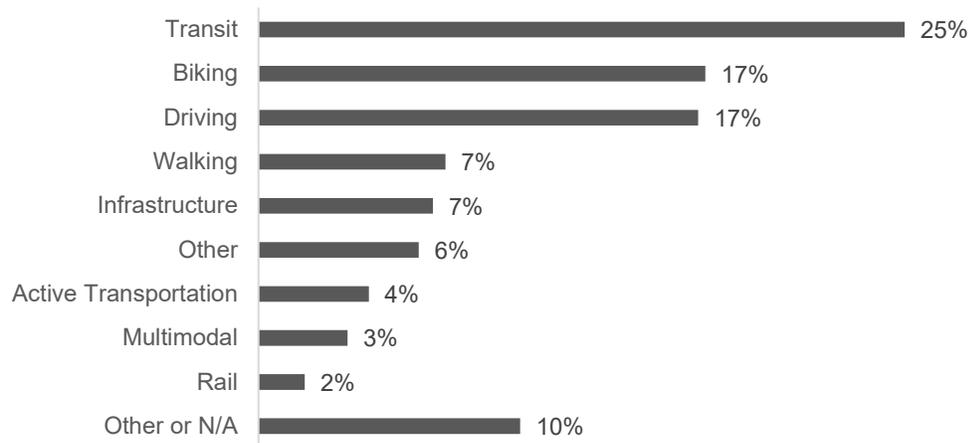
Elderly requiring medical/other transportation at night forced to make unsafe choice of driving at night (concerns of new locations in the dark)

## Responses from the Public Engagement Survey

Respondents to the Whatcom Public Engagement Survey were asked which transportation system components **don't** work well. Results are shown in **Figure 12**.

**Figure 12: Transportation System Components in Whatcom that Don't Work Well**

Source: Public Engagement Survey for Whatcom County, 2021: Whatcom Council of Governments: <https://wcog.org/>



The biggest concerns listed for transit included level of service, access, intra-regional mobility, and infrastructure.

Both biking and walking mode concerns focused on infrastructure and safety. Infrastructure concerns included primarily the quality of roads, traffic lights, and roundabouts.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Public Engagement Survey for Whatcom County, 2021: Whatcom Council of Governments: <https://wcog.org/>

## 5. COVID-19

The full impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on regional travel patterns are still unknown. At the time of writing this report, another wave of COVID-19 infections has transpired. However, many of the precautionary measures put in place in 2020 and 2021 have been eased in 2022.

### Impacts to Transit

#### Whatcom Transportation Authority

As transit is an essential service, WTA operated service throughout all stages of the pandemic, although with dramatically reduced ridership and measures in place to safely space passengers aboard vehicles.

WTA worked with the Whatcom County Health Department and followed official guidance to make transit travel as safe as possible. Steps included extra cleaning, suspending fare collection so riders could enter and exit through the rear door, adding extra buses, requiring riders to wear masks, and providing masks for those who needed them.

During the peak of the pandemic, from April 2020 to June 2021, WTA partnered with the Bellingham Food Bank to deliver an average of 85 boxes of food per week to people's homes.

One consequence of reduced fixed route service hours was the reduction in paratransit service. This impacted riders going to early morning dialysis. WTA made the decision to continue providing those rides for the duration of reduced service hours.

Ridership is still down from pre-pandemic levels. A large impact came from students at the region's university and colleges switching to online classes, as well as the loss of jobs and growth in the number of people working from home.

In July 2021 WTA re-established fare collection and in 2022 began rolling back most restrictions. Ridership is back on the rise, with 2022 numbers expected to be higher than those in the two previous years.

#### Lummi Transit

During the height of the pandemic, Lummi Transit switched to a temporary on-demand model, allowing individuals to request pickup and drop off at any location on the reservation and the surrounding service areas (Bellingham and Ferndale). The successes and challenges of this effort will illuminate future considerations of flexed routes and on-demand services.

### Impacts for Medicaid Patients

Transporting COVID-19 positive patients continues to be a challenge for medical transportation providers. Many of the services that operated prior to the pandemic will no longer drive clients who test positive.

This, in conjunction with the loss of taxi service businesses and drivers, and a reduced number of volunteer services, has resulted in difficulties for Medicaid brokerages in transporting clients when needed.

## Reductions in Options

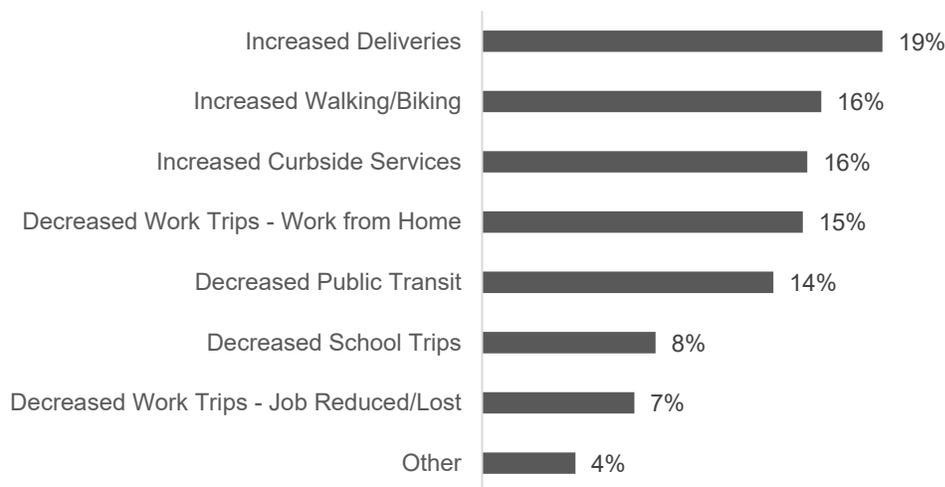
Some travel options were discontinued during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and never resumed. In addition to a reduction in available taxi services and changes in transit capacities, Zipcar car share services, based at Western Washington University, ceased operation during the pandemic and has not returned.

## Related Travel Changes

Respondents to the 2021 Public Engagement Survey were asked about changes in their households during the COVID-19 pandemic. The biggest changes were seen in increased deliveries, with 19% of respondents mentioning the change (see **Figure 13**).

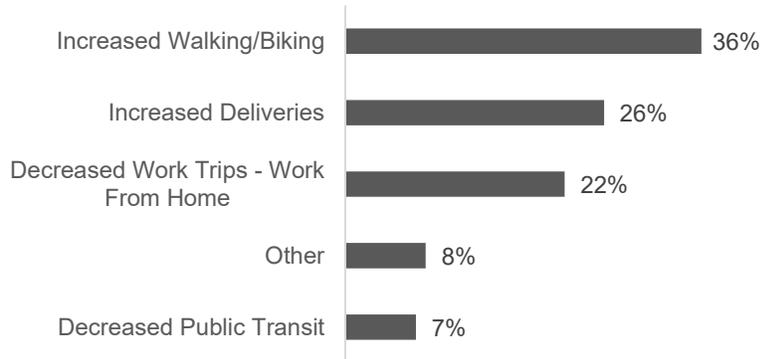
Figure 13: Household Travel Changes During COVID-19 Pandemic

Source: Public Engagement Survey for Whatcom County, 2021; Whatcom Council of Governments: <https://wcog.org/>



### Figure 14: COVID-19 Travel Changes That Will Be Continued

Source: Public Engagement Survey for Whatcom County, 2021; Whatcom Council of Governments: <https://wcog.org/>



# 6. Strategies and activities to address identifies gaps

## Regional Transportation Goals

The *Way to Go, Whatcom: Whatcom Region's 2045 Regional & Metropolitan Transportation Plan* identifies seven goals that our region strives to achieve through policy and investments in our transportation system

### 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.

The Plan's sixth goal – **access, equity, and economic opportunity** – is the primary focus of the strategies identified below.

## An Ideal Transportation System

HSTP stakeholders were asked, "What would an ideal transportation system look like?" Answers provided are summarized below:

### More Service of All Kinds

- A responsive, more frequent transit system.
- Better geographic coverage across the region with transit.
- Safe and accessible pedestrian and bicycle networks to bus stops and stations.
- Paratransit with a shorter pick-up-time window.
- Formalized van/cab service that follows along transit lines.
- Formalized neighborhood transportation support networks.
- A larger fleet of taxis and TNCs (and more drivers) for on-demand service.
- A requirement for every urbanized area with a certain population level have at least one wheelchair-accessible taxi and rental vehicle.
- Same-day service for Medicaid clients and on-demand transit.
- Door-to-door service for cases where transportation is a barrier to access/improvement/treatment.
- A non-emergency transportation service/ community transport person on-call for community members in need (run errands, pick up prescriptions, go to appointments).

- A fare-free downtown circular transit service that connects people to various social services in Bellingham.
- Fare-free transit to daycare and after-school locations (Boys & Girls clubs, YMCA, etc.)
- Consideration of other options: light rail, monorail, gondola
- Safe trail connections to different types of hubs, especially in the north Bellingham.
- In communities with no operating TNCs, start a program driven by community volunteers who are reimbursed time and expense.
- Dependable Lummi Ferry with dependable transit meeting on the mainland side.
- More frequent rail service to get people to Seattle for medical appointments.

### Improved functionality/infrastructure of existing networks

- Improved sidewalks and bus stops
- The county thinks ahead and connects new developments with trails and pathways
- WTA and school bus networks working together to make buses more attractive as an option and lead toward a culture change.
- More dynamic school bus routing system in Bellingham to meet changing needs – remove the need to ask personal questions about family situations.
- Program for bus safety – someone on board to assist the drivers and make sure other riders are feeling safe.
- Every bus stop is covered and accessible with seating, making it more of an incentive for people to ride the bus.
- Every jurisdiction helps fund infrastructure to support transit, and not leave all expenses to transit agencies.
- Dedicated bus lanes that may make them more like light rail and more attractive as a service.
- More free bus passes for community providers.
- A statewide definition of what a “trip” constitutes to give transit agencies some uniformity in eligibility policies.
- Partnerships between school district bus systems and WTA in cases of emergency.
- Transit agencies and school districts all pool resources (similar to state motor pool) for regional purchases of shelters and other equipment that benefit everyone.
- Revisit PTBA boundary issues to allow for more cross-boundary services, even if duplication of service occurs.

## Other Improvements

- A change in the cultural view of transit.
- Incentivizing/de-incentivizing strategy for individuals in higher socio-economic strata to consider using transit instead of individual cars and change the perception of transit.
- Stronger community bonds so that people in rural communities can work together for rides.
- A way to help lower-income families or families with specific mobility needs purchase and/or repair cars.
- Identify ways to assist transportation as a standardized part of addressing homelessness.
- A school bus system that is more equitable to all kids, including families in transition.
- A decrease in air and noise pollution from diesel buses by converting WTA's fleet to electric vehicles.

In addition to the suggestions listed above, additional comments were more general and represent broader concepts that the region should consider:

*"Independent mobility that allows families to get their needs met is essential to get to the next socio-economic level, which will then allow for a choice of where they work and live."*

*"We must ask ourselves: are we as a region being creative when looking at transportation options, or are we rejecting ideas simply because they're new?"*

## Goals

The following goals were developed and prioritized by the HSTP Stakeholder Group:

1. **Options** for reliable and independent transportation
2. **Access** that is equitable regardless of location, age, income, or disability
3. **Safety** and comfort for travelers with special transportation needs

## Strategies

To advance the above regional human service transportation goals, the HSTP Stakeholder Group identified the following strategies:

1. Develop innovative options for transportation that include new services, creative pilot projects, and technology improvements.
2. Increase access by reducing gaps in the public transportation system, improving infrastructure and system operations, encouraging transit-oriented development, and providing education opportunities regarding transit options.
3. Improve safety for travelers through outreach, infrastructure, services, and environmental justice policies.