# Northwest Washington Regional Transit Study

Summary Report

April 2025

***Prepared for:***

Skagit Transit, on behalf of
North Sound Transportation Alliance

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# Contents

# Overview

The Northwest Washington Regional Transit Study explores opportunities to enhance and expand transit in Northwest Washington, focusing on Whatcom, Skagit, Island, San Juan, and northern Snohomish County. This study has been undertaken on behalf of the North Sound Transportation Alliance and is funded in part by Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT).[1]

The following are objectives of the Northwest Washington Regional Transit Study:

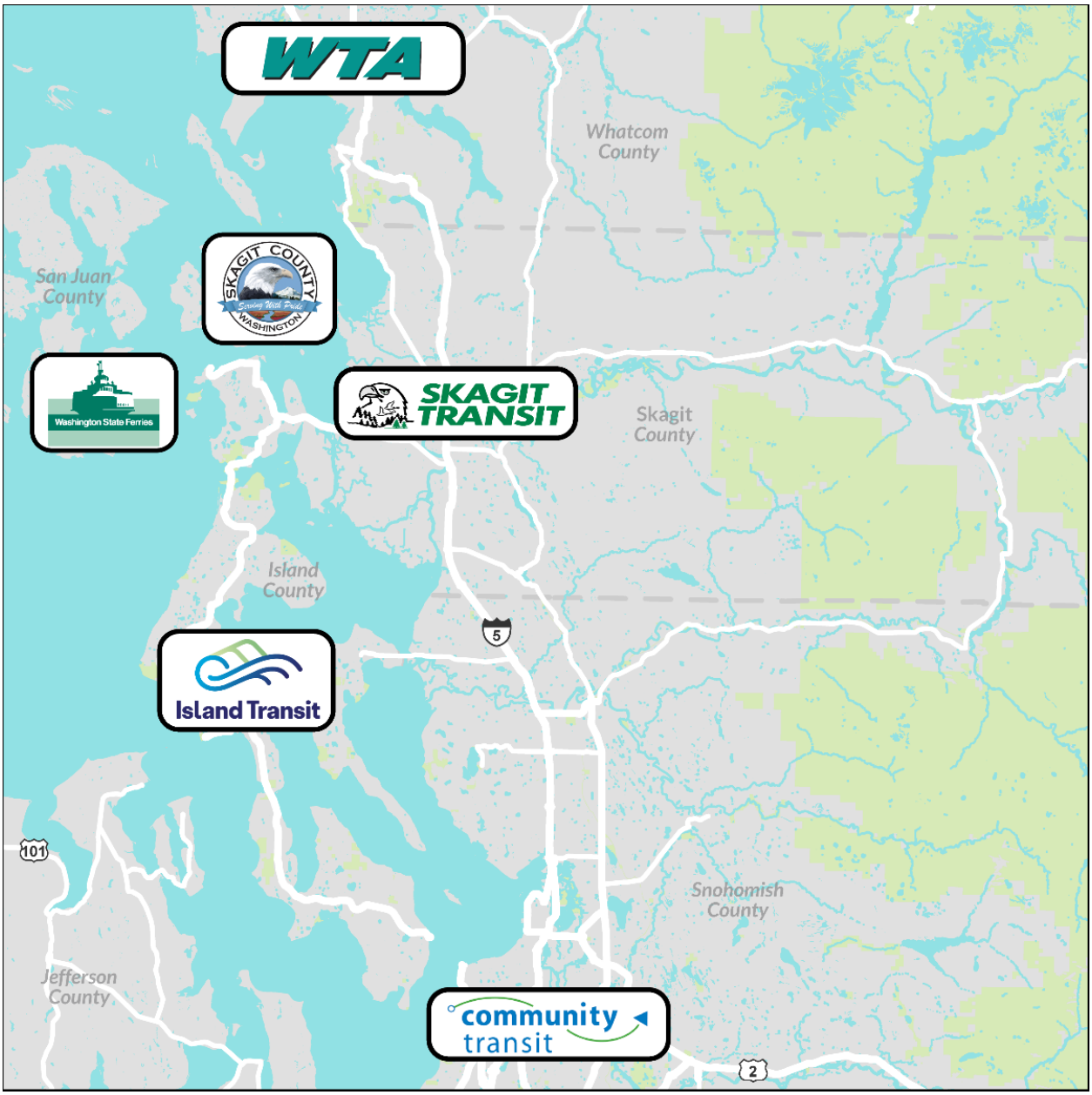
- Study existing public transit services operating within the service area, and evaluate cost-effectiveness
- Analyze current regional travel patterns and transit propensity
- Analyze projected regional population growth and other regional transportation needs
- Provide recommendations to meet anticipated future transit demand and vision for transit services
- Engage stakeholders to develop a collaborative regional vision and enhance efficiency

The first section of this report summarizes existing conditions: transit providers and services offered, transit and multimodal facilities, employment commuting flows for both intercounty and intra-county trips, and transit propensity based on several demographic and socio-economic factors. The second section of this report details projected population increases by urban area to highlight areas of expected growth.

The final section of this report outlines a range of potential service, infrastructure, and operational improvements over the next 10 to 20 years for public transportation. These opportunities and recommendations are based on current transit service levels, regional transportation patterns, and forecasted population and employment growth data to meet the region's current and future transportation needs. The recommendations contained within this memo are aligned with Statewide and regional policy documents, including the Washington Transportation Plan[2] and the Skagit 2045 Regional Transportation Plan[3]. The recommendations are not intended to be constrained by existing resources and have not yet been adopted or endorsed as priorities by agencies.

[1] This study engaged staff from Skagit Transit, Whatcom Transportation Authority, Island Transit, Whatcom Council of Governments, and Skagit Council of Governments. The findings and recommendations are informational and do not constitute adopted policy of any of the participating agencies.
[2] Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT), Washington Transportation Plan, January 2015.
[3] Skagit Council of Governments (SCOG), Skagit 2045 Regional Transportation Plan, March 2021.

*Figure 1: Northwest Washington Transit Providers*



# Current Transit Services

## Service Providers

This memo covers transit service providers throughout Northwest Washington, including public transit agencies, Washington State Ferries, and tribal transportation providers. The following is an overview of current services in the study area.

### *Skagit Transit*

Skagit Transit operates fixed-route and paratransit services in Skagit County. Skagit Transit operates 16 fixed routes, including two routes that serve surrounding counties. Route 80X serves Bellingham Station and Western Washington University and is operated in partnership with Whatcom Transportation Authority and Route 90X serves Everett Station. Skagit Station, located in Mount Vernon, is the major transit hub in Skagit County. In addition to serving 11 out of 16 of Skagit Transit's routes, it also services Amtrak passenger rail, Greyhound intercity bus service, and Island Transit. Skagit Transit has an operating budget of $25,668,030 (2025) and a fleet of 31 buses (2023).

### *Whatcom Transportation Authority*

Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA) operates fixed-route and paratransit services in Whatcom County, with a concentration of services in Bellingham. WTA operates 28 fixed routes, including four GO Lines, which are corridors with at least 15-minute frequencies. WTA has an operating budget of $43.8 million and a fleet of 63 buses (2024).

### *Island Transit*

Island Transit operates fare-free fixed-route and paratransit services in Whidbey Island and Camano Island. Island Transit operates 12 fixed routes, including three routes that serve surrounding counties. Route 411W connects Oak Harbor to March Point, Route 411C connects Terry's Corner to Mount Vernon, and Route 412C connects Terry's Corner to Everett Station. Island Transit has an operating budget of $14.4 million and a fleet of 19 buses (2023).

### *Community Transit*

Community Transit operates fixed-route and paratransit services throughout Snohomish County (note: Everett Transit also operates within the City of Everett). Community Transit operates 46 fixed routes, which includes local service, express routes, and bus rapid transit "Swift" routes. Swift routes include the Blue Line which connects Everett and Shoreline, the Green Line connecting Boeing Everett Factory to Mill Creek, and the Orange Line serving Lynnwood to Mill Creek. By 2029, Community Transit will add the Gold Line to Smokey Point.

### *Ferry Service*

Washington State Ferries (WSF) operates ferry service from Anacortes Ferry Terminal to multiple terminals in the San Juan Islands.

Skagit County operates ferry service from Anacortes to Guemes Island.

### *Tribal Transportation*

The Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe operates a public transit route called the Darrington-Concrete Direct Shuttle Bus Service (DCD). Tulalip Transit operates a fixed-route and route deviation service to serve the Tulalip Tribes Reservation and connect to eight Community Transit's Route 222 stops. The service runs Monday through Friday from 8:50 AM to 3:34 PM. Lummi Nation Transit operates fixed-route service on the reservation which connects to WTA's Route 50.

## Service Frequency

Existing fixed route transit services provide both local and regional service. For the purposes of this study, the focus is on routes serving across county boundaries and/or serving as connection points to other transit services. The important regional connection routes are described in *Table 1*. Skagit Transit's regional routes include the 40X to Anacortes, 70X Concrete to Mount Vernon, 80X Bellingham Connect (operated with WTA), the 90X Skagit Snohomish Connector, and Route 410 serving Anacortes and the San Juan Ferries Terminal. Current frequencies range from running every 60 minutes to running 6 total trips per day, with less frequent service on the weekends. Community Transit's Route 201 and 202 are currently running 30-minute frequencies but will be replaced by the Gold Line in 2029, which is intended to run 10- to 12-minute weekday frequencies and serve Smokey Point Transit Center in Arlington. Island Transit's Route 411W, serving Oak Harbor to March Point, currently runs 60-minute frequency on weekdays, 120-minute frequencies on Saturdays, and does not currently operate Sunday service.

*Table 1: Current Frequency of Regional Routes*

| Route | Transit Provider | Current Weekday Frequency | Current Weekend Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|
| **90X Skagit Snohomish Connector** | Skagit Transit | 90 minutes | 5 trips/day |
| **201 Smokey Point TC** | Community Transit | 30 minutes | 60 minutes |
| **202 Smokey Point TC** | Community Transit | 30 minutes | 60 minutes |
| **40X Anacortes** | Skagit Transit | 60 minutes | 60 minutes on Saturday; no Sunday service |
| **70X Concrete to Mount Vernon** | Skagit Transit | 6 trips/day | 3 trips/day |
| **410 Anacortes/San Juan Ferries** | Skagit Transit | 60 minutes | 60 minutes on Saturday; no Sunday service |
| **80X County Connector** | Skagit Transit/WTA | 60 minutes | 6 trips/day |
| **411W Oak Harbor to March Point** | Island Transit | 60 minutes | 120 minutes on Saturday; no Sunday service |

| Route | Transit Provider | Current Weekday Frequency | Current Weekend Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|
| **411C Camano** | Island Transit | 6 trips/day | 3 trips/day |
| **331 Green & 232 Gold Go Lines** | WTA | 15 minutes | 30 minutes |
| **240 Stanwood Downtown – Smokey Point TC** | Community Transit | 60 minutes | 60 minutes |
| **3 Airport/Cordata** | WTA | 60 minutes | 60 minutes on Saturday; no Sunday service |

## Service Span

Existing service span of regional routes is described in *Table 2*. Most services start at or before 6:00 AM on weekdays and 9:00 AM on weekends. Apart from Community Transit's Route 201 and 202 that will be replaced by the Gold Line, many routes run end before 9:00 PM on weekdays and 6:00 PM on weekends, with Skagit Transit Route 40X and 410, Island Transit Route 411W, and WTA Route 3 not currently providing Sunday service.

*Table 2: Current Service Span of Regional Routes*

| Route | Transit Provider | Current Weekday Span | Current Weekend Span |
|---|---|---|---|
| **90X Skagit Snohomish Connector** | Skagit Transit | 4:45 AM to 6:15 PM | 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM |
| **201 Smokey Point TC** | Community Transit | 4:48 AM to 9:48 PM | 7:03 AM to 10:03 PM |
| **202 Smokey Point TC** | Community Transit | 5:08 AM to 10:18 PM | 6:33 AM to 9:33 PM |
| **40X Anacortes** | Skagit Transit | 6:15 AM to 7:15 PM | 8:40 AM to 5:15 PM on Saturday; no Sunday service |
| **70X Concrete to Mount Vernon** | Skagit Transit | 6:40 AM to 6:15 PM | 8:10 AM to 3:15 PM |
| **410 Anacortes** | Skagit Transit | 6:05 AM to 7:40 PM | 8:10 AM to 5:10 PM on Saturday; no Sunday service |
| **80X County Connector** | Skagit Transit/WTA | 6:40 AM to 6:15 PM | 8:05 AM to 6:00 PM |

| Route | Transit Provider | Current Weekday Span | Current Weekend Span |
|---|---|---|---|
| **411W Oak Harbor to March Point** | Island Transit | 6:00 AM to 6:00 PM | 9:00 AM to 5:15 PM on Saturday; no Sunday service |
| **411C Camano** | Island Transit | 5:30 AM to 6:30 PM | 8:30 AM to 3:40 PM |
| **331 Green & 232 Gold Go Lines** | WTA | 6:40 AM to 10:40 PM | 7:55 AM to 10:40 PM |
| **3 Airport/Cordata** | WTA | 6:40 AM to 7:15 PM | 7:40 AM to 6:15 PM; no Sunday service |
| **240 Stanwood Downtown – Smokey Point TC** | Community Transit | 5:56 AM to 8:48 PM | 6:52 AM to 7:52 PM |

## Regional Travel Patterns

The following section assesses current travel patterns in the study area. For this analysis, in addition to the four core counties that are the focus of the study, the analysis includes San Juan and King counties. The following data was collected from the US Census American Community Survey commuter data (ACS 2016-2020) and rounded to highlight travel trends across Northwest Washington. Understanding current travel patterns will help plan for emergent regional commuting patterns. Data on commute flows is useful, although ACS data does have some limitations and commuting patterns continue to evolve in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. In general, commuting patterns reinforce the interconnectedness of the counties that make up the study area, while it is also interesting to note that more commuters travel *within* county boundaries than *across* county boundaries. The data also shows that King County (south of the study area) remains a strong commuter focal point in the broader Western Washington region. *Table 3* below shows daily commuting trends for San Juan, Skagit, Snohomish, Whatcom, Island, and King Counties.

*Table 3: 2016-2020 5-Year ACS Commuting Flows by County*

| | | Workplace County | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | San Juan | Skagit | Snohomish | Whatcom | Island | King |
| **Residence County** | San Juan | **7,300** | 50 | 20 | 20 | 5 | 150 |
| | Skagit | 40 | **44,200** | 5,500 | 3,200 | 1,700 | 1,700 |
| | Snohomish | 10 | 4,400 | **266,600** | 700 | 770 | 132,900 |
| | Whatcom | 90 | 5,100 | 1,500 | **97,500** | 90 | 1,000 |
| | Island | 10 | 3,300 | 5,500 | 260 | **26,500** | 2,100 |
| | King | 90 | 180 | 37,800 | 470 | 180 | **1,122,700** |

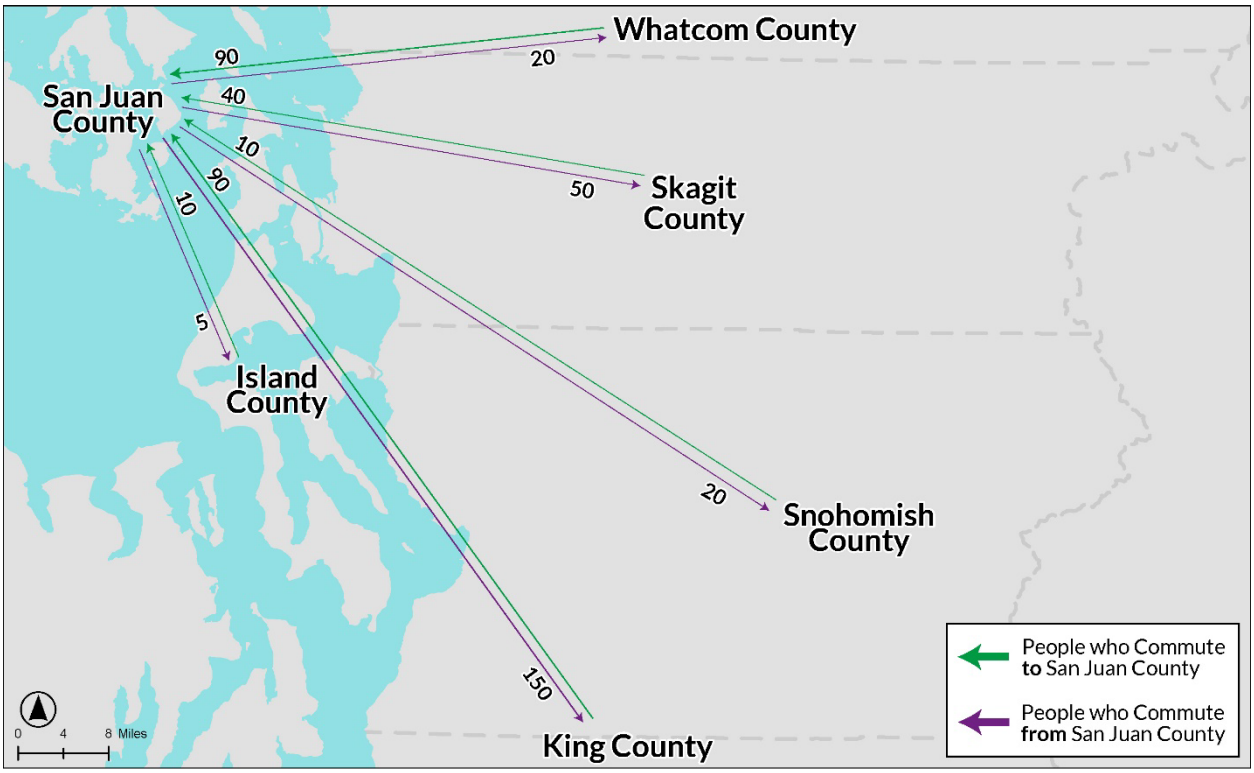
*Figures have been rounded to illustrate general travel patterns.*

The following sections describe the regional commuting patterns for each county.

### *San Juan County*

The islands that make up San Juan County are only accessible by plane or ferry, making it impractical for daily commutes. As shown in Figure 2 below, commuting volumes in San Juan County are smaller than the surrounding counties, with around 240 workers commuting into the county for their place of employment, and 245 San Juan County residents traveling to another county. The largest number of employees traveling to or from San Juan County for employment derive from King County.

*Figure 2: San Juan County Travel Patterns*

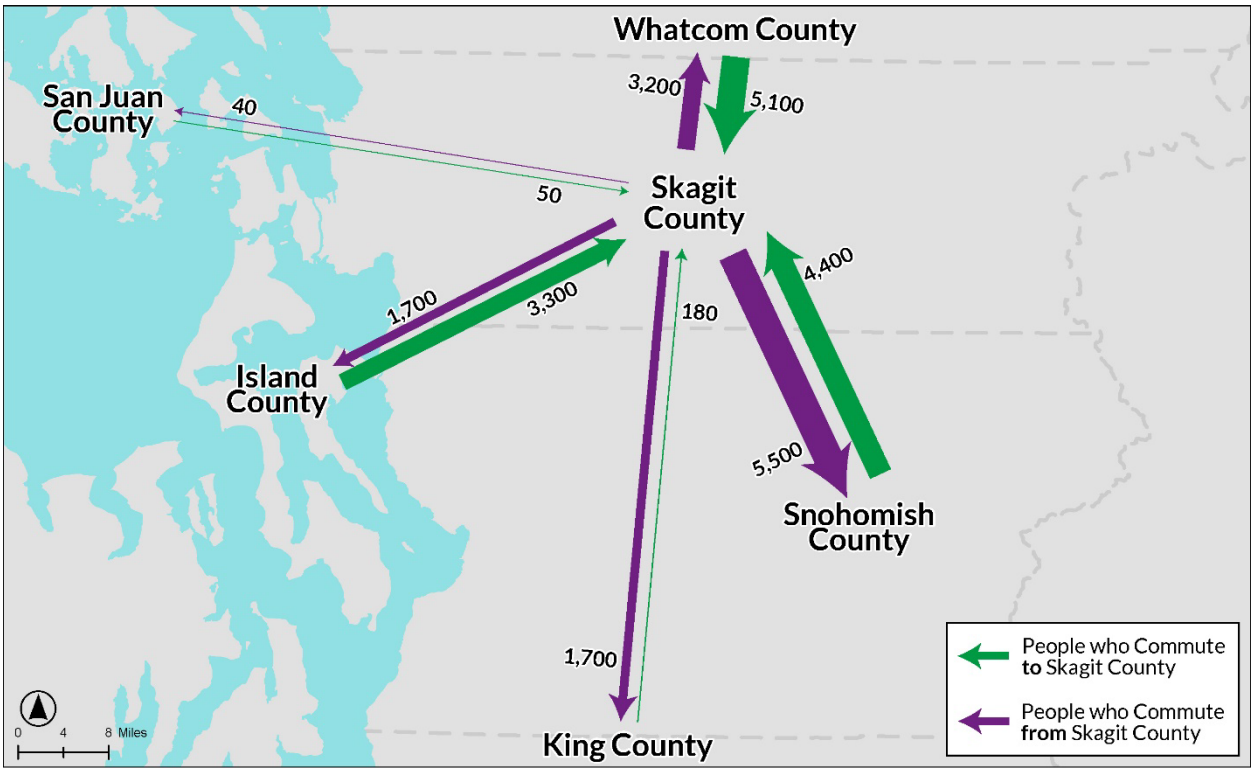



*Values have been rounded to illustrate general travel patterns.*

### *Skagit County*

On average, 13,030 workers commute to Skagit County every day, approximately 40% of which come from Whatcom County as shown in Figure 3 below. A number of commuters also come from Snohomish (4,400) and Island (3,300) counties. Approximately 12,140 workers commute out of Skagit County to parts of Snohomish (5,500), Whatcom (3,200), Island (1,700) and King (1,700) counties.

*Figure 3: Skagit County Travel Patterns*

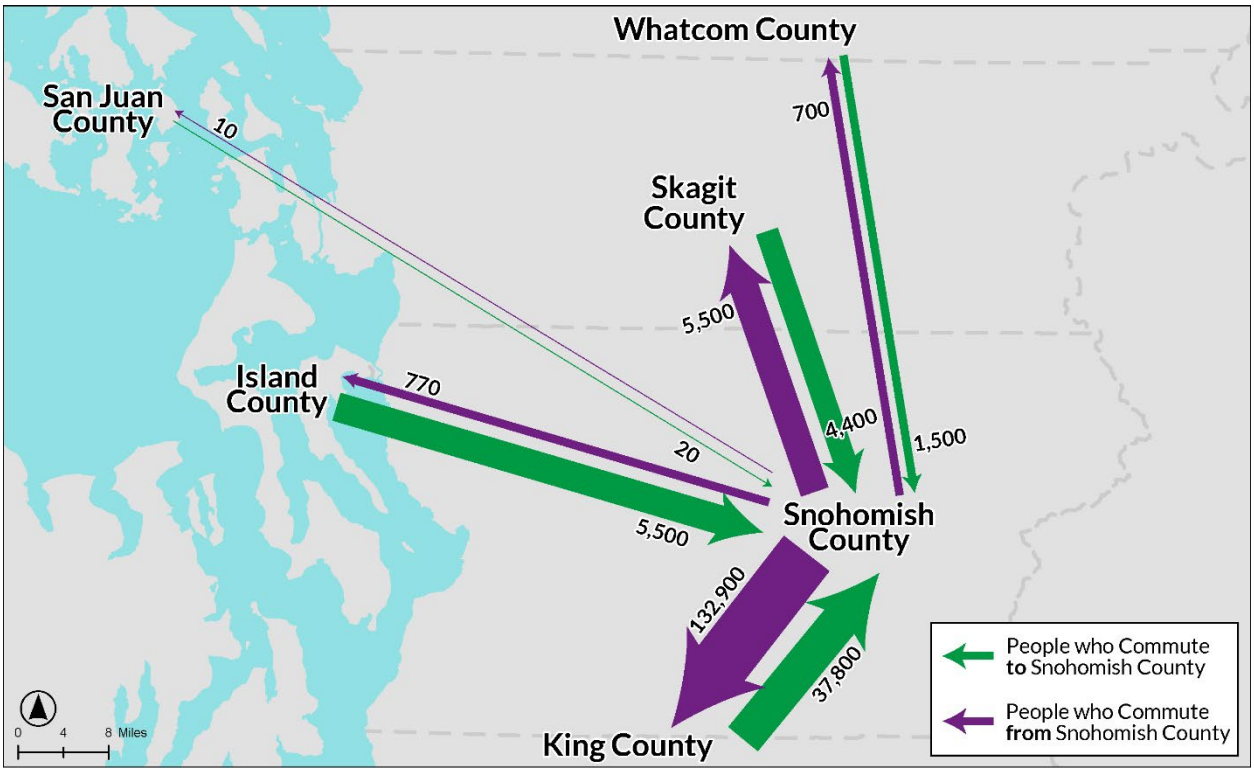



*Values have been rounded to illustrate general travel patterns.*

### *Snohomish County*

Snohomish County is the largest population center in Northwest Washington, with approximately 132,900 daily commuters traveling to King County for work (Figure 4). 49,220 commuters travel to Snohomish County, with a majority of those trips originating in King County (37,800). 5,500 people commute from Island County to Snohomish County. 4,400 commute trips to Snohomish County originate in Skagit County.

*Figure 4: Snohomish County Travel Patterns*

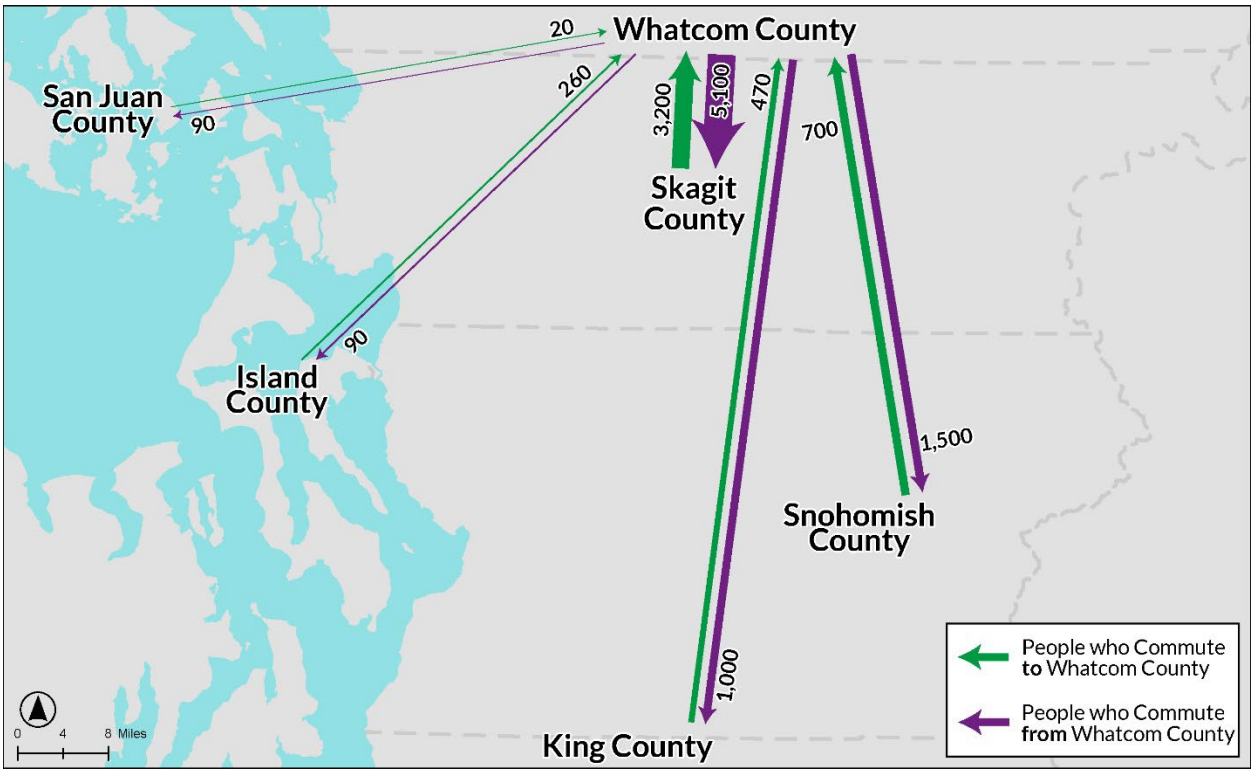



*Values have been rounded to illustrate general travel patterns.*

### *Whatcom County*

Figure 5 depicts Skagit County as Whatcom County's largest commuting partner – 5,100 commuters travel south from Whatcom to Skagit County for work, and 3,200 travel north into Whatcom County. Additionally, 1,000 Whatcom County commuters travel to King County and 1,500 make trips to Snohomish County.

*Figure 5: Whatcom County Travel Patterns*

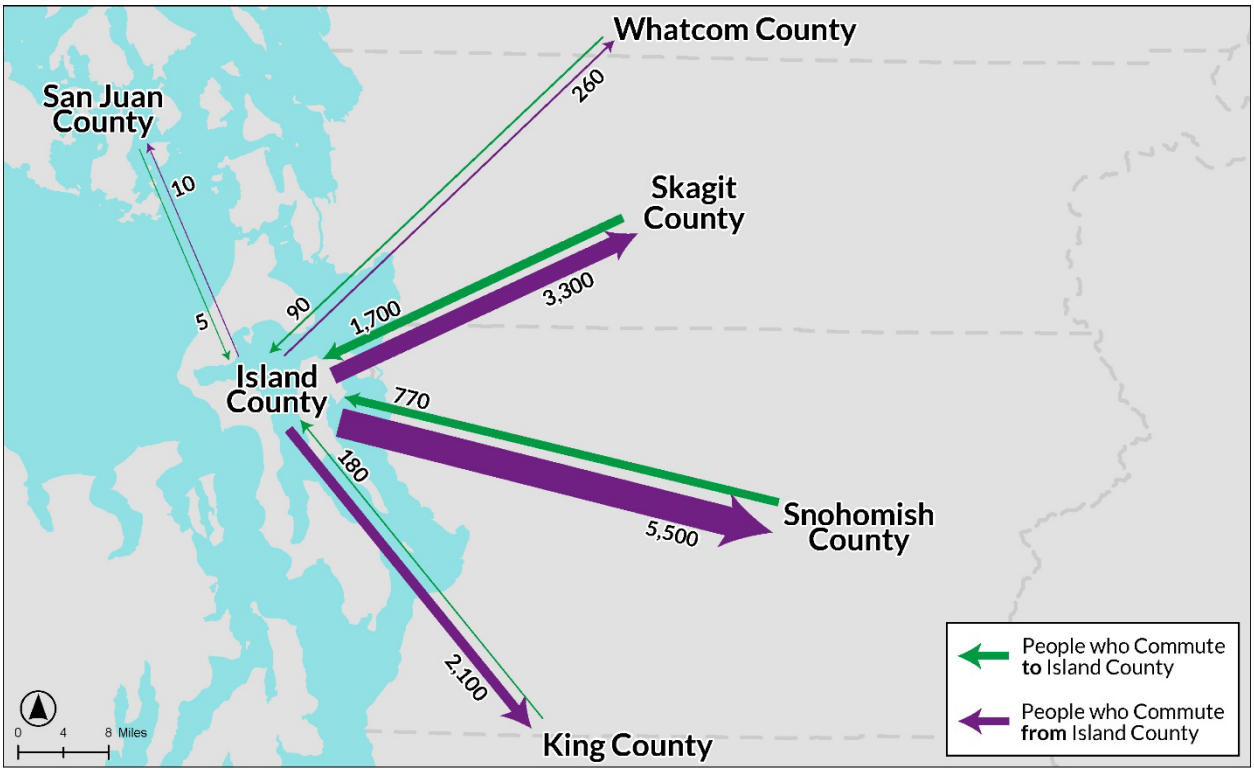



*Values have been rounded to illustrate general travel patterns.*

### *Island County*

Island County data patterns indicate that many residents make commute trips outside the county boundaries. Figure 6 shows Island County's largest employment destinations are in Snohomish (5,500), Skagit (3,300), and King (2,100) Counties, respectively. 1,700 commute trips originate in Skagit County.

*Figure 6: Island County Travel Patterns*

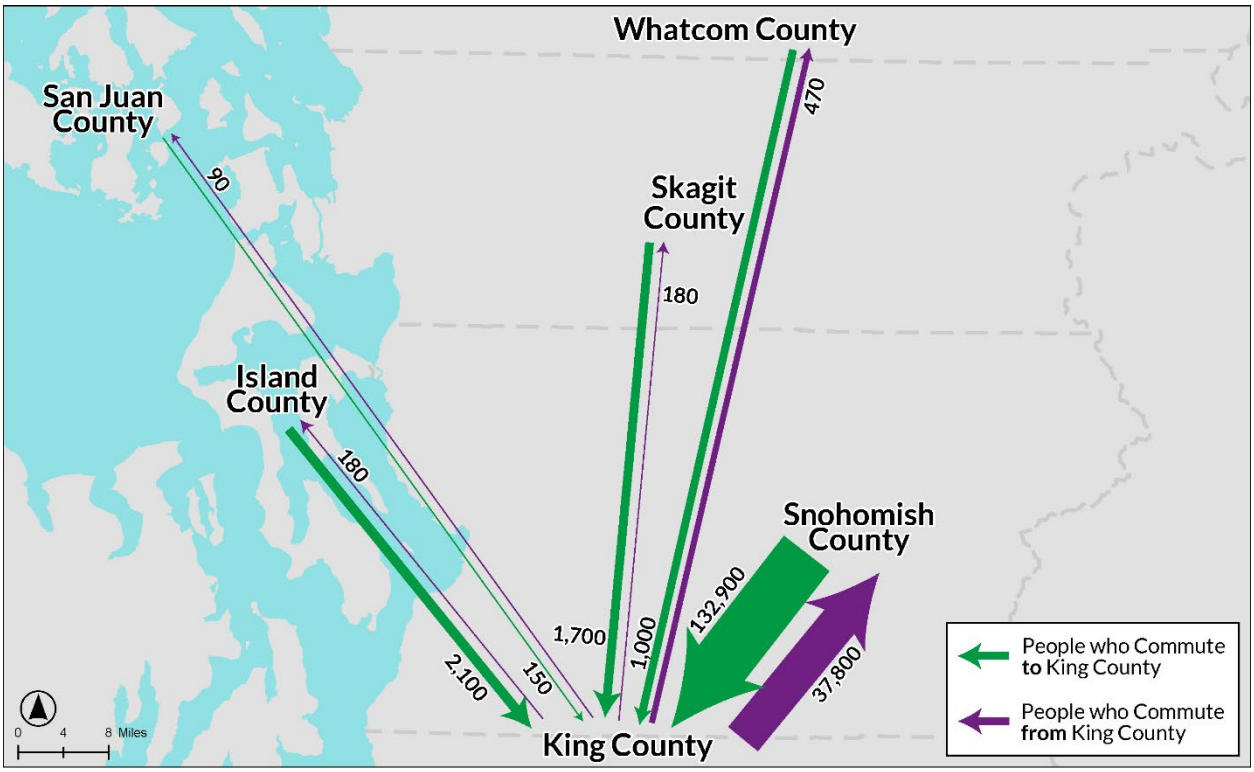



Values have been rounded to illustrate general travel patterns.

### *King County*

As the largest job center in the State of Washington, King County is a large employment destination. The largest number of cross-county commuters originate in Snohomish County (132,900). There are also a significant number of commuters traveling from Island (2,100) and Skagit (1,700) counties. Figure 7 below shows a visual representation of these commuting trends.

*Figure 7: King County Travel Patterns*



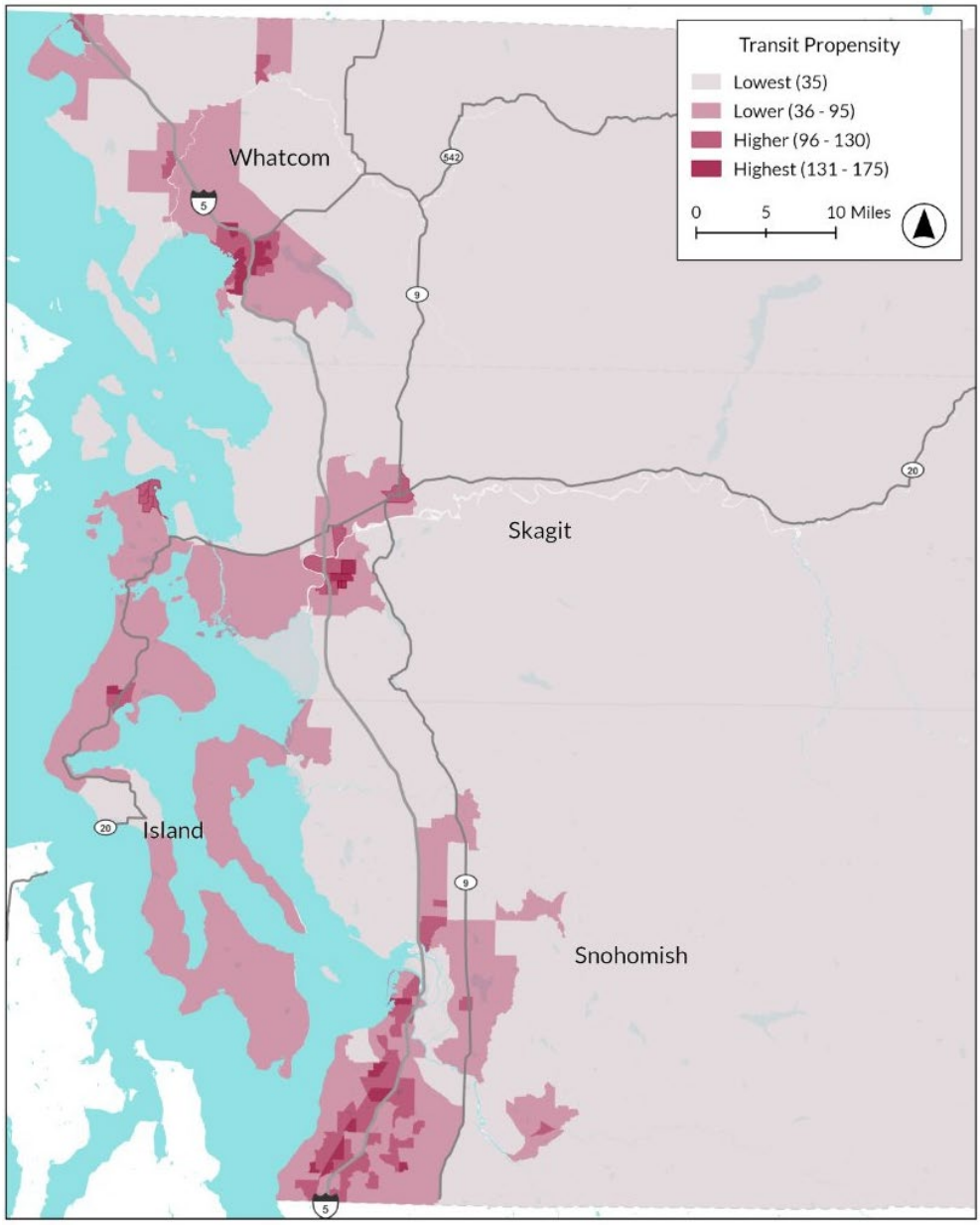

*Values have been rounded to illustrate general travel patterns.*

These summaries of commuting patterns by county illustrate the interconnected nature of the Northwest Washington study area. Transit is utilized for both commute and non-commute trips, like those for shopping, health services, or recreation, many of which do cross county boundaries. Unfortunately, there are not region-wide data sources that can be consistently used to compare non-commute trips, and information on these trips is often anecdotal. The illustration of commute trip data is intended to give a general sense of travel demands but should not be interpreted as comprehensive summary of all travel demand.

## Transit Propensity

*Figure 8* highlights areas that are more likely to support transit ridership. Transit propensity considers factors such as population density and other socioeconomic factors, including income, racial demographics, population age, and zero car households. Scores are calculated based on these factors consistently across the entire study area. Census blocks with higher scores (dark red on the map) have higher densities of these socioeconomic groups and are more likely to support transit services. Transit service within the study area is generally aligned with areas of higher Transit Propensity score and there are not large areas of high transit propensity that are not served by fixed-route service.

*Figure 8: Transit Propensity in Northwestern Washington*



## Forecasted Regional Population Growth and Demographics

Urban areas within Northwest Washington are expected to grow in population between 2020 and 2045. It is anticipated that Snohomish County will experience the largest population gain, with a total of 27% in all urban growth areas. Incorporated urban growth areas in Skagit, Snohomish, Island, and Whatcom Counties are forecasted to experience at least 15% growth. *Table 4* below shows the ten communities with the highest expected population growth percentages between 2020-2045, and *Table 5* denotes the ten communities expected to see the largest raw population growth during this period of time.

*Table 4 Northwest Washington Growth Areas by Percentage Growth*

| Urban Growth Area | County | 2020 Pop | 2045 Pop | Pop Growth | Pop Growth % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Arlington** | Snohomish | 19,913 | 34,684 | 14,771 | 74.2% |
| **Bothell** | Snohomish | 19,299 | 32,388 | 13,089 | 67.8% |
| **Sultan** | Snohomish | 5,192 | 8,663 | 3,471 | 66.9% |
| **Lynnwood** | Snohomish | 38,379 | 63,533 | 25,154 | 65.5% |
| **Mountlake Terrace** | Snohomish | 21,063 | 34,413 | 13,350 | 63.4% |
| **Everett** | Snohomish | 111,894 | 180,544 | 68,650 | 61.4% |
| **Granite Falls** | Snohomish | 4,412 | 6,491 | 2,079 | 47.1% |
| **Ferndale** | Whatcom | 16,762 | 24,024 | 7,262 | 43.3% |
| **Stanwood** | Snohomish | 7,568 | 10,807 | 3,239 | 42.8% |
| **Marysville** | Snohomish | 70,572 | 99,623 | 29,051 | 41.2% |

*Source: Snohomish County Comprehensive Plan, Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan, Skagit Council of Governments, Island County Planning and Community Development Department.*

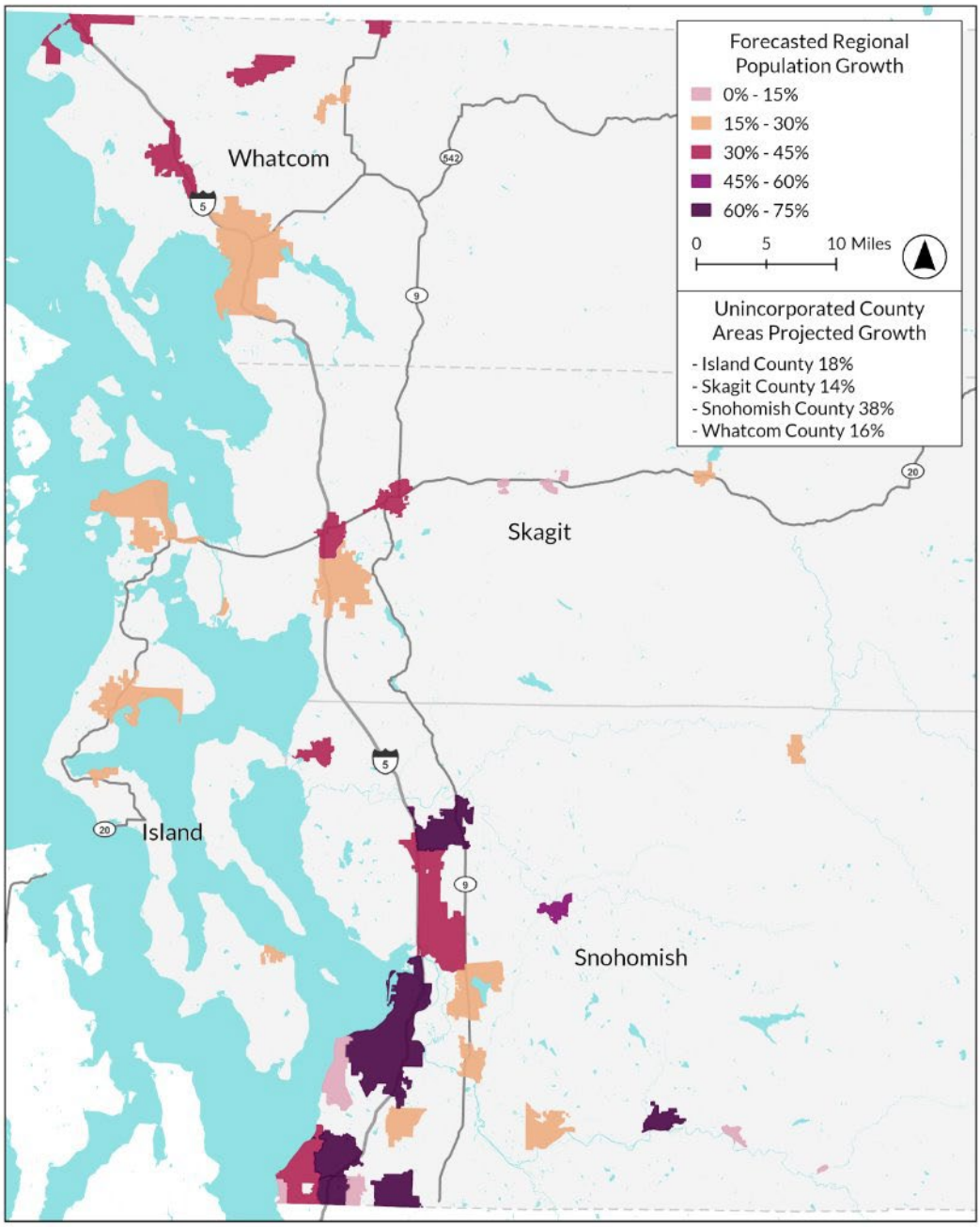
*Table 5 Northwest Washington Growth Areas by Total Population Growth*

| Urban Growth Area | County | 2020 Pop | 2045 Pop | Pop Growth | Pop Growth % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Everett** | Snohomish | 111,894 | 180,544 | 68,650 | 61.4% |
| **Marysville** | Snohomish | 70,572 | 99,623 | 29,051 | 41.2% |
| **Lynnwood** | Snohomish | 38,379 | 63,533 | 25,154 | 65.5% |
| **Bellingham** | Whatcom | 105,529 | 129,687 | 24,158 | 22.9% |
| **Arlington** | Snohomish | 19,913 | 34,684 | 14,771 | 74.2% |
| **Edmonds** | Snohomish | 42,702 | 55,839 | 13,137 | 30.8% |
| **Bothell** | Snohomish | 19,299 | 32,388 | 13,089 | 67.8% |
| **Oak Harbor** | Island | 55,128 | 65,144 | 10,016 | 18.2% |
| **Lake Stevens** | Snohomish | 38,982 | 48,507 | 9,525 | 24.4% |
| **Mount Vernon** | Skagit | 37,679 | 46,460 | 8,781 | 23.3% |

*Source: Snohomish County Comprehensive Plan, Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan, Skagit Council of Governments, Island County Planning and Community Development Department.*

Figure 9 highlights areas within Western Washington that are forecasted for population growth within the next two decades. The most significant growth is forecasted in Snohomish County, particularly Marysville, Everett, and Lynnwood. Population growth is also forecasted in Bellingham and Arlington.

*Figure 9: Forecasted Growth in Northwestern Washington 2020-2045*




Skagit Council of Governments (2022-2045), Puget Sound Regional Council (2020-2044), Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan (2023-2045), & Island County Planning And Development (2023-2045)

# Regional Transit Framework

Based on current services, existing demographics, and forecasted population growth, this study outlines a set of opportunities and recommendations to enhance transit in Northwest Washington. This regional transit framework is composed of three elements:

- A **service vision** that highlights a potential future approach to regional service network and service levels.
- An **infrastructure vision** that highlights potential future capital investments to support the transit service framework.
- An **operations vision** that highlights other future needs to support a high-quality rider experience in the study area.

Each of these opportunities and recommendations would need to be further developed prior to implementation, including identifying the resources needed to implement.

## Service Vision+

As Northwest Washington continues to grow, regional transit service can sustainably connect people with their destinations while addressing vehicle congestion. To advance this goal, the regional vision for transit service is to provide fast, frequent, and reliable service among Regional Service Hubs that connect to local transit networks. This assessment is "operator-neutral", meaning any transit operator could provide services and focused on regional connectivity, not recommendations for local service investments. The recommendations in this section would require additional resources in terms of vehicles, operators, facilities and maintenance capacity. Therefore, regional transit partners should collaborate to identify the best way to operationalize potential service investments.

### *Regional Service Hubs*

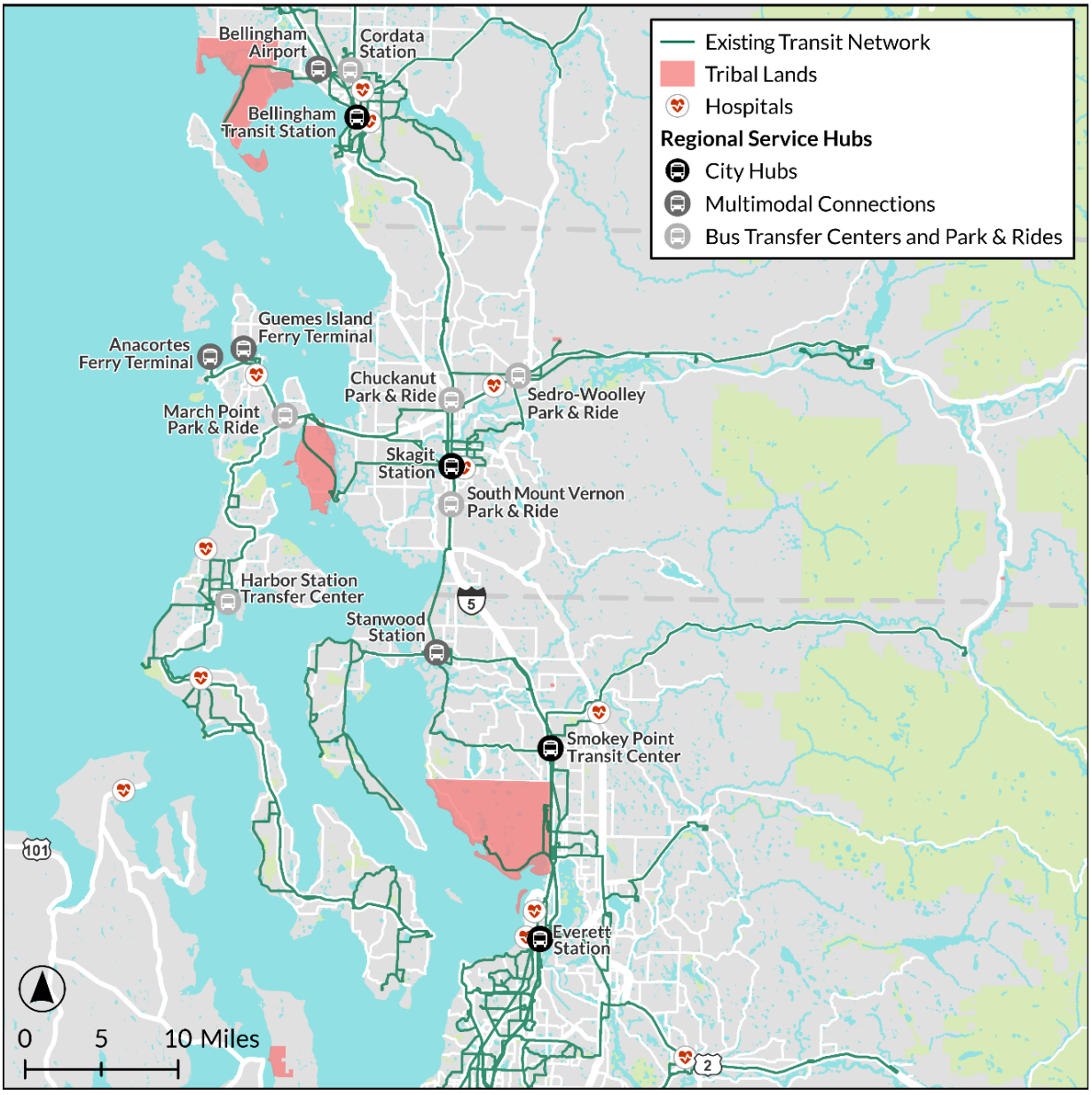
Existing regional transit service is focused around transit centers and other transfer points where riders transfer from one operator to another and from longer distance express routes to local service. There is potential to evolve these locations into Regional Service Hubs, shown in Figure 10.

The framework for a future regional transit system is based on this foundation of Regional Service Hubs. This study proposes three categories of service hubs:

- *City Hubs*
- *Multimodal Connections*
- *Bus Transfer Centers and Park & Rides*

The proposed hubs were identified based on current travel patterns, existing facilities and infrastructure, and future population growth. These categories of service hubs, further detailed below and described in the Infrastructure Vision section, are not intended to be static designations, and with investment and land use change, hubs may transition from one category to another.

*Figure 10: Regional Service Hubs*




*City Hubs*

City Hubs are defined as transit centers and/or stations located in dense and walkable areas with existing and/or potential transit-oriented development. City Hubs are served by three or more transit lines and by cross-county routes, including intercity rail and/or bus service. City Hubs locations include:

- Skagit Station in Mount Vernon
- Smokey Point Transit Center in Arlington
- Bellingham Station in Bellingham
- Everett Station in Everett

*Multimodal Connections*

Multimodal Connections are defined as transit centers that connect to another mode of transportation, including Amtrak passenger rail, Greyhound, intercity bus service, ferry service, and air travel. These hubs can have transit-supportive development, but the primary purpose is to provide connections between transportation modes. Multimodal Connection locations include:

- Guemes Island Ferry Terminal in Anacortes
- Stanwood Station in Stanwood
- Anacortes Ferry Terminal in Anacortes
- Bellingham Airport in Bellingham
- Fairhaven Station in Bellingham

*Bus Transfer Centers and Park & Rides*

Bus Transfer Centers and Park & Rides are defined as transit centers that are located in less walkable or more remote areas that are served by multiple transit lines and where riders can leave their personal vehicles to transfer to a bus line. These hubs are defined separately from City Hubs by their current land use but could change and evolve over time. Bus Transfer Centers and Park & Rides include:

- March Point Park & Ride on Fidalgo Island
- South Mount Vernon Park & Ride in Mount Vernon
- Cordata Station in Bellingham
- Chuckanut Park & Ride in Burlington
- Sedro-Woolley Park & Ride in Sedro-Woolley
- Harbor Station Transfer Center in Oak Harbor
- Lincoln Creek Park & Ride in Bellingham

### *Frequency and Span Improvements*

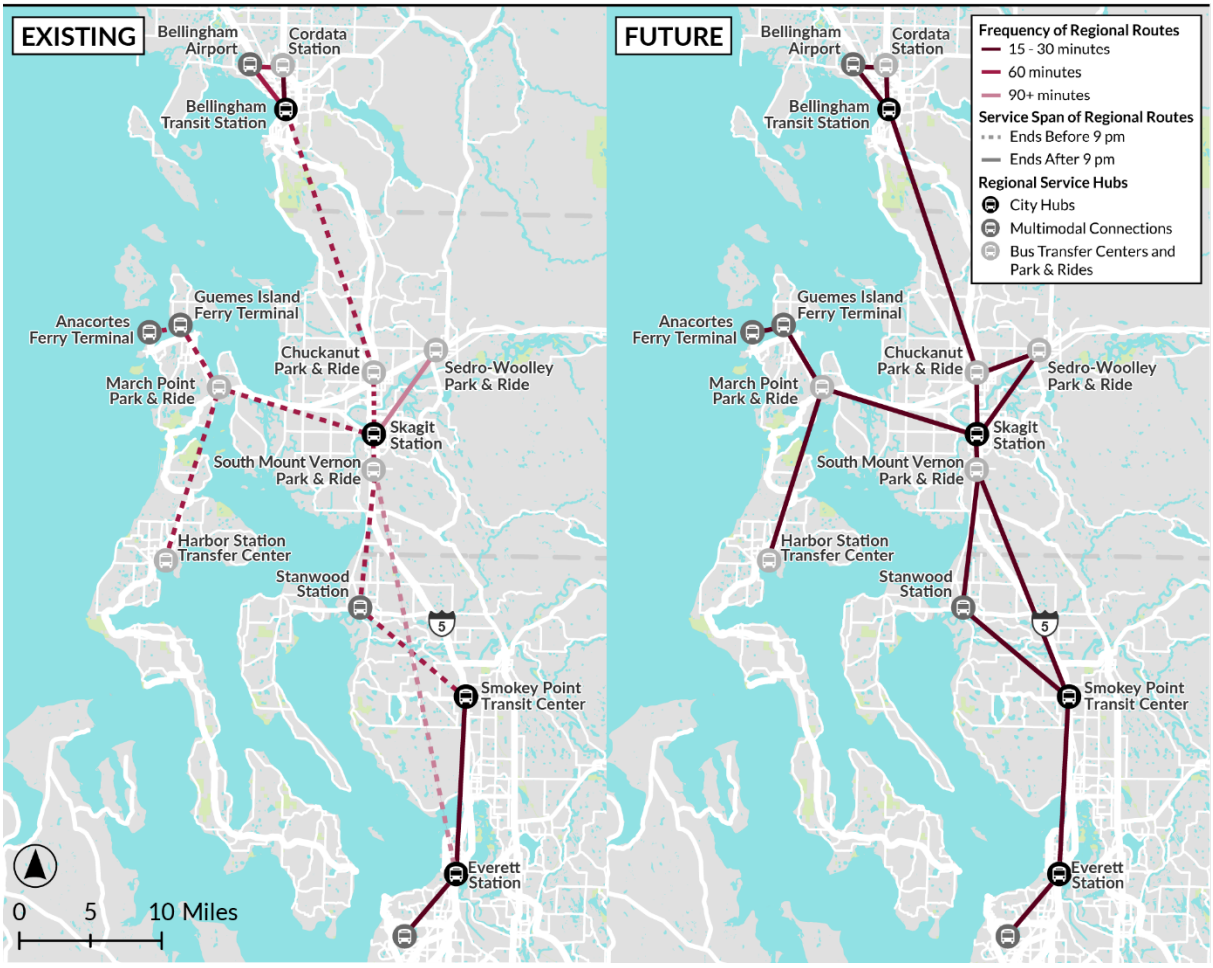
Improving frequencies and expanding span on routes that connect regional hubs will decrease travel times and improve rider convenience. Figure 11 illustrates the existing connections between regional hubs and their level of service, and the potential improvements that would promote more regional travel and provide more consistency to transit customers, since many services to regional hubs are already operating at these service levels. Potential service improvements include at least 60-minute frequencies between regional hubs, extending service until 9:00 PM, and running Sunday service.

Increasing frequency to 60 minutes on regional service hubs would require an estimated 2 vehicles in active service and would add an estimated $1.5 million to annual regional transit operating costs. Increasing frequency to 30 minutes between regional service hubs would require an estimated 14 vehicles in active service and add an additional $8.4 million to annual regional transit operating costs.

Improving service span to run until 9:00 PM on routes between regional service hubs would require no extra vehicles but would add an additional $0.9 million to regional annual operating

costs. Extending all service to run on both Saturdays and Sundays between regional service hubs would require no extra vehicles and cost an additional $0.2 million to annual operating costs across the region.

*Figure 11: Regional Level of Service*




### *Interoperating Paratransit Service*

Skagit Transit, WTA, Island Transit, Everett Transit, and Community Transit all operate paratransit services in their respective counties. In 2023, WTA completed a cross-county paratransit feasibility study that evaluated several regional paratransit options, focusing on travel between Whatcom County and Skagit County. Based on public feedback, a regional paratransit service was not in high demand and would be perceived as a strain on resources. At the time that the survey was conducted many participants were not aware of the 80X as a cross-county transit connection. Moving forward, the 80X should continue to be promoted as a feasible cross-county transit option, if fixed-route service is accessible by the rider. Since ADA complementary service is not required on express routes, paratransit transfers will occur at service hubs where local fixed-route service is provided.

Cross-county travel is a challenge for many people without transportation choices in Northwest Washington. Conversations with regional social service providers have highlighted

this as a gap for clients with medical appointments across county boundaries. County-wide transit often focuses resources on an intercounty network, therefore a regional approach to cross-county paratransit services for medical trip could fill a connectivity gap and help reduce the transportation burden on area social service agencies. ORCA, the regional fare partnership for many transit agencies in the Puget Sound, plans to extend paratransit services to its mobile application. The ORCA system may be an avenue to coordinate effective cross-county paratransit service (as detailed below).

Transit agencies should consider ways to partner resources in a manner that would create efficiencies in booking for seamless transfers or interconnected operations between separately operated paratransit services.

### *On-Demand Transit*

In recent years, on-demand transit or "microtransit" programs have been piloted and implemented in transit service areas across the country. The establishment of an on-demand transit zone may prove beneficial to an area that is not dense enough to warrant fixed-route bus service, but still has a demand for elements of public transit infrastructure. Existing paratransit services are similar to on-demand service but are solely designated for individuals with physical limitations or mobility issues, while on-demand transit programs offer services to all clientele. One component of Skagit's Long Range Transit Plan was the study of on-demand transit and the identification of potential zones where a pilot program could be successful. The City of Anacortes has been identified as the recommended on-demand pilot zone in the Long Range Transit Plan due to the area's lower density, above average senior population, topography, and challenging streets for traditional fixed route service with larger vehicles. Community Transit and Island Transit currently offer on-demand services and WTA has experience administering the service. Future regional transit collaboration can explore how merging, coordinating, or a creation of intercounty on-demand zones could benefit regional connectivity, customer experience, and make operations more efficient for all.

## Infrastructure Vision

To maximize the benefits of regional service investments, infrastructure investments in Regional Service Hubs and key transit corridors will improve transit access and reliability.

### *Regional Service Hub Improvements*

The following section outlines potential investments for the Regional Service Hubs defined previously. Potential improvements, described in Table 6, vary based on regional hub classification. Regional Service Hubs designed as City Hubs would benefit from infrastructure improvements that may be the most comprehensive, focusing on multi-purpose land use, improved pedestrian and bicycle access, and emphasizing transit center/station upgrades. Multimodal Connection hub investments include improved transfer points to other modes (Amtrak, WSF, Greyhound), improved pedestrian/bicycle access, and designated bikeshare/scooter-share areas. Transfer Centers and Park & Rides upgrades include improved station amenities and EV charging. ADA accessibility, general bus stop improvements (shelters, benches, and lighting), and real-time signs are proposed improvements at all regional hubs, regardless of classification.

*Table 6: Service Hub Improvements*

| Type | Improvement |
|---|---|
| **City Hub** | Upgraded facility that includes customer service and community resources |
| | Proximity to dense multi-purpose land use |
| | Improved bus stop amenities including shelters, benches, and lighting |
| | Real-time signs |
| | Wayfinding |
| | ADA accessibility |
| | Improved pedestrian/bicycle access and storage |
| | Designated bikeshare/scooter-share areas |
| **Multimodal Connection** | Improved bus stop amenities including shelters, benches, and lighting |
| | Comfortable transfer points to other modes (Amtrak, WSF, Greyhound) |
| | ADA accessibility |
| | Real-time signs |
| | Wayfinding |
| | Improved pedestrian/bicycle access and storage |
| | Designated bikeshare/scooter-share areas |
| **Transfer Centers and Park & Ride** | Improved bus stop amenities including shelters, benches, and lighting |
| | EV Charging |
| | Connections to local transit service |
| | Real-time signs |
| | ADA accessibility |

### *Transit Accessibility and First-/Last- Mile Connections*

Access to and from regional hubs impact travel times, rider convenience, and safety for people who walk, bike or roll. Transit agencies and jurisdictions should partner on sidewalk improvement projects and improving bicycle connections to ensure rider safety and ease of access. Other strategies for improving connections between transit and rider destinations in lower density areas, include on-demand service. On-demand service is typically introduced in select areas where transit demand exists, yet fixed-route transit service may not be an appropriate option. These are also areas where level of comfort for pedestrians and cyclists may be lower than denser, more walkable urban areas.

Each transit agency in the study area has done some level of inventory of bus stop improvements, and first-/last-mile connections are opportunities for partnerships with local jurisdictions on street improvements. The quality of first-/last-mile connection infrastructure typically decreases at near county lines. The transit agencies and local jurisdictions in the study area would benefit from establishing an ongoing investment program that prioritizes potential mobility improvements at these junctions and makes street design around and connected to fixed route transit service safe and accessible for transit customers.

### *I-5 Bus on Shoulder/BRT*

Chronic congestion impacts transit reliability and speed along the I-5 corridor, especially during peak hours. If shoulders are of adequate width, they can be used by general traffic or transit vehicles during periods of heavy congestion. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) recommends a shoulder width of 12 feet for part-time shoulder use, though in some cases shoulders as narrow as 10 feet can be acceptable for smaller vehicles. The shoulders on I-5 in Snohomish, Skagit, and Whatcom Counties vary between 4-11 feet which is not wide enough for use by transit vehicles without physical improvements. As the region continues to grow, the flexible and efficient use of I-5 as a transit corridor may benefit from upgrades to infrastructure that would enable transit operators to use shoulders for operations during congested periods.

Future large-scale investment in Bus Rapid Transit corridors, like the Swift network in Snohomish County, may be primarily for local high ridership transit areas, but as these investment opportunities are undertaken at the local level, there will be continued opportunities for coordinated regional service to take advantage of infrastructure investment.

## Operations Vision

### *Fleet and Facilities*

A limiting factor for expanding regional service are the location and capacity of facilities. The regional service recommendations in Frequency and Span Improvements would require up to 14 additional vehicles, and collaboration between transit agencies on potential fleet storage and maintenance could alleviate operational challenges of expanding service. Potential collaboration could include shared use of facilities and the locations of new facilities that may enable more efficient deployment of transit service that crosses county boundaries and serves regional connections.

### *ZEV Transition*

Skagit Transit, WTA, Island Transit, and Community Transit have all begun the transition to a zero-emissions fleet. The region's providers are utilizing a variety of zero-emission technologies, including hydrogen-cell and battery powered electric vehicles. *Table 7* includes the target year for a complete transition and the estimated cost of the zero-emission vehicles and the associated facility upgrades.

*Table 7: ZEV Transition by Transit Provider*

| Transit Provider | Target Year | Estimated Cost |
|---|---|---|
| **Skagit Transit** | 2039 | $50 million |
| **Community Transit** | 2050 | $1.4 billion |
| **WTA** | 2040 | $215 million |
| **Island Transit** | 2035 | $46 million |

### *Tribal Resources Access*

Several tribes in Northwest Washington operate their own transit service on tribal lands to connect to WTA, Island Transit, and Community Transit fixed-route service (see Tribal Transportation). Skagit Transit is currently exploring connections to the Upper Skagit

Reservation with refinements to Route 301. Further collaboration between the Tribal governments and transit agencies can include identifying transfer points, timed transfers, and pooling resources to provide more direct routes to employment, grocery stores, colleges, hospitals, and other major destinations.

### *Fare Coordination and Integration*

ORCA is the primary fare system provider of the region and is used by Community Transit, Everett Transit, Sound Transit, Kitsap Transit, Pierce Transit, King County Metro, and Washington State Ferries. Skagit Transit and WTA currently use Umo as their fare system provider. Transitioning to ORCA would allow for more seamless connections between providers. Investments and upgrades required may include fare collection hardware and software upgrades that are compatible with the ORCA system, fare structure realignment, establishment of interagency data sharing and processing protocols, and upon implementation, customer communication and education. While Community Transit already uses the ORCA system, the cost of adopting the ORCA system for WTA, Skagit Transit, and Island Transit is estimated at approximately $350,000 per county. Making a regional investment would cost between roughly $0.7 – $1.5 million[4]. Integration into the broader Puget Sound via the ORCA fare system is a lever that would dramatically benefit customers and impact regional access and information-sharing as populations and transit investments expand into the North Puget Sound.

## Conclusion and Next Steps

The recommendations of this study intend to facilitate further discussion between transit providers and partners on improving travel in Northwest Washington as the region grows. Transit partners should continue to identify collaboration opportunities that enhance cross-county travel between regional hubs and discuss potential resource pooling for improvements to service, facilities, and fleet.

[4] Estimate intended for planning-level understanding only. Low end of range assumes all WTA, Skagit Transit, and Island Transit fixed-route coach buses would be retrofitted for ORCA. High end of range assumes both fixed-route and paratransit vehicles would be retrofitted for ORCA.