



**whatcom council of governments**

# **Public Participation Plan**

## **DRAFT**

*For public review and comment  
July 26-September 8, 2021*



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## MEMORANDUM

To: The People of Whatcom County  
From: Bob Wilson, Executive Director  
Date: July 26, 2021  
Subject: **Draft Public Participation Plan – Request for Public Comments**

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Public participation in the transportation planning process is essential in ensuring that the people of Whatcom County have the mobility they need to make the most of their lives, whether it's getting to work or school, participating in community life, shopping, receiving deliveries . . . the list goes on and on. While the elected officials who serve on the Whatcom Transportation Policy Board and the staff of the Whatcom Council of Governments do their best to plan for future transportation needs, without the public's input there is a risk of making decisions – including significant investments of public funds in the regional transportation network – that may not reflect the vision of the citizens, communities and businesses of Whatcom County as accurately as they should.

The Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG) has prepared this draft *Public Participation Plan* to replace the current [Public Participation Plan](#), which was adopted in 2009 and updated in 2014. Members of the public are strongly encouraged to review and comment on the draft plan from July 26 through September 8, 2021. Comments may be emailed to [wcog@wcog.org](mailto:wcog@wcog.org) with the subject heading “Public Participation Plan Comments.” You may also submit comments by mail to:

Whatcom Council of Governments  
Attn: PPP Comments  
314 East Champion Street  
Bellingham, WA 98225

All comments received will be considered by WCOG's Council Board and will be included in the “Comments Received During Public Review Period” appendix of the adopted plan.

WCOG's Board, staff and I look forward to receiving your comments. Thank you!

## Introduction

Transportation is essential to everyday life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Whether for going to school or work, visiting family and friends or shopping in a store or online, at least one mode of transportation is involved: walking, biking, rolling, driving a car, riding a bus, or trucks delivering goods to stores and homes. Transportation networks include roads, bike lanes, transit routes, sidewalks, rails, trails, ferries and more. With the exception of the Canadian border, jurisdictional boundaries have little bearing on the public, which views the regional transportation network as a subsection of a continuous, nationwide system. Creating this seamless system for all users requires something more than just transportation planners and elected officials: it needs the public's input. As both a user of the regional transportation system and as a funder (through the various local, state and federal taxes you pay), your concerns, opinions and wishes matter. This *Public Participation Plan for the Whatcom Council of Governments* (“the Public Participation Plan”) has been developed to inform you of your rights and role in the development of regional transportation plans, including how those plans will be funded.

### About the Whatcom Council of Governments

Established in 1966 pursuant to Chapter 36.64.080 of the Revised Code of Washington, the Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG) provides a forum that facilitates cooperation among its members, which include the County's seven cities, Whatcom County Government, the Port of Bellingham, the Lummi Nation and other regional entities. Like most other councils of governments throughout Washington and the United States, WCOG has neither taxing authority nor the ability to regulate land use.

In 1982, Governor John Spellman designated WCOG to serve as the region's Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), the federally recognized transportation policy board for the Bellingham Urbanized Area. With the passage of the Washington State Growth Management Act in 1990, WCOG was also designated as the Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) for all of Whatcom County. The MPO and RTPO are governed by a joint Transportation Policy Board which ensures that the region meets its obligations under the Growth Management Act as well as the transportation planning requirements of the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

Other important WCOG activities include the [International Mobility and Trade Corridor Program](#) (IMTC), which facilitates improved transportation and commerce in the Cascade Gateway region of Washington State and British Columbia; facilitating the [North Sound Transportation Alliance](#) (NSTA), a coalition of concerned citizens, elected officials and professional staff of transportation agencies from Washington's five northwestern-most counties; and staffing and operating the [Whatcom Smart Trips](#) program.

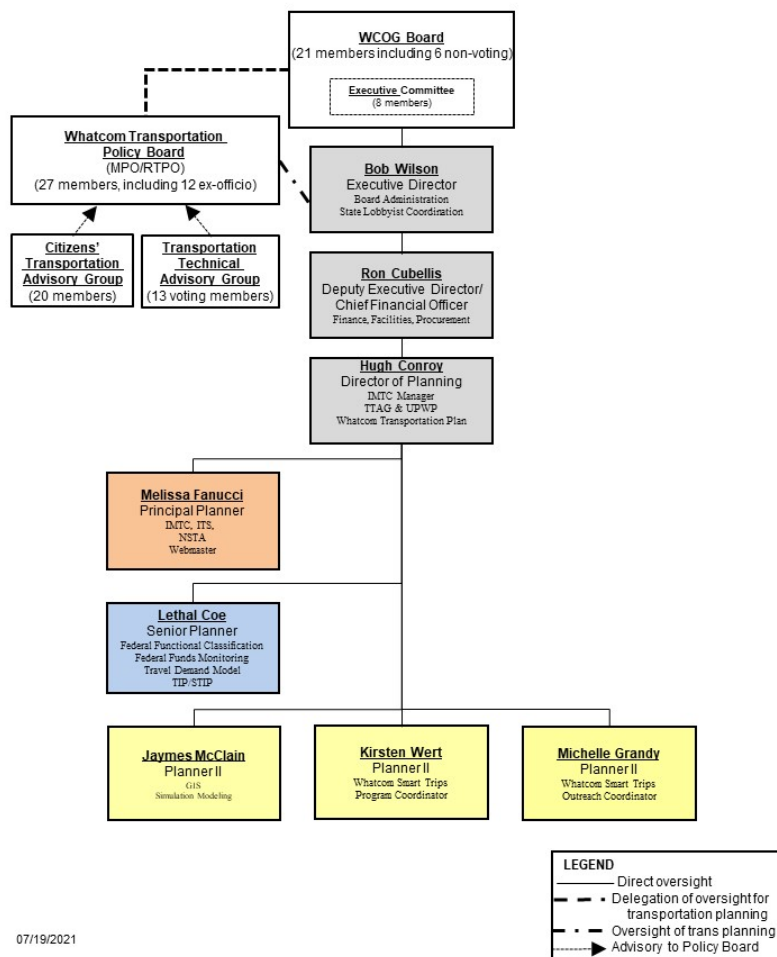
Federal regulations require WCOG to develop a long-range metropolitan transportation plan and a funding schedule for regional projects – known as the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) – consistent with the long-range plan. Funding to develop the plan and TIP is provided to WCOG from its member jurisdictions and agencies, the State of Washington, and the FHWA and

FTA. Additionally, WCOG regularly applies for and receives competitive grant funding from federal and state agencies as well as funding from the Canadian federal government and the Province of British Columbia for IMTC projects.

### WCOG Governance Structure

The [Council Board](#) is WCOG’s governing body and serves as its board of directors. It is composed of 15 voting members drawn from Whatcom County Government (three members, including the County Executive), the City of Bellingham (three members, including the Mayor), the County’s six other cities, the Port of Bellingham, the Lummi Nation and the Lake Whatcom Water and Sewer District. There are also associate (non-voting) members who participate in Council Board meetings and share the perspectives of the organizations and communities that they represent.

### Whatcom Council of Governments 2021 Organizational Structure



07/19/2021

The region’s transportation planning process is directed by a standing committee of the Council Board known as the [Whatcom Transportation Policy Board](#) (“the Policy Board”). In addition to most of the Council Board’s voting members, the Nooksack Tribe, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and the Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA) are also voting members of the Policy Board. To minimize unnecessary duplication of work and

oversight, the separate MPO and RTPPO planning processes have been merged into a unified process overseen by the Policy Board. In addition to governing the metropolitan and regional transportation planning processes, the Policy Board is charged with allocating the combination of federal, state and local funds to the numerous projects contained in the TIP. The Policy Board may also request WCOG staff to perform analyses or other research to assist them in understanding the complex issues they are called on to address.

The [Transportation Technical Advisory Group](#) (TTAG) meets monthly to analyze and discuss regional transportation planning issues – including requests for project funding – and makes recommendations to the Policy Board. TTAG is composed of professional transportation planning staff from WCOG’s member jurisdictions.

The [Citizens’ Transportation Advisory Group](#) (CTAG) is jointly administered by WCOG and WTA to facilitate ongoing citizen participation in support of the regional transportation planning process as well as transit services provided by WTA. Although all members of the public are welcome and encouraged to comment individually on the planning process at any time, including at Policy Board meetings, through surveys, etc., CTAG serves as a standing resource for public engagement. CTAG’s core responsibilities are to:

- Review and comment on plans and programs subject to the oversight or approval of the Policy Board
- Provide input on planned services and programs provided by WTA, and
- Offer ideas, identify needs, and otherwise contribute to the planning process.

Membership on CTAG shall be available to any person over the age of 16 residing and/or working in Whatcom County. WCOG and WTA value diversity in the regional transportation planning process. To encourage participation that furthers equity and inclusion; facilitates input from the entire WCOG region and WTA service area, and; includes the perspectives of multiple transportation-system user groups, WCOG and WTA specifically try to ensure that CTAG includes:

- Native Americans (Lummi Nation and Nooksack Tribe)
- Black people, people of color, and other racial and ethnic minorities
- People with disabilities
- Senior citizens
- People with incomes below Whatcom County’s median
- Members of the LGBTQ+ community
- People who ride the bus, bike or walk, including those who do so as their primary means of travel
- People who do not own a car, and
- Residents from Whatcom County’s small cities and rural communities.

Persons interested in CTAG membership must submit a signed membership agreement to the Executive Director of WCOG that:

- Establishes the applicant’s eligibility for membership based on their current home or work address
- Provides the applicant’s assurance that they will 1) actively participate in CTAG in furtherance of the goal of improving the regional transportation planning process, and 2) do so in a way that respects and supports all CTAG members’ ability to participate and be heard

- Confirms the applicant’s understanding that meetings may be recorded for the purpose of note taking and improved documentation of member feedback for consideration by decision makers.

The Executive Director, in consultation with WTA, shall have the authority to 1) determine if an applicant meets the requirements for membership, and 2) terminate the membership of anyone who is disruptive or otherwise fails to respectfully treat their fellow CTAG members, WCOG or WTA staff, or other attendees.

### **Vision and Goals**

The purpose of the metropolitan and regional transportation planning process is to provide a platform for a collective definition of regional goals and cooperative decision-making on transportation investments. Local governments, state and federal agencies, public and private transportation providers, the business community, advocacy organizations and individual members of the public come together to identify the goals to be achieved through the region’s transportation network within the 20-year life of the region’s long-range transportation plan. Typical goals include enhanced mobility, greenhouse gas reduction, environmental stewardship, economic development, equity and more. The goals of the plan are achieved through a set of coordinated programs, policies and investments in the regional network.

[Whatcom Mobility 2040](#) draws on the transportation goals adopted in the comprehensive plans of WCOG’s member jurisdictions – Whatcom County, the seven cities, the Lummi Nation and the Nooksack Tribe – in establishing the goals for the Whatcom region. The transportation elements of all the jurisdictions’ comprehensive plans were carefully reviewed, and the goals emphasized in each of them were compiled in a matrix to identify those shared by a majority of the jurisdictions.

*Goals* (numbers in parentheses indicate how many jurisdictions included that goal in their local comprehensive plans)

- Safety (10)
- Climate & environmental quality (8)
- Preservation (6)
- Mobility (all modes & emphases on trip capacity) (8)
- A multimodal transportation system (8)
- Access (6)
- Freight transportation (6)

These seven regional goals, which overlap and relate to the planning factors prescribed in federal and state law, are the bases for prioritizing project funding requests and developing performance measures and targets.

#### *Safety*

All ten of the Whatcom region’s jurisdictions included safety as one of their transportation goals. The safety of all users of the region’s transportation system – pedestrians, bicyclists, automobile drivers and passengers, and truckers – must be maximized to the greatest degree practicable in the establishment of regional transportation policies and investment decisions.

#### *Climate (greenhouse gas reduction) & environmental quality*

Whatcom region local governments, tribal governments, and Washington State government have initiated actions to reduce carbon emissions and prepare for the effects of climate disruption. Reducing greenhouse gas 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.

#### *Preservation*

The high priority of the preservation goal indicates the Whatcom region's intent to ensure that its existing transportation systems are kept in a state of good repair before pursuing system expansions. This goal includes the principle of sustainability: the importance of choosing investments in facilities and programs that our region has the fiscal capacity to pay for, operate, and maintain into the future.

#### *Mobility*

Mobility refers to the summation of qualitative measures of travel and goods movement including travel time, travel-time predictability and reliability, and comfort. The goal of mobility and our region's strategies to optimize it pertain to all modes (i.e., walking, transit, biking, driving, freight & service trucks, etc.). Mobility depends on adequate transportation system capacity. To advance this mobility goal (and its other goals), the Whatcom region measures capacity primarily as the number of trips that the transportation network can accommodate. Secondly, traditional, mode specific measures of road-capacity for vehicles are appropriate for certain analyses.

#### *A multi-modal transportation system*

To efficiently and equitably serve the movement of people and goods that our region needs in the years ahead, our transportation network must provide for multiple modes of transportation (e.g., walking, buses, trucks, cars, bikes, paratransit, rail, etc.) and good connections between them. While "mobility" addresses the quality of transportation provided by all modes, this goal affirms a commitment to the continued development and integration of the options themselves.

#### *Access*

The region's transportation system is intended to serve all people and acknowledge and reduce barriers related to age (seniors and youth), income, and disability.

#### *Freight transportation*

Given Whatcom County's adjacency to the Canadian border, along with the presence of one of the nation's premier trade corridors within its boundaries (Interstate 5) and BNSF freight rail, goods movement has a significant impact on the region's transportation system.

#### **Planning Partners**

WCOG actively coordinates its planning efforts and public participation activities with its member jurisdictions and agencies as well as other organizations responsible for planning and resource development activities within or adjacent to the region, notably the Province of British Columbia, the Canadian federal government, Skagit County and various federal and state agencies, including the National Park Service, the U.S Forest Service and the Washington State departments of Commerce and Ecology. Coordination is primarily achieved through regular meetings of the Policy Board, TTAG and CTAG. Coordination also occurs through the operation of three of WCOG's principal programs: IMTC, NSTA and Whatcom Smart Trips. Additionally, less formal, but important outreach occurs through the participation of WCOG staff at meetings, forums and workshops held throughout the region.

## Purpose and Scope of the Public Participation Plan

Robust public engagement is essential for ensuring that the transportation planning process reflects the goals of the people who use and pay for the system. To facilitate meaningful engagement, public participation activities should be coordinated and coincide with milestones in the plan-development process and must be designed to elicit relevant information and opinions needed to make a lasting contribution to the quality of life in Whatcom County. To facilitate this, WCOG:

1. Provides access to plans, programs and supporting materials and data at various stages during their development, and
2. Offers opportunities for members of the public to comment as plans and programs proceed toward completion.

WCOG is responsible for actively engaging all affected parties in an open, cooperative and collaborative process that provides stakeholders significant opportunities to influence transportation policy-making. The gathered feedback allows the Policy Board to give due consideration to the social, economic and environmental consequences of their actions, and assures the public that transportation programs support adopted local plans as well as community values.

WCOG is committed to providing a forum for such cooperative decision-making and emphasizes transparent and inclusionary outreach activities. The purpose of the Public Participation Plan is to facilitate a consistently applied approach to citizen engagement that includes various tools and established public review periods for plans and programs. Public Participation Plan guidance is used to encourage citizens, affected organizations and other interested parties to participate in the development of transportation plans and programs, and to provide input during all phases of the transportation decision-making process (planning, design, financing, etc.).

### Regulatory Framework and Guiding Principles

WCOG complies with all federal and state requirements for public participation as well as its own policies, all of which assisted in the formulation of the guiding principles underlying the development and implementation of this Public Participation Plan.

- Adequate notice and comment periods
  - Conduct public participation opportunities at key decision points
  - Provide timely and adequate notice of public participation activities
  - Allow for sufficient time for public review and comment
- Open and inclusionary access
  - Offer full public access to information about transportation issues and processes
  - Employ visualization techniques, such as maps, pictures and graphics to convey information
  - Make public information available in electronically accessible formats and resources
  - Hold public meetings at convenient and accessible locations and times
- Explicit consideration
  - Demonstrate explicit consideration and response to public input received
  - Seek out and consider the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, including but not limited to low-income and minority households



- Proactive public participation process
  - Coordinate with statewide transportation planning public involvement and consultation processes
  - Periodically review the effectiveness of public participation procedures and strategies.

The resulting strategies, tools and public comment periods were designed to meet the applicable federal and state requirements for metropolitan and regional transportation planning, which are described in Appendix B.

### **Environmental Justice and Limited English Proficiency Considerations**

The U.S. Department of Transportation mandates that non-discrimination principles be incorporated into the transportation planning and decision-making process. WCOG is responsible for ensuring that a transportation project which receives federal funding does not have a disproportionately adverse effect on minority or low-income populations.

As a recipient of federal transportation funds, WCOG makes reasonable efforts to provide meaningful access to transportation planning information for individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP), those for whom English is not their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, speak, write or otherwise communicate in English.

In December 2019, WCOG adopted its *Language Assistance Plan for People with Limited English Proficiency* as part of its *Combined Title VI and Limited English Proficiency Plan* (Appendix C). Based on an examination of Whatcom County demographic data conducted as part of the recommended “Four-Factor Analysis,” there are more than 4,000 Spanish-or Spanish Creole speakers who speak and comprehend English “less than very well.” WCOG’s LEP Plan established several “language assistance measures,” including publishing meeting notices in Spanish and providing translation or interpretation services upon request.

### **Public Participation Objectives, Strategies and Tools**

The fundamental objective of the Public Participation Plan is to ensure that the concerns and issues of everyone with a stake in transportation are identified and addressed in the regional planning and decision-making process. The strategies underlying all public participation activities are as follows:

- **Capture a wide audience** through various public participation strategies and tools
- **Provide information** to the public about transportation planning and improvement projects
- **Increase awareness** and become the go-to source for regional transportation information
- **Build community support** through early and ongoing public participation.

In order to facilitate public participation in the Whatcom region, WCOG uses a variety of engagement strategies and tools, which are described in the following sections.

### **Council Board, Whatcom Transportation Policy Board and Executive Committee Meetings**

Meetings of WCOG’s Council Board, Policy Board and Executive Committee are open to the public and fully comply with Washington State’s Open Public Meetings Act. To facilitate participation by individual citizens and representatives from community organizations in Whatcom County, WCOG ensures that:

- There is a public comment period on the agenda for every Council Board, Policy Board and Executive Committee meeting
- All meetings are conducted using a “hybrid” meeting format, whereby members of the public as well as board and committee members may participate in person or online
- Notices of the time and place of meetings, as well as instructions for virtual participation, are provided on WCOG’s [website](#)
- Meetings are held in WCOG’s fully-accessible Gordon W. Rogers Conference Room, or in other accessible locations, and
- Meeting minutes are made available upon their approval by the convening body.

It is important to note that public comments received through other public participation activities are distributed to board members at or before meetings to ensure that they will be considered prior to action.

Occasionally, WCOG convenes public information meetings, including workshops and open houses, in addition to regular board and committee meetings. These meetings are held to introduce the public to a specific project or program, as well as to directly interact with citizens. These meetings provide WCOG with opportunities to gather both quantitative and qualitative input and connect with citizens and organizations interested in becoming involved in the transportation planning process. WCOG strives to hold public meetings, workshops and open houses at convenient times and in accessible locations:

- Meeting locations are convenient and accessible to the public, including persons with disabilities
- The proximity to transit facilities, day of the week, and time of day are considered as meetings are scheduled to accommodate those who need or want to access the public meetings by public transportation, and
- Several methods for gathering public input are provided during each public meeting, including but not limited to audio or video recorders; various visualization techniques, such as infographics, PowerPoint presentations, or maps; comment boxes; or interpreters for those with limited English proficiency.

Additional feedback may be obtained through member interviews, targeted stakeholder meetings and resource agency consultation.

#### **wcog.org**

As part of its ongoing effort to keep the citizens of the region informed, WCOG built and maintains its website, [wcog.org](http://wcog.org). The site provides extensive information on WCOG, including:

- A calendar of board, committee and advisory group meetings
- Agenda packets for upcoming meetings
- A listing of current board and committee members
- Updates on current planning activities, including opportunities to participate in surveys
- Descriptions of approved plans and active programs, along with staff contact information
- An archive of previous plans and studies, meeting packets, and approved meeting minutes
- The Google Translate tool for people who do not read English or those with limited proficiency
- A map delineating those areas within Whatcom County with higher-than-average minority populations and/or low-income levels, and for which Environmental Justice action may be required

- A dedicated CTAG page that also serves as a portal for engagement in the transportation decision-making process.

The site is regularly updated with content on public participation opportunities, current plans and programs, and information on particular projects from across the region. Also, site-specific Internet traffic data are gathered through web analytics, including the number of visitors, downloads for specific documents, pages visited, and other metrics, and these usage data are reviewed and evaluated to improve the site.

### **WCOG Interactive Map**

The Interactive Map tool is available on WCOG's website. Using WCOG's geographic information system, members of the public can view, sort, analyze and interpret data that inform local and regional transportation planning decisions.

### **Hard-copy Documents**

In addition to making documents accessible to the public on its website, WCOG maintains paper copies of many of them in its office at 314 East Champion Street in downtown Bellingham. These include the Interlocal Agreement, bylaws, the TIP, the Unified Planning Work Program, contracts, and original signed copies of meeting minutes. Members of the public may make arrangements to view documents by emailing WCOG's Public Information Officer at [publicdisclosure@wco.org](mailto:publicdisclosure@wco.org).

### **Visualization Techniques**

WCOG frequently uses maps, charts, illustrations and photographs in its documents and presentations to provide visual aids to illustrate key topics and regional objectives or trends. Interactive web content, animations and videos are also deployed.

### **Translation of Public Notices, Meeting Materials, and Summary Documents**

To accommodate those members of the public who possess limited English proficiency, meeting notices, agenda packets, summary documents for select plans and programs, etc., can be translated into Spanish upon request. Additionally, WCOG makes a reasonable effort to accommodate the needs of speakers of other languages when assistance is requested.

### **Surveys**

WCOG utilizes both online and on-site surveys to elicit feedback from citizens. Online platforms make it particularly easy to analyze results and aid in the visualization of collected responses and overall trends. On-site surveys are normally conducted using paper forms but may also be facilitated through the use of mobile devices. A good example is a [Household Travel Survey](#) (HST) which WCOG conducts periodically to collect data to refine the transportation planning process. A successful HST relies on voluntary participation from community members throughout the region.

### **Public Notice and Call for Public Commentary**

Prior to the adoption or amendment of major planning documents, such as the long-range transportation plan, the regional TIP, the Public Participation Plan and others, a call for public comments is issued. This call invites and encourages the public to review and comment on the draft document. All comments received from the public, including community organizations – whether positive or negative – are handled in the following manner:

- All comments must be submitted in writing and received within the published public comment period

- Comments concerning specific projects or proposals are forwarded to the sponsoring agency or jurisdiction
- A copy of the comments are provided to the Council Board, the Policy Board or TTAG, as appropriate, for their evaluation and consideration prior to official action of the board with jurisdiction
- A written response is provided to the individual or organization concerning recommendations or decisions arising from the board meeting or the sponsoring entity, as appropriate, and
- Copies of all comments received will be included in the final document.

A notice of the public review period is published in *The Bellingham Herald* and on [wcog.org](http://wcog.org). Additional public notice may also be provided through press releases, email notifications and other means, as appropriate. As noted earlier, public comments are also accepted during WCOG board meetings.

### **Press Releases and Media Outreach**

In order to reach a larger audience, WCOG prepares press releases with information on the regional transportation planning process, products and public participation opportunities for distribution through local print, radio, television and online media outlets.

### **Distribution Lists**

WCOG maintains several distribution lists consisting of individuals and non-governmental organizations interested in receiving information and being involved in one or more programs related to the regional transportation planning process.

### **Outreach to Tribal Members**

The Lummi Nation is a voting member of WCOG's Council Board, and both they and the Nooksack Tribe are voting members of the Whatcom Transportation Policy Board. WCOG encourages and welcomes the full involvement of the tribes and the participation of tribal members in all its activities, including the development of the long-range transportation plan and the regional TIP.

### **Regional Meetings, Community Events and Popular Venues**

WCOG staff actively seek out opportunities to elicit public comment and inform the community about ongoing planning activities and programs. This may be accomplished by attending and making presentations at meetings of community organizations, engaging with members of the community at regional venues, such as the Bellingham Farmers' Market or the Northwest Washington Fair, or enlisting the aid of membership organizations like the Bellingham Regional Chamber of Commerce or Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism to reach their members. Furthermore, WCOG strives to connect with traditionally underrepresented populations within the region, including minority, low-income, and limited English proficiency populations by working through key stakeholders and community groups that engage and serve these populations to receive feedback on upcoming transportation planning and investment decisions.

## Public Participation Activities by Plan or Program

This chapter focuses on the previously described strategies and tools, and details public comment periods as they apply to each of WCOG’s planning documents and programs. The matrix below summarizes the potential public participation activities for each of the listed plans and reports.

Overview of Strategies, Tools, and Public Comment Periods	Policy Board Meetings	Public Meetings	Member Interviews, Stakeholder Meetings, Agency Consultation	Website	Surveys	Public Notice	Call for Public Comments (Length)	Press Releases and Media Outreach	Mailing Lists	Regional Meetings, Community Events, Venues
Long-range Transportation Plan Development	✓	3 rounds	✓	✓	✓	✓	4 weeks	✓	✓	✓
Long-range Transportation Plan Amendment	✓	✓		✓		✓	2 weeks			
Transportation Improvement Program	✓			✓		✓	2 weeks			
Public Participation Plan	✓	✓		✓		✓	45 days	✓	✓	✓
Human Services Transportation Plan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 weeks	✓	✓	
Unified Planning Work Program	✓			✓						
Annual Performance and Expenditure Report	✓			✓						
Title VI and Limited English Proficiency Plan	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	2 weeks	✓	✓	✓
Title VI Annual Accomplishment Report	✓			✓						
Surface Transportation Block Grant Project Selection	✓			✓						

*Note: Public participation activities for non-recurring and special studies will be determined as part of the initial scoping.*

## Long-Range Transportation Plan

Adopted in June 2017, the Whatcom region's long-range transportation plan (LRTP), known as *Whatcom Mobility 2040*, describes the current state of the regional transportation network, identifies region-wide issues and existing needs, provides projections of future travel demand, establishes goals and lays out a program of actions and investments to achieve them. The LRTP's principal function is to provide the policy framework for prioritizing and selecting transportation projects and programs for funding and implementation. It is a *multimodal* plan intended to improve access and mobility throughout the region for *all* modes of transportation: transit, walking, biking, rolling (such as wheelchairs and scooters), trucks and private automobiles. It also provides the link between the local jurisdictions' transportation plans, the region's [Human Services Transportation Plan](#) and the [Washington State Transportation Plan](#).

There are specific federal and state requirements related to metropolitan and regional transportation plans. Preparation of a metropolitan transportation plan is a federal requirement for the Bellingham Urbanized Area. The Washington State Growth Management Act establishes the requirements for a regional transportation plan, which addresses all of Whatcom County, not just the Bellingham Urbanized Area.

Because the Whatcom region must meet both federal and state transportation planning requirements, which overlap in many respects, *Whatcom Mobility 2040* addresses both in a combined LRTP that:

- Examines the transportation needs of the entire Whatcom region through the year 2040
- Focuses on identifying priorities, policies and a strategic framework to define and select investments and programs with the greatest regional benefit
- Builds on strategies identified by state and local agencies to address short-, mid-, and long-term needs
- Is *fiscally constrained*, meaning that its assumptions and recommendations are based on reasonable federal, state and local funding projections
- Considers potential impacts to vulnerable populations and the natural and built environment, and
- Is a *multi-modal* plan that focuses on the mobility needs of *all* the region's travelers, not just those who drive.

*Whatcom Mobility 2040* provides clear policy and project recommendations and guides all other transportation planning and programming activities performed by WCOG. In accordance with federal requirements, the LRTP will be updated and presented to the Policy Board for its adoption in June 2022.

## Transportation Improvement Program

Federal and state regulations also require WCOG to develop a TIP for the Whatcom region. Federal requirements call for a four-year, financially constrained list of projects, whereas Washington State regulations stipulate a six-year list of projects. Rather than producing two separate documents, the combined Whatcom region TIP is a six-year programming document, which demonstrates financial constraint for federal funds throughout the first four years of the integrated financial plan.

The TIP also serves as a schedule of accountability to FHWA and FTA, which annually review and certify the TIP to ensure the continuation of federal financial assistance for transportation improvements in the Whatcom region. WCOG's regional TIP works in concert with the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) to implement projects. Placement in the STIP is required for most transportation projects that receive federal funding. TIP projects are separated into three distinct groups:

- Projects with secured funding anticipated and are located within the Metropolitan Planning Area
- Projects with secured funding but are located outside the Metropolitan Planning Area, and
- Unfunded projects (without dedicated funding source) for the entire WCOG region.

Projects in the TIP must be consistent with policy and project recommendations contained in the adopted LRTP. The TIP functions as a project programming document and financial plan that identifies all federally funded and prioritized projects, as well as other transportation improvements of regional significance, regardless of their

funding source. It is updated annually and amended throughout the year as new projects are added, completed projects are removed, or existing projects move into a new phase or experience a change in funding.

General steps in the development of the TIP include:

- Local city and county governments and WTA prepare and submit their local six- year programs to WSDOT and WCOG; these programs also contain regionally significant projects that do not use federal funding
- WCOG reviews all projects to ensure the following:
  - All projects scheduled for federal funding are included in the TIP
  - Projects are fiscally constrained by year and funding source
  - All regionally significant projects are included, regardless of funding source
  - The TIP projects are consistent with the current LRTP
- The public and interested parties are afforded early and reasonable opportunity for involvement, and
- All projects in the TIP are consistent with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.

Once approved, the regional TIP is included in the STIP, which is coordinated and maintained by WSDOT. Following USDOT approval of the STIPs, local jurisdictions may begin obligating federal funds for their projects.

### **Public Participation Plan**

Previously adopted by WCOG in October of 2009 and updated in November 2014, WCOG again updated its Public Participation Plan in the summer and fall of 2021. The updated plan incorporates information gathered as part of the development of both *Whatcom Mobility 2040* and the 2045 LRTP, which will be adopted by the Policy Board in June 2022. The draft Public Participation Plan underwent a 45-day public comment period from July 26 through September 8, 2021. All comments received on the draft, whether positive or negative, were provided to the Council Board, and when appropriate a response was provided to the individual or organization that submitted it, including any recommendations or decisions made by the Council Board resulting from the comment. All comments received on the draft, and any responses provided to those who submitted comments, are included in Appendix A of this Public Participation Plan.

The Public Participation Plan is reviewed annually to gauge the effectiveness of its strategies and tools and may be amended when deemed necessary.

### **Human Services Transportation Plan**

In 2006, WSDOT directed WCOG and the state's other RTPOs to convene stakeholder groups composed of local human services agencies, schools, transportation providers and others to develop consolidated human services transportation plans to address the mobility needs of people who do not drive due to age, income or disability reasons. The current Whatcom Human Services Transportation Plan was adopted in October 2018; it will be updated in 2022.

The Whatcom region's human services transportation planning process has since been reviewed and refined by CTAG and TTAG; the planning process engages stakeholders to identify gaps in service and updates a ranked list of project proposals within Whatcom County. Project proposals included on the list are thus eligible for consideration for state and federal public transportation grant funding administered through WSDOT's Consolidated Grant Program.

### **Unified Planning Work Program**

The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) describes the planning activities and products that WCOG is working on during the current state fiscal year, and it also summarizes the work and accomplishments of the previous year. Updated annually, the UPWP defines each planning task, associated budget, the responsible lead agency, and the anticipated completion date for all related activities.

### **Annual Performance and Expenditure Report**

The Annual Performance and Expenditure Report describes the progress made towards fulfilling the activities outlined in the previous year’s UPWP. The report also details associated expenses and discusses any departure from the originally proposed task budgets. UPWP-specific public participation protocols to this report.

**Combined Title VI and Limited English Proficiency Plan and Annual Report**

Adopted in December 2019, WCOG’s *Combined Title VI and Limited English Proficiency Plan* outlines WCOG’s specific roles and responsibilities necessary to ensure consistent implementation of its non-discrimination policy in all its programs and activities, regardless of whether or not those programs and activities receive federal funding. It also includes a *Language Assistance Plan for People with Limited English Proficiency* to ensure compliance with the applicable provisions of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended.

The Annual Title VI Report provides an overview of all relevant accomplishments for the various programs and activities WCOG administers.

**Surface Transportation Block Grant Project Selection**

Although WCOG staff facilitates the regional project selection processes, it is the member jurisdictions themselves, via TTAG, that determine which projects will be considered for selection by the Policy Board. This process applies to the award of funding through the federal Surface Transportation Block Grant and Transportation Alternatives programs.

For the Washington State Public Transportation Consolidated Grant program, regional priorities for the Human Services Transportation Plan projects are also determined through a regional project selection process; subsequently, the projects are submitted to WSDOT to inform the statewide competitive process.

**Ongoing Evaluation and Improvement of Public Participation Efforts**

Regular monitoring and qualitative as well as quantitative assessment of public involvement strategies and tools help identify effective public participation activities and allow them to be modified when necessary, leading to more and better public engagement.

**Assessment of Activities**

As shown in the previous chapter, WCOG uses a variety of public participation strategies and tools. A priority is placed on adapting these activities to new technologies and the region’s changing organizational and demographic landscapes. Therefore, WCOG continuously seeks out improvements to its public participation and transportation planning process. The following table provides an overview of potential metrics used in the ongoing evaluation of public participation and engagement activities.

Public Participation Strategy or Tool	Evaluation Metric	Information Used for Improvement
Board Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Number of attendees</li> <li>● Number of comments</li> <li>● Number of key topics of comments</li> <li>● Title VI information of attendees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Effectiveness of meeting notification</li> <li>● Level of interest in certain topics</li> </ul>
Public Participation Strategy or Tool	Evaluation Metric	Information Used for Improvement



Public Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Number of attendees</li> <li>● Number of comments</li> <li>● Number of key topics of comments</li> <li>● Day/time of day meetings are held</li> <li>● Title VI information of attendees</li> <li>● How attendees indicate that they heard about a meeting or event</li> <li>● Evaluation information provided by attendees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Effectiveness of meeting notification</li> <li>● Effectiveness of notification distribution method</li> <li>● Effectiveness of meeting location and time</li> <li>● Level of interest in certain topics</li> <li>● Provide essential information for plans and programs</li> <li>● Identification of potential gaps in reaching certain populations</li> </ul>
Stakeholder Meetings and Outside Agency Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Number of interviews/meetings/ consultations held</li> <li>● Type of stakeholder/organization</li> <li>● Number of attendees</li> <li>● Contact information for organizations and their constituents</li> <li>● Number of contacts to other organizations and level of interest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Effectiveness of engagement</li> <li>● Level of interest in certain topics</li> <li>● Provide essential information for plans and programs</li> <li>● Maintain local contacts and institutional knowledge</li> </ul>
Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Number of site visits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Monthly</li> <li>■ During public comment periods</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Number of visits to specific pages</li> <li>● Number of document downloads</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Effectiveness of presentation of web content</li> <li>● Level of interest in certain topics</li> </ul>
Surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Number of respondents</li> <li>● Percent of surveys completed and/or number of questions completed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Level of interest in certain topics</li> <li>● Provide essential information for plans and programs</li> <li>● Indicate public awareness, interest in the planning process, and validity of survey responses</li> </ul>
Call for Public Comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Timing of notification efforts</li> <li>● Geographic distribution of notifications</li> <li>● Number of comments received</li> <li>● Number of key topics of comments</li> <li>● Substance of comments received</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Effectiveness of call for public comment notice</li> <li>● Effectiveness of notification distribution method</li> <li>● Level of interest in certain topics</li> <li>● Provide essential information for plans and programs</li> </ul>

**Review of the Public Participation Plan**

WCOG’s commitment to meaningful public participation is the basis for involving the public in the metropolitan and regional transportation planning process. To that end, this Public Participation Plan will be evaluated annually to ensure that it remains relevant and effective. Part of these annual reviews will involve surveying emerging technologies that could be brought to bear to enhance public engagement. In any case, the Public Participation Plan can be amended by the Council Board whenever it is deemed necessary.

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## Appendix A: Comments Received During Public Review Period

The draft Public Participation Plan was made available for public review and comment from July 26 through September 8, 2021. Comments received in writing appear verbatim; comments received verbally were transcribed. WCOG's response to each comment is included.

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## Appendix B: Regulatory Framework

### Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act of 2015

The [Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act](#) – commonly referred to as the FAST Act – was signed into law on December 4, 2015. It was intended to be a five-year surface transportation authorization bill to replace the previous transportation bill, *Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (MAP-21); however, the FAST Act was extended to September 30, 2021, through a continuing resolution. The FAST Act provides funding for surface transportation improvements and guides the growth and development of vital transportation infrastructure. FAST largely maintains the program structure and funding shares established by MAP-21, which provided for the creation of a streamlined, performance-based and multimodal program for the U.S. surface transportation system.

### 23 USC 134 Metropolitan Transportation Planning

[Section 134 of Chapter 1 of Title 23 of the United States Code](#) (USC) requires metropolitan transportation planning that encourages and promotes the safe and efficient management, operation, and development of surface transportation systems to serve the mobility needs of people and freight and to foster economic growth and development within and between States and urbanized areas. The sections that directly apply to public participation are contained in paragraphs on consultation [23 USC 134 (g)], the development of the transportation plan [(i)], and the transportation improvement program [(j)].

### 23 CFR 450.316

[Section 450.316 of Volume 1 of Title 23 of the Code of Federal Regulations](#) (CFR) provides specific guidance on the development and content of federally required public participation plans.

### 23 CFR 450.322 and 450.324

In paragraphs (g), (i), and (j) of [Section 450.322](#), and paragraph (b) of [Section 450.324](#) of Volume 1 of 23 CFR there is specific guidance on consultation and public participation as it relates to the development and content of metropolitan transportation plans and transportation improvement program, respectively.

### Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 23 USC 140, 23 CFR 200, and 49 CFR 21

WCOG assures that no person shall, on the grounds of race, color, national origin, or sex, as provided by [Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964](#), and the [Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987](#) (P.L. 100.259), be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any agency-sponsored program or activity. WCOG further provides assurance that there will be no discrimination in any of its programs or activities, whether those programs and activities are federally funded or not.

### Executive Order 13166 - Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency

Issued in 2000, [Executive Order 13166](#) improves the access to services for those with limited English proficiency. The basis for this nondiscrimination order prohibition Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination based on national origin. Providing meaningful access to information, programs, services and activities for certain LEP individuals is required of recipients receiving federal funds.

### Executive Order 12898 - Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations

In accordance with [Executive Order 12898](#), issued in 1994, a recipient of federal funds from the U.S. Department of Transportation must incorporate Environmental Justice into its programs, policies and activities. Environmental Justice principles protect minority and low-income populations from disproportionately adverse effects of programs, policies and activities funded by the USDOT. These principles help assure that potential negative impacts to minority and low-income populations are identified and addressed before decisions are made that will utilize federal transportation funds.

### Growth Management Act, RCW 36.70A and 47.80

Washington's [Growth Management Act](#) (GMA), signed into law in 1990, established state goals, deadlines for compliance, and direction on how to prepare local comprehensive plans and development regulations, as well as requirements for early and continuous public participation. The [Regional Transportation Planning Organization](#) Chapter of GMA authorized the creation of regional transportation planning organizations, including WCOG, which are required to prepare regional transportation plans consistent with countywide planning policies and local comprehensive plans.

**Open Public Meetings Act, RCW 42.30**

Passed in 1971, the Washington State [Open Public Meetings Act](#) (OPMA) ensures that meetings of governing boards are open and accessible to the public so that citizens may view the decision-making process. All members of governing bodies must complete training on the OPMA within 90 days of taking office, and then take a refresher course at least every four years thereafter while in office.

**Public Records Act, RCW 42.56**

The Washington State [Public Records Act](#) requires that all records maintained by state and local agencies are made available to members of the public, allowing for only very narrow statutory exemptions.

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# Appendix C: Combined Title VI and Limited English Proficiency Plan

[Combined Title VI and Limited English Proficiency Plan](#)

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## Appendix D: Consultation Sources

- Whatcom County
- Cities of Bellingham, Blaine, Everson, Lynden, Nooksack and Sumas
- Port of Bellingham
- Lummi Nation
- Nooksack Tribe of Indians
- Whatcom Transportation Authority
- Citizens' Transportation Advisory Group
- Transportation Technical Advisory Group
- Washington State Department of Transportation
- Federal Highway Administration
- Federal Transit Administration
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Forest Service
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- Washington State Department of Ecology
- Washington State Department of Commerce
- Public Utility District No. 1
- Lake Whatcom Water & Sewer District
- Birch Bay Water & Sewer District
- Other Regional Organizations:
  - Bellingham Regional Chamber of Commerce
  - Whatcom Business Alliance
  - Whatcom Community Foundation
  - The Opportunity Council
  - Northwest Regional Council
  - Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism
  - Western Washington University
  - Bellingham Technical College
  - Whatcom Community College
  - Northwest Indian College
  - Public school districts and private schools

## Appendix E: Media Contacts

### Newspapers

- The Bellingham Herald
- The Lynden Tribune
- The Ferndale Record
- The Northern Light
- El Periódico (Spanish)

### Radio

- KZAX-FM 94.9
- KGMI-AM 790
- KGMI-FM 96.5
- KISM-FM 92.9
- KPUG-AM 1170
- KBAI-FM 98.9
- KBAI-AM 930
- KMRE-FM 102.3
- KPPI-AM 1550 (Punjabi)
- KUGS-FM 89.3
- KWPZ-FM 106.5

### Television

- Bellingham Community Television

### Websites

- Whatcom Talk ([whatcomtalk.com](http://whatcomtalk.com))