

# Whatcom Mobility 2040

## Introduction: The Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG) and regional and metropolitan transportation planning

Welcome to *Whatcom Mobility 2040*, the latest update to the Whatcom region's metropolitan and regional transportation plans (MTP and RTP respectively). This section gives an overview of state and federally legislated regional and metropolitan planning efforts and the related organization and responsibilities of the WCOG.

### WCOG

**A regional planning conference:** WCOG was created in 1966 pursuant to [RCW 36.64.080](#), the state law enabling the creation of regional conferences. In accordance with this legislation, WCOG serves as a regional planning forum for the jurisdictions in Whatcom County – the seven cities, the county government, the port, and the tribes. It currently has associate members as well including Western Washington University and the Opportunity Council. The state's objective under this legislation is to provide a framework for adjacent jurisdictions to collaborate on problems more effectively addressed as a region.

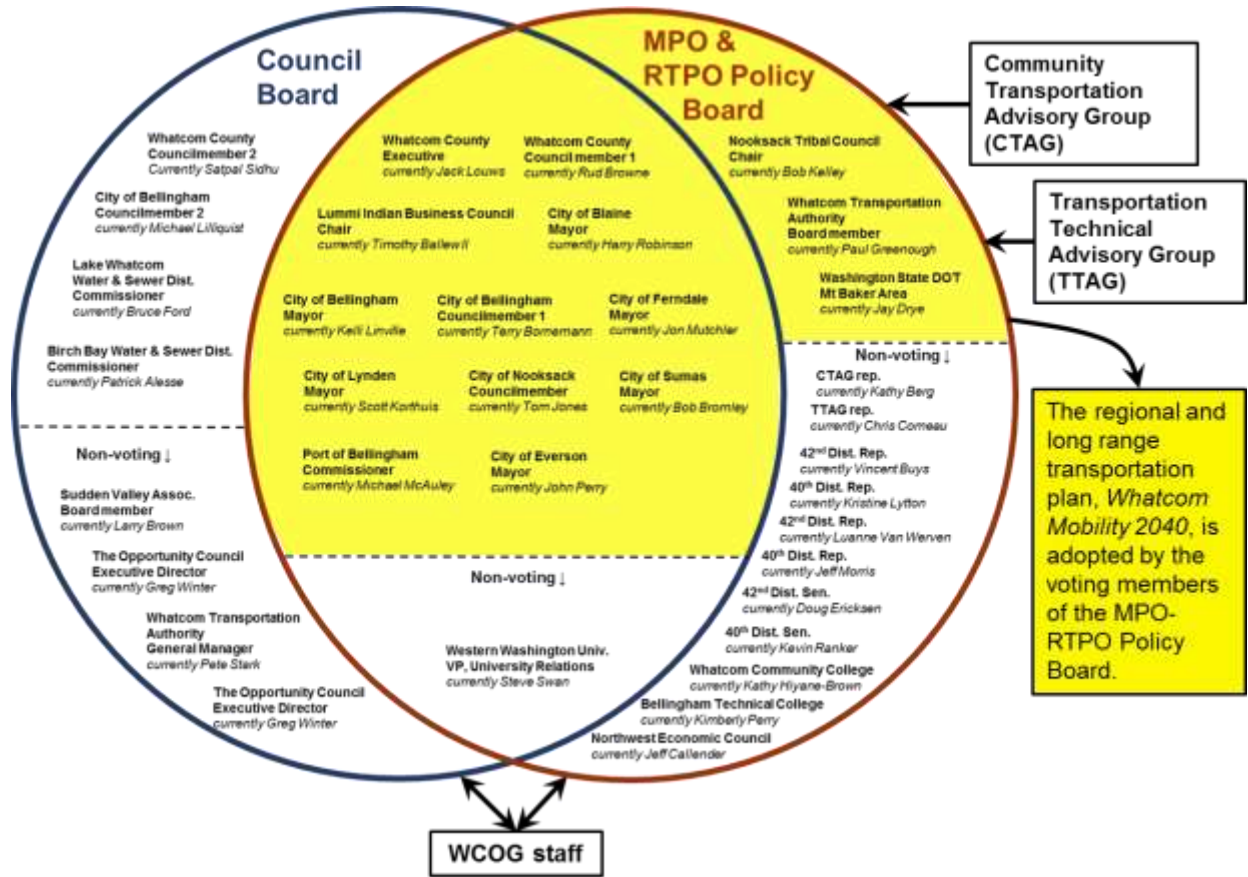
**An MPO:** In the early 1980s the City of Bellingham grew to exceed 50,000 people and became a U.S. Census Bureau designated urbanized area. This new demographic status meant that if Bellingham wanted to use any federal transportation funding, it needed to carry out federally prescribed transportation planning processes. As part of meeting these new federal requirements, Washington's governor designated WCOG as the region's metropolitan planning organization (MPO) in 1982. (Federal law regarding metropolitan planning is found at [23 U.S. Code § 134](#))

**An RTPO:** In 1990, following passage of Washington state's Growth Management Act (GMA) WCOG was designated as the county's regional transportation planning organization (RTPO). The purpose, structure, and responsibilities of RTPOs under GMA are contained in [RCW 47.80](#)

Since its initial designations as the region's MPO and RTPO, WCOG has formally blended its MPO and RTPO boards as well as integrated the conduct of its continuous planning program. This is also reflected in the periodic update of the metropolitan transportation plan (MTP) and the regional transportation plan (RTP) presented here as one product – *Whatcom Mobility 2040*.

The layers of WCOG's organization and how they interrelate relative to this plan are summarized in the diagram below.

**Figure 1.** Whatcom Council of Governments: governing structure relative to MPO & RTPO planning functions.



## **Whatcom Mobility 2040 – the 20-year transportation plan for our region.**

While the planning processes that the WCOG carries out as an RTPO and MPO are continuous, updates to a long-range (20-year) transportation plan are required at least every five years. Thus, *Whatcom Mobility 2040* is a snapshot as of 2017 – an analysis and compilation of:

- The regional transportation system as it exists and functions today.
- Our region’s goals – the outcomes we expect from our investments in transportation.
- Currently forecasted transportation demand that our region will experience over the next 20 years.
- Our collaboratively developed regional strategy for advancing our transportation goals through projects, programs, collaboration, and public engagement – and paying for it.

Though the *Whatcom Mobility 2040* product is now complete, regional planning carried out by the WCOG as required by state and federal law continues. System performance monitoring, collaborative identification of needs and solutions, and stakeholder engagement continue to inform investment and policy decisions. As conditions (travel demand, land use, etc.) and community expectations change as they certainly will, the next update to the long-range plan in

2022 will again update and reflect our region's best sense of what we need to do to achieve our region's goals over the next 20 years.

## **The Regional and Metropolitan Transportation Plan – What is it for?**

A continuous regional and metropolitan planning process and the related five-year plan update (this document), are required by law as the mechanisms for aligning future investments of public funds (primarily federal funds) with communities' priorities, demographics, financial capabilities, and land use plans.

### **Relationship to sub-regional planning**

Whatcom County and its local jurisdictions, the Lummi Nation and Nooksack Tribe, and transportation service providers such as the Whatcom Transportation Authority and the Port of Bellingham all conduct transportation planning for their jurisdictions, governments, and agencies. Local jurisdictions (cities and counties) are also required to update long-range comprehensive plans (inclusive of transportation and land use chapters) under Washington State's Growth Management Act. Through the RTPO and MPO (primarily elected local legislators and executives), all of the above listed entities and the citizens they represent are involved in structured coordination of strategies and investments of regional significance.

### **Relationship to state planning**

Regional and metropolitan planning is also importantly integrated with how Washington state plans for state owned components of transportation system and the relationship of state systems and strategies to those of regions. To this end, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is a member of the RTPO-MPO policy board, ongoing updates to the six-year regional transportation improvement program (RTIP) are meticulously aligned with the state transportation improvement program (STIP), WCOG and WSDOT staff, along with local jurisdiction staff regularly collaborate on system evaluation and planning, and much attention is paid to aligning the regional and metropolitan plans with WSDOT's long-range plans.

### **Relationship to citizens**

Good planning also requires the involvement of individual citizens, businesses, non-governmental organizations, and other community groups and constituencies. For the Whatcom region, this connection is affected through local, representative democracy and more precisely through elected officials' participation on the WCOG policy board. A second source of community input to the regional and metropolitan planning process is the structured involvement and advisory functions of the Whatcom Citizens' Transportation Advisory Group ([CTAG](#)). CTAG is comprised of private citizens appointed to serve by WCOG policy board members. The most basic way for citizens to participate in the regional and metropolitan transportation planning process is to communicate directly with their local, state, and federal elected officials; with staff of local governments, the Whatcom Transportation Authority, the Port of Bellingham, the WCOG, the state DOT, and others. To support this and other types of public participation, jurisdictions and agencies periodically host public forums to solicit input on community goals, system improvement strategies, and identification of investments. (e.g. [www.wcog.org](http://www.wcog.org)). Such feedback is also solicited through internet-based forms, e-mail, and other media. WCOG's plan for public participation is documented in the current version of its [Public Participation Plan](#). Specific strategies that were undertaken to encourage direct community input to the development of Whatcom Mobility 2040 **included...**