

Regional Transportation Accountability Legislation

Fixing our State's transportation problems will require huge investments and new ways of thinking. There is ample evidence, particularly from recent events, that our current transportation governance is inadequate and there is a compelling and urgent need for a better system of picking and prioritizing projects. The challenge of reducing congestion, improving safety, expanding transit and replacing worn out highways is increased by the urgency of reducing dependence on foreign oil and decreasing hydrocarbon emissions. We must rethink and reform the fractured and fragmented way that we tackle transportation issues in our urbanized counties.

The Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) appointed by Governor Gregoire in 2006, and the Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation appointed by Governor Locke in 1999 both found that (a) voter-approved regional investments in King, Pierce, Snohomish and Kitsap Counties are essential to meeting our transportation challenges, and (b) a patchwork of transportation agencies with overlapping functions has diluted accountability, weakened efficiency, and undermined public confidence.

Regional Transportation Accountability Legislation should be adopted in the 2008 Legislative session so that projects and funding can be promptly developed for, proposed to and approved by the voters in a regional transportation vote. **We cannot delay any longer.** We propose the following:

1. Consolidating Regional Agencies. Proposed Legislation would consolidate, under a single Transportation Board of Directors, the transportation-related planning, prioritization and funding responsibilities of: (a) the Puget Sound Regional Council (including transportation related growth management act duties); (b) the Regional Transit Authority (Sound Transit); and, (c) the Regional Transportation Investment District (RTID). The Transportation Board will take over coordination of federal and state funds as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (as allowed by federal law) and the Regional Transportation Planning Organization. In addition, the Transportation Board of Directors would:

- Assume and consolidate the PSRC staff, Sound Transit's planning staff and the RTID Planning Committee. Consolidation will help ensure a greater share of transportation funding is spent on construction and operation of the right projects.
- Serve as gatekeeper for all major transportation ballot measures in the region. Regional transportation funding plans would be approved by the Transportation Board before submission to the voters.
- Establish incentives for coordinating regional fares and services provided by local transit agencies, and be responsible for performance accountability review of the agencies.

2. Elected and Appointed Members. The Transportation Board of Directors would consist of nine non-partisan members elected from districts and six appointed members to ensure necessary transportation planning, engineering, construction and finance-related expertise. Each of the four PRSC counties (King, Kitsap, Pierce and Snohomish) would appoint one member and the Governor would appoint two members. Appointed members would not be current elected officials and should, as a group, have the needed technical expertise.

3. Advisory Council. The Transportation Board would receive advice and guidance from an advisory council that would include state, regional, and local officials, transportation providers and citizens.

4. Balanced Regional Package. The Transportation Board of Directors would (a) provide oversight of any previously approved regional transportation plans and (b) develop a balanced package of regional transportation investments for approval by the voters. A new plan must be approved by both a majority of all Transportation Board members as well as a majority of elected members. A package may include any transportation improvement—including highway and transit investments, user fees including time-of-day congestion pricing—most appropriate for the community served. The Transportation Board has the responsibility to develop a financing plan and to impose voter approved taxes, Transportation Board imposed tolls, user fees or other financing tools.