

# Plan Like Our Future Depends On It

## Aligning Regional Transportation Planning with Washington's Climate and Mobility Goals



Transportation Choices

Washington's [climate laws](#) require cutting pollution and reaching net-zero emissions by 2050, but regional transportation plans don't yet reflect those goals. **Updating regional planning rules to require reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and vehicle miles traveled** would help ensure future transportation investments support clean mobility and livable communities, instead of reinforcing car dependence and exacerbating climate pollution.

### Some of These Plans Are Not Like the Others

Under Washington's Growth Management Act, cities and counties must align their comprehensive plans with state climate and land-use requirements. **But Regional Transportation Planning Organizations are not subject to equivalent requirements to plan for greenhouse gas or vehicle miles traveled reductions.** This creates a structural disconnect: local governments may plan to reduce driving and emissions, while regional transportation plans can continue to assume growth in vehicle travel and prioritize roadway expansion. This has long-term consequences for emissions, costs, and travel behavior.

About **45%** of Washington's greenhouse gas emissions come from transportation.

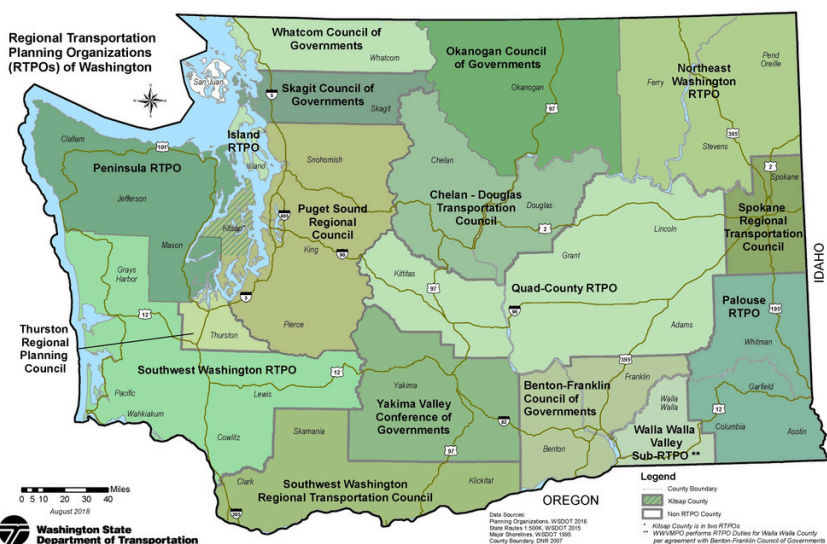
Passenger vehicles are the largest contributor.



### What Are Regional Transportation Planning Organizations?

RTPOs are regional entities responsible for developing long-range transportation plans, typically spanning 20 to 30 years, that guide major transportation investments and determine which projects are eligible for federal funding. **These plans strongly influence where roads are widened, where transit expands, and how people will travel for generations.**

RTPOs extend transportation planning into rural and urban areas, including regions not served by federal Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs). Several RTPOs also serve as MPOs in urbanized areas, such as the Puget Sound Regional Council and Spokane Regional Transportation Council.



**Washington has 14 Regional Transportation Planning Organizations.**

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# Transportation Planning Supports Climate Action

Washington's [Statewide Vehicle Miles Traveled Targets Report](#) indicates that reducing per-capita vehicle miles traveled is necessary to meet our climate goals. Without intentional regional planning, population growth in urban and suburban areas will result in increased vehicle travel, congestion, and emissions.

Planning for GHG and VMT reduction enables regions to accommodate growth through transit, walkability, and compact development, rather than increased driving and long-term dependence on costly roadway expansion.

A [new state report](#) highlights that transportation sector emissions accounted for the largest share of the emissions rebound following the pandemic, underscoring the importance of transportation policy as a critical lever for climate policy.

In response to similar challenges, other states are also rethinking how transportation planning can be adapted for climate goals:

- [California](#) requires metropolitan regions to meet state-assigned per-capita GHG reduction targets
- [Colorado](#) requires regions to demonstrate transportation emissions reductions or revise project lists
- [Oregon Metro](#) sets per-capita VMT reduction targets for metropolitan areas, including a 20% reduction by 2035 in the Portland region. The targets are tied to regional land-use and transportation planning, ensuring consistency across plans.
- [Massachusetts](#) requires transportation plans to be consistent with the state's legally binding net-zero mandate.

## WA State law requires:

- Per capita vehicle miles traveled to be reduced **50%** by 2050
- Greenhouse gas emissions to be at **45%** of 1990 levels by 2030, and at **net zero** by 2050



[New evidence](#) shows Washington is already moving in the right direction. Between 2011 and 2019, 35% of housing built in Washington was located in very low VMT areas—up from 23% in the 2000s.



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# Why Large and Fast-Growing Regions Are the Focus

A proposed update to regional planning rules would only apply to select RTPOs that include counties experiencing significant population size, density, or growth. This approach is consistent with WSDOT's findings that VMT trends and reduction potential vary significantly by county, and that regional context matters for effective planning. The covered counties include: **King, Pierce, Snohomish, Kitsap, Thurston, Clark, Whatcom, Spokane, Benton, Franklin, and Skagit**. This targeted approach covers regions that account for a substantial share of Washington's population and vehicle travel, and their planning decisions have the largest statewide climate and mobility impacts.



## What's Next for Washington

Washington already has the analytical foundation to support VMT reduction, but planning consistency has not yet caught up. **In the 2026 legislative session, a bill in the House (HB 2134) would update Washington's regional transportation planning framework to require select RTPOs to incorporate GHG and VMT reduction objectives into their long-range plans, and align them with the expectations already placed on cities.**

This proposal solely focuses on planning requirements. It does not mandate specific projects, prohibit roadway investments, or create new funding programs. Instead, it ensures that regional transportation planning reflects Washington's climate laws, rising transportation costs, and long-term mobility needs as the state continues to grow.

**We are calling on the legislature to strengthen and modernize regional transportation planning to achieve Washington's climate, affordability, and mobility goals.**

**Learn more and take action at [transportationchoices.org/planning](https://transportationchoices.org/planning)**

***Transportation Choices Coalition** advocates for safe, sustainable, and equitable transportation for all residents in Washington State. For over 30 years, it has brought together businesses, labor, transit agencies, transit riders, and elected leaders to win transformative policies and funding.*