

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public transportation is a vital component of Whatcom County's quality of life. In addition to providing access to employment, education and other essentials, it provides mobility for people with disabilities and offers an alternative to the single occupant vehicle. It also contributes to economic vitality, community cohesion and a healthy natural environment.

Whatcom Transportation Authority's (WTA's) Six-Year Strategic Plan represents the agency's commitment to maintaining and improving its service to Whatcom County. At the beginning of the process, WTA worked with its Board of Directors to establish the planning parameters. The strategic plan was then developed within this planning context:

- **Maintain what is working well**
- **Increase service by drawing down reserves**
- **Offer new service in an equitable way**
- **Plan for incremental expansion, using resources that don't require a sales tax increase**

WTA worked with its planning consultants, Board of Directors, community members, organizational partners, riders, and with steering and technical committees to design this plan.

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY *(continued)*

Here is a summary of the key recommendations for WTA's 2017 Strategic Plan:

Expand service by drawing down reserves. In the years leading up to the Strategic Plan, WTA preserved financial capacity to be used for a future service increase. A major outcome of this plan is a nine percent expansion of service, to be introduced in March 2017.

Provide and expand service in an equitable way. Though it wouldn't be effective to serve all of Whatcom County equally, considering how to serve the county equitably should continue to be a major focus. Sunday service to rural communities is one example of how this plan seeks to improve the equity of service delivery.

Respond to emerging needs with a two-year planning cycle. While WTA has previously made minor service changes between strategic plans, this recommendation will formalize a process to review and adjust service every two years.

Preserve capacity in order to add service every two years, to keep pace with population growth. In order to remain viable as a transportation option, WTA must keep pace with growth in the community.

Increase revenue and contain costs to allow for future service expansion. The financial model created during the planning process explores several ways to increase revenue and contain costs. WTA's ability to increase revenue and contain costs will have a major impact on its ability to preserve and expand service in the coming years.

Preserve capacity for increasing fixed route service by containing paratransit costs. WTA's cost to deliver paratransit is increasing with the rising population of older adults. Rising costs in paratransit can negatively affect WTA's ability to maintain and expand fixed route service. This in turn can negatively affect paratransit, as paratransit services are only offered where and when fixed routes are offered. This plan presents several options for containing paratransit costs.

Prepare for growth through improvements in capital, technology, and business processes. WTA's ability to keep pace with community expectations and demand will depend on its completing several major projects, including expanding Bellingham Station, implementing "real time" bus information, and implementing a two-year service planning cycle.

Work with community partners to enhance transit effectiveness, ridership and revenue. While continuing to nurture existing relationships, WTA should expand its network of partners. This includes government agencies, the business community, local developers, social and health service providers, employers, and other communities.

Advocate for transit at the local, state and national level. While WTA is fortunate to be financially stable, and to possess strong financial reserves, it cannot take current funding levels for granted. WTA should work with local, state and national government to seek funding for projects in which there is shared interest, and to advance policies that allow transit to thrive.

Reduce greenhouse gas emissions. With regard to major initiatives such as alternative fuels, solar power and other emissions-reducing efforts, timing is a key consideration. Throughout the life of this plan, WTA should be ready to incorporate new technology and practices, when the time is right, to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions. WTA should continue to consider the greenhouse gas impacts of all of its actions.

This plan, and the following related documents, (*Executive Summary, Environmental Scan, and Technical Appendices*) can be found in their entirety at ridewta.com/2017plan.