

# Chapter 1

## Purpose and Need for the Long-Range Plan Update

### 1.1 Introduction

Sound Transit (the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority) plans, builds, and operates high-capacity transit (HCT) in the form of light rail, commuter train, and regional express bus services. Sound Transit is updating its *Regional Transit Long-Range Plan* (Sound Transit 1996a, 2005a), which outlines the agency's vision for the HCT system serving the urban areas of Snohomish, King, and Pierce Counties. Figure 1-1 shows the Sound Transit District boundary, which defines the agency's service area as established by state law. It also shows regional growth centers and manufacturing/industrial centers within Sound Transit's service area as currently designated by the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC).

The Washington State Environmental Policy Act requires environmental review when a public agency is preparing to adopt a plan, such as a regional transit long-range plan or a transit system plan.

Sound Transit has prepared this Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) to support Sound Transit's current planning and decision-making efforts for an updated Long-Range Plan and future transit system plan. This Final SEIS provides a plan-level environmental review of the alternatives for the Long-Range Plan Update. It supplements EISs prepared by Sound Transit in 2005 (*Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement on the Regional Transit Long-Range Plan* (Sound Transit 2005b)) and in 1993 (*Final Environmental Impact Statement Regional Transit System Plan* (JRPC 1993)). Upon completion of the environmental review process, the Sound Transit Board will decide whether to make any revisions to the Long-Range Plan.

This chapter presents the purpose and need for the Long-Range Plan Update. Subsequent chapters describe the alternatives considered for the Long-Range Plan Update and their transportation and environmental impacts and potential mitigation measures.

### 1.2 Background

HCT has an extensive planning history in the region, and some of the major Sound Transit milestones are shown on Figure 1-2. Sound Transit has been implementing its Long-Range Plan in phases through voter-approved funding programs as described below.

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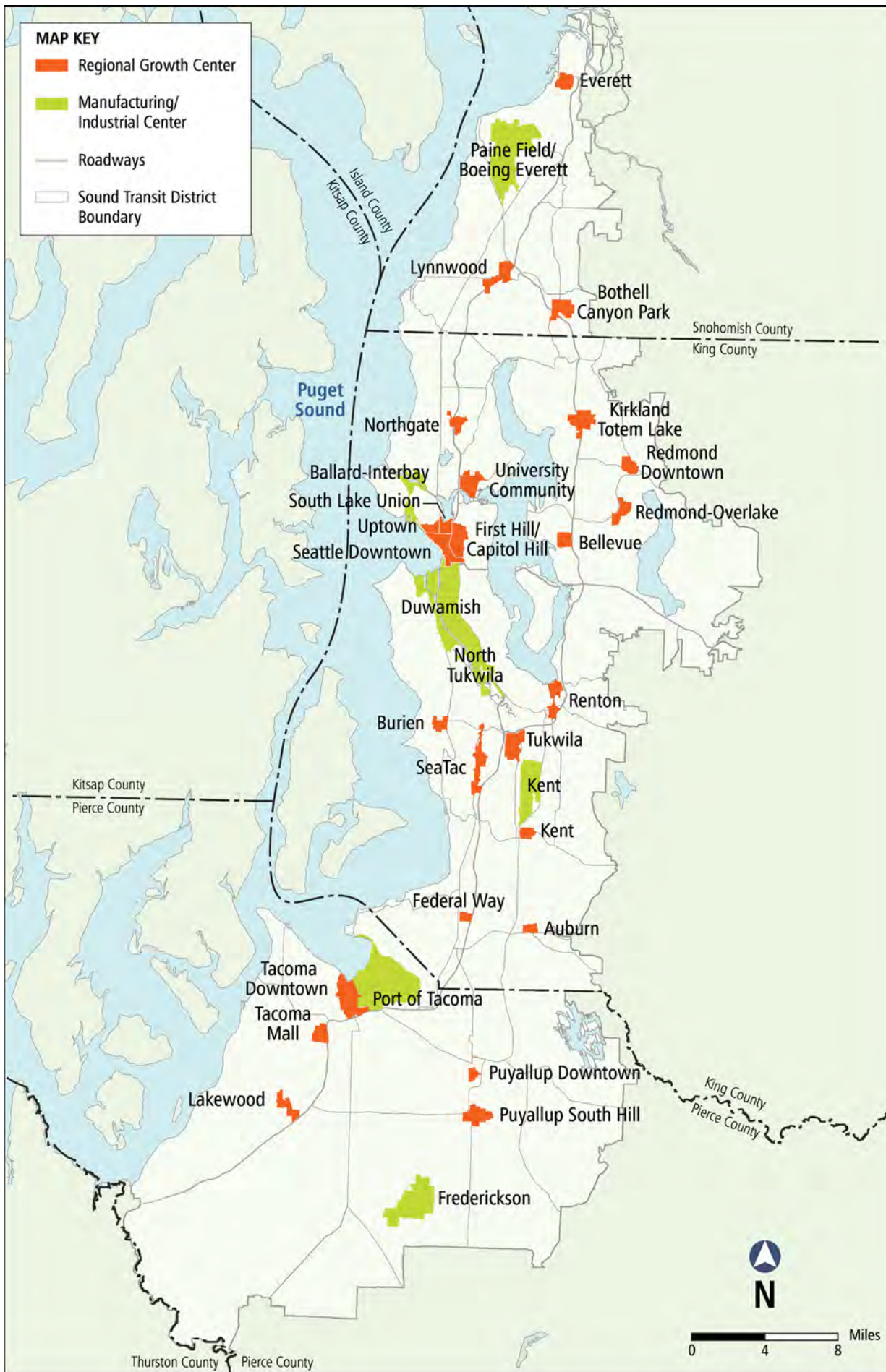
#### The Plan area

The study area for purposes of this Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement is referred to as the Plan area and includes the entire Sound Transit district.

#### Regional growth centers

Regional growth centers are designated areas of high-intensity residential and employment development. They are most typically located in the historic downtowns or other major activity areas of the region's five Metropolitan Cities and in Core Cities.

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Source: PSRC 2014b

Figure 1-1. PSRC's designated regional growth centers within the Sound Transit district boundary

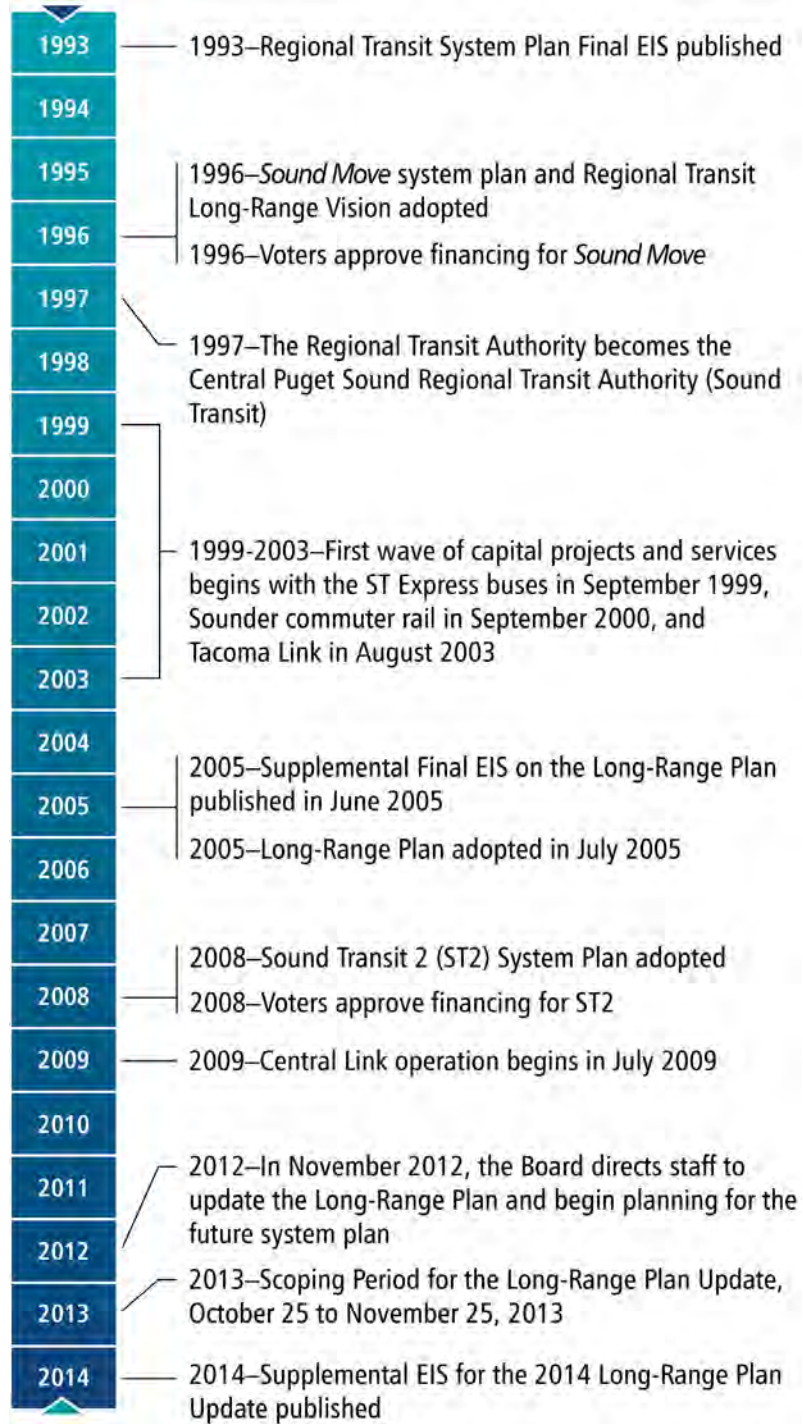


Figure 1-2. Sound Transit long-range planning history

In 1996, Sound Transit developed and adopted its *Regional Transit Long-Range Vision* (Sound Transit 1996a), which later evolved into the agency's Long-Range Plan. At the same time, Sound Transit adopted *The Ten-Year Regional Transit System Plan* (Sound Transit 1996b), which became known as *Sound Move*. *Sound Move* was the first phase in implementing the Long-Range Vision and, as such, was fiscally constrained.

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#### High-capacity transportation system (RCW 81.104.015)

A system of public transportation services within an urbanized region operating principally on exclusive rights-of-way, and the supporting services and facilities necessary to implement such a system, including interim express services and high-occupancy vehicle lanes, which taken as a whole, provides a substantially higher level of passenger capacity, speed, and service frequency than traditional public transportation systems operating principally in general purpose roadways.

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Sound Transit updated its Long-Range Plan in 2005, following the preparation of an SEIS (Sound Transit 2005a, 2005b). In 2008, Sound Transit adopted its next system plan, *The Regional Transit System Plan for Central Puget Sound* (Sound Transit 2008), known as Sound Transit 2 (ST2). Financing for ST2 was subsequently approved by the voters. ST2, also fiscally constrained, was the second phase in implementing the Long-Range Plan. The current Long-Range Plan encompasses the 2005 Long-Range Plan and subsequent Sound Transit Board actions implementing the 2008 ST2 System Plan.

On November 29, 2012, the Sound Transit Board directed staff to begin planning for the next set of investments in Sound Transit's HCT system. The first step is to update the agency's Regional Transit Long-Range Plan in order to confirm and clarify the long-term vision on which subsequent investment decisions can be based.

### 1.3 Purpose of the Long-Range Plan Update

Sound Transit is responsible for planning, designing, and building HCT to serve the central Puget Sound region. The Long-Range Plan is a fiscally unconstrained plan that represents Sound Transit's goals, policies, and strategies to guide the long-term development of the HCT system. The purpose of the Long-Range Plan Update is to define a regional HCT system that could effectively and sustainably help to serve the mobility needs of the central Puget Sound region through 2040 and beyond, providing an alternative to automobiles and the congested freeway network. The Long-Range Plan Update will consider the projected regional population, employment, and transportation growth. This will be done in coordination with, and the support of, the growth management strategies established in regional land use, transportation, and economic development plans.

### 1.4 Goals and objectives

As the designated provider of HCT infrastructure and services in the central Puget Sound region, Sound Transit's 2005 Long-Range Plan includes goals and objectives that address Sound Transit's legislative mandate, the functional needs of HCT, the needs associated with future growth, and mobility issues across the region. The 2005 Long-Range Plan goals and objectives are presented below.

## Goals and Objectives—2005

### GOALS

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| <p>▶ <b>Provide a public transportation system that helps ensure long-term mobility, connectivity, and convenience for the citizens of the Puget Sound region for generations to come</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide reliable, convenient, and safe public transportation services between regional growth centers and create an integrated system of transit services and fares</li> </ul> | <p>▶ <b>Contribute to the region's economic vitality</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase access to jobs, education, and other community resources; enhance the region's ability to move goods and services</li> </ul>   |
| <p>▶ <b>Preserve communities and open space</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support communities' ability to develop—consistent with state and regional laws and growth management policies—in ways that keep our neighborhoods livable and protect our natural resources and open space</li> </ul>   | <p>▶ <b>Preserve our environment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve land and energy resources, and control air pollution</li> </ul> <p>▶ <b>Strengthen communities' use of the regional transit network</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage the development, or redevelopment, of areas around transit stations and centers and park-and-ride lots with a mix of transit-oriented activities at a pedestrian scale and orientation to enhance current and future transit use</li> </ul> |

### OBJECTIVES

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|---|--|
| <p>▶ <b>Keep the region moving</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the percentage of people using public transportation throughout the region for all trips, not just trips to work</li> <li>• Increase the percentage of people using transit for their trips to work and the percentage using transit to reach major regional employment centers</li> <li>• Increase public transportation ridership at a rate faster than the population is growing</li> <li>• Reduce the average time it takes to make a trip by transit</li> <li>• Increase transit speeds and improve the reliability of transit service</li> <li>• Make it easier to use transit to reach jobs, schools, medical facilities, recreation, and shopping throughout the region</li> <li>• Support ridesharing, vanpooling, and other commute trip reduction programs that complement the regional transit system</li> </ul> | <p>▶ <b>Create a regional transit system that provides community, social, economic and environmental benefits</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help limit urban sprawl, maintain open space, and protect natural resources</li> <li>• Support creation of communities that are easy to reach and use on foot, by bicycle, on transit and by people with disabilities</li> <li>• Increase transportation options that use less energy, consume less land resources, and produce less pollution</li> </ul>   |
| <p>▶ <b>Offer cost-effective and efficient transportation solutions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer the most efficient and effective services and facilities possible within available resources</li> </ul>  | <p>▶ <b>Develop equitable transportation solutions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer transit services that benefit subareas within the region in proportion to the revenues they generate</li> </ul> <p>▶ <b>Create a financially feasible system</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a system that is affordable to build, run, and use</li> </ul> <p>▶ <b>Offer regional services that work well with other transportation services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with local public transportation providers and the state Department of Transportation to coordinate services and develop a single-fare card</li> </ul> |

Revised goals and objectives were developed as shown below to reflect new policy or programs adopted by the Board since 2005. They are intended to provide examples of potential revisions to the 2005 goals and objectives. The Sound Transit Board will consider whether to make any of these or other revisions to the 2005 goals and objectives in the updated Long-Range Plan.

Revised Goals and Objectives for Consideration	
<p>▶ <b>Provide a public high-capacity transportation system that helps ensure long-term mobility, connectivity, and convenience for the residents of the Puget Sound region for generations to come</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance regional mobility through improved travel time, reliability, and customer experience</li> <li>• Provide reliable, convenient, and safe public transportation services to regional growth centers and create an integrated system of transit services by planning and implementing services in coordination with local public transportation providers</li> <li>• Increase the percentage of people using transit for all trips</li> <li>• Support transportation demand management programs that complement the regional transit system</li> <li>• Provide an effective and efficient alternative to travel on congested roadways</li> <li>• Plan and implement HCT services consistent with PSRC’s long-range growth management, environmental, economic and transportation strategy</li> </ul>	<p>▶ <b>Strengthen communities’ use of the regional transit network</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use HCT to create opportunities for transit-oriented development around transit stations and centers consistent with local land use plans</li> <li>• Support the ability of communities to develop in a manner consistent with state and regional laws and growth management policies</li> <li>• Create HCT stations that are easy to access by foot, by bicycle, and local transit, as well as by people who are transit-dependent</li> <li>• Consider transit-dependent, low-income, and minority populations when expanding HCT services</li> </ul>
<p>▶ <b>Preserve and promote a healthy and sustainable environment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve land and energy resources, and improve air quality while also reducing greenhouse gas emissions and other pollutants</li> <li>• Minimize potential adverse impacts on the natural and built environment</li> <li>• Help limit urban sprawl, maintain open space, and protect natural resources</li> </ul>	<p>▶ <b>Improve the economic vitality of the region</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance the region’s ability to move goods</li> <li>• Make it easier to use transit to reach jobs, education, community resources, and commercial centers throughout the region</li> </ul>
	<p>▶ <b>Create a financially feasible system</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve financial sustainability</li> <li>• Maintain, operate, and expand regional HCT services in a cost-effective manner</li> <li>• Offer transit services that benefit subareas consistent with the Board’s subarea equity policies</li> <li>• Support and build upon the existing regional HCT system</li> <li>• Avoid competitive, duplicative transit services</li> </ul>

## 1.5 Need for the Long-Range Plan Update

It has been almost a decade since the last plan update. Historically, the region has experienced high population and employment growth, which has outpaced that of the nation. This is expected to continue. In addition, regional and local growth and transportation plans have been updated to better accommodate anticipated increases in population and employment, and to address state and federal policy changes. Sound Transit is updating its Long-Range Plan in order to achieve the following:

- Make it consistent with updated local and regional plans
- Incorporate current population and employment forecasts
- Identify potential modifications to the plan that could serve as a basis for the next phase of HCT improvements, at the Board’s discretion, to continue to address long-term mobility needs

### 1.5.1 Consistency with local and regional plans

The greater Puget Sound metropolitan area, which encompasses urbanized Snohomish, King, Kitsap, and Pierce Counties, has a coordinated series of regional, county, and local plans and policies that guide how the region manages its growth. The primary plans at the regional metropolitan level are PSRC’s *VISION 2040* (PSRC 2008) and *Transportation 2040* (PSRC 2010, updated 2014). These plans share land use, growth management, and transportation policies that call for an effective regional transit system to link the regional urban growth and employment centers where much of the region’s future growth will be focused. County and city comprehensive plan policies throughout the region reinforce the need for HCT investments to support new and continued population and employment growth, as well as to provide for vibrant urban communities that offer alternatives to travel via the automobile.

Since the 2005 Long-Range Plan Update, the regional land use plan *VISION 2040* and the regional transportation plan *Transportation 2040* have been updated by the PSRC, the region’s federally recognized metropolitan planning organization. *Vision 2040* also serves as the region’s sustainability plan, providing direction for integrated regional decision-making based on the triple bottom line of people, prosperity, and planet.

*VISION 2040* has moved from a more conceptual plan to a clear and geographically specific Regional Growth Strategy based on forecasted population and employment. The Strategy divides the region into seven distinct “regional geographies” based on the desired role for each type of jurisdiction in planning for future growth. Metropolitan and Core Cities, for example, are the locations for the majority of the population and job growth, with a “significant share” of that growth concentrated in regionally designated centers.

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#### Documents of note

The region’s current growth management strategy is defined by the Puget Sound Regional Council’s *Vision 2040*.

The regional multimodal transportation plan is *Transportation 2040*.

Sound Transit’s 2005 Long-Range Plan is a part of the regional high-capacity transit element of *Transportation 2040*.

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The structure of multicounty planning policies has been revised to include goals, policies, actions, and measures. Environmental policies have been expanded to address habitat, water and air quality, and climate change. In addition, transportation policies now place a greater

emphasis on increased safety; more choices; better mobility through improved transit, ferries, and roads; transportation pricing; and mitigation of environmental impacts, particularly greenhouse gas emissions.

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### Growth Management Act (GMA)

The GMA provides a comprehensive framework for managing growth and identifying needed transportation and infrastructure improvements to support and serve changes in land use. Under the GMA:

- Counties are required to designate Urban Growth Areas (UGA).
  - UGAs include cities and surrounding lands plus urban villages in unincorporated areas.
  - Land use plans within the UGAs must be appropriate in size, intensity, and character to accommodate most growth projected for a 20-year planning period.
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*VISION 2040* calls for continued expansion of the regional transportation system to meet increased transportation demand associated with forecasted growth and accommodated consistent with the Regional Growth Strategy. For example, as a functional plan implementing *VISION 2040*, *Transportation 2040*'s programs and projects assume a doubling of transit during peak hours and a more than 80-percent increase during off-peak hours (PSRC 2010a).

The Growing Transit Communities Strategy was developed in 2013 to address key challenges to implementing *VISION 2040* by identifying key strategies to accommodate growth near transit, provide affordable housing choices, and improve equitable access to opportunity. *Transportation 2040* recognizes the Growing Transit Communities Strategy framework to implement the Regional Growth Strategy through region-wide action and collaboration to promote thriving and equitable transit communities. As a signatory to the Growing Transit Communities Regional Compact, Sound Transit has joined the Puget Sound Regional Council and over 30 local jurisdictions and regional partners to work toward the broad goals of the Strategy and implement its many identified strategies and actions.

Finally, since 2005, local jurisdictions (cities and counties) have amended their comprehensive plans to ensure consistency with regional plans and with the state's Growth Management Act requirements, as well as to accommodate increasing population and travel demand. Sound Transit's Long-Range Plan Update will help support these plans.

### 1.5.2 Population and employment growth

The Plan area lies within the central Puget Sound region, which is home to more than 50 percent of the state's population and is the largest economic activity area in the state (U.S. Census Bureau).

The region has experienced tremendous historical growth. From 1990 to 2010, regional population grew by nearly 34 percent (while the national growth rate was 24 percent during the same period). Similar growth is expected to continue, as the region's population is forecasted to grow 34 percent from 2010 to 2040 (PSRC 2013d).



Table 1-1 shows the population and employment estimates for the Plan area for 2010 and 2040. From a base of more than 2.8 million today, the region’s population is expected to grow by over 30 percent to more than 3.7 million in 2040. During the same period, employment is expected to grow even faster, from approximately 1.5 million jobs to over 2.5 million, an increase of 62 percent.

Table 1-1. Population and employment estimates for the Plan area

Demographic	Year 2010 (in millions)	Year 2040 (in millions)	Forecasted growth 2010–2040
Households	1.13	1.63	44%
Population	2.81	3.77	34%
Employment	1.55	2.52	62%

Source: PSRC 2013a, 2013b

The 2040 values are based on PSRC 2035 Land-Use forecasts extrapolated to 2040.

The projected increases in population and jobs in the Plan area will result in more congestion. In 2011 alone, the average central Puget Sound commuter spent 48 hours stuck in traffic. If growth trends continue, commuters could spend 37 percent more time sitting in traffic by 2035 (ITTI 2012; PSRC 2013a). Congestion also harms the region’s economy and environment through lost productivity and increased vehicle emissions. As the region’s population and employment grow, regional transit becomes even more vital to the area’s transportation system.

Consistent with *VISION 2040*, most of this growth is expected to occur in cities and other urbanized areas, with only 18 percent planned for urban unincorporated areas as a whole and 7 percent outside the designated Urban Growth Area (UGA) (PSRC 2013b). Because the Plan area is almost entirely within UGAs, most of the region’s growth would occur within the Plan area. The Long-Range Plan will be updated as needed to address appropriate HCT service to support the amount, type, and locations of growth forecast for the region, called for in the Regional Growth Strategy, and planned locally for each of the regional growth centers.

### 1.5.3 HCT system development

Since the Long-Range Plan was last updated, several Sound Transit projects have been in varying stages of planning, design, and construction. Sound Transit’s system ridership has grown almost 155 percent. Based on land use forecasts, population forecasts, and limited highway expansion plans, transit ridership is expected to continue to increase. An update to the Long-Range Plan will identify potential new or modified HCT corridors and services, and it may clarify modal choices and services for existing HCT corridors where appropriate.

