

Notable results

- *Peak period travel times increased on 15 of 18 Puget Sound region commute routes evaluated*
- *Some I-5 and I-405 commutes experienced travel time increases of four minutes, while SR 167 saw a three-minute increase*

Puget Sound region travel times trending higher

Puget Sound region travel trends observed during the first half of 2014 indicate corridor travel times are trending up, while the traffic volume changes varied depending on the corridor and location. The increase in travel times on Puget Sound region freeways — Interstate 5 (I-5), I-405, I-90, State Route (SR) 520, and SR 167 — comes at a time of growth in the region’s economy.

This travel time trends analysis looks at traffic conditions for the first half of 2014 (January through June) and changes relative to the same time period in 2013. Key observations include:

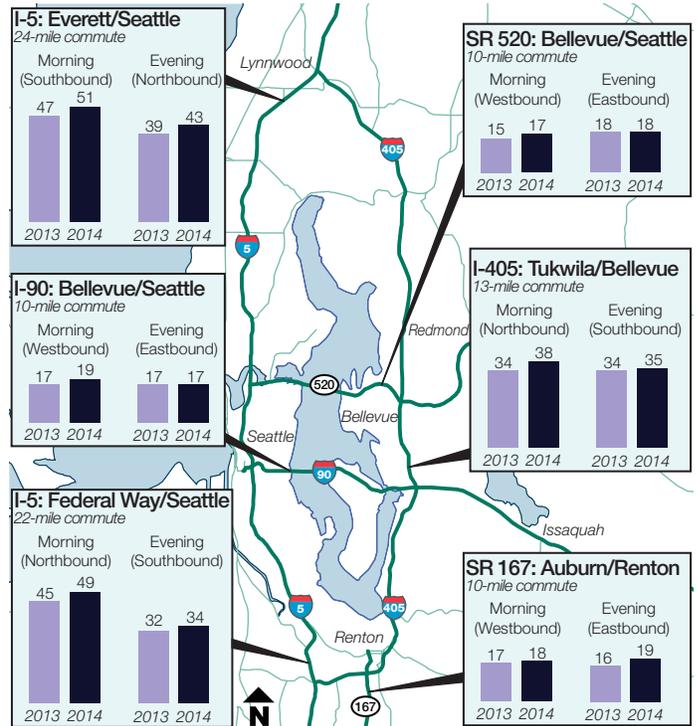
Travel times: Peak period (Monday-Friday, 5-10 a.m. and 2-8 p.m.) travel times increased on 15 of the 18 commute routes. Of the remaining three, two commutes saw no change in travel time while one improved by two minutes.

Traffic volumes: During peak periods (Monday-Friday, 5-10 a.m. and 2-8 p.m.), traffic volume (number of vehicles passing a location) on 15 of the 18 commute routes changed 2 percent or less. The remaining three commute routes experienced significant variations in traffic volume, ranging from an 8 percent decrease to a 5 percent increase.

Economy: Employment levels increased by 3.2 percent between June 2013 and June 2014 in the Seattle-Bellevue-Everett metropolitan area, indicating continued economic growth.

Lake Washington commute times remain stable as volumes increase

Between 2013 and 2014, travel times on all of the eight cross-lake commute routes on SR 520 and I-90 changed by two minutes or less, while traffic volumes increased up to 5 percent depending on the direction of travel and the time of day.



Source: WSDOT Northwest Region and the Washington State Transportation Center (TRAC)
Notes: Travel times are for single occupant vehicles in minutes. Data is for the first half of 2013 and 2014 (January through June). Peak periods are 5-10 a.m. for morning and 2-8 p.m. for evening.

SR 520 corridor (2014 vs. 2013): Eastbound peak period traffic volumes on SR 520 (between Bellevue and Seattle) increased by 5 percent, while westbound peak period traffic volume increased by up to 2 percent. In comparison, average daily volume increased by 4 percent in the eastbound direction while the westbound direction remained unchanged.

State Route 520 travel times changed by two minutes or less in both directions of travel.

I-90 corridor (2014 vs. 2013): Peak period traffic volumes on I-90 (between Bellevue and Seattle) increased by 1 percent or less in both directions of travel. Daily volume remained unchanged.

Interstate 90 travel times increased by up to two minutes in both directions of travel.

I-5, I-405 commutes experience increased congestion

North-south corridors experience longer travel times in 2014

Between 2013 and 2014, travel times increased on all 10 north-south (along I-5, I-405, SR 167) commute routes. Among these, three routes on I-5 and I-405 (during the morning commute) and two on I-5 and SR 167 (during the evening commute) represent the most congested trips. The increases in travel times ranged between three and four minutes. The remaining five commutes showed moderate increases in travel times of up to two minutes.

I-5 corridor (2014 vs. 2013): Peak period traffic volume changes on I-5 between Everett and Seattle, were relatively small, with a 1 percent reduction in the northbound direction, while southbound peak period traffic volume remained steady. Similarly, peak period volumes on I-5 between Federal Way and Seattle were up by 2 percent in both the northbound and southbound directions. Daily volume remained steady north of Seattle, but was up 3 percent south of Seattle.

Interstate 5 commutes between Federal Way, Seattle and Everett have taken more time during the past few years. Travel times on these routes had three of the four largest travel time increases among the 18 monitored trips: four-minute increases on the Federal Way to Seattle and Everett to Seattle morning commutes, and a four-minute increase on the Seattle to Everett evening commute.

I-405 corridor (2014 vs. 2013): During the morning peak period, southbound traffic volume on I-405 (between Everett and Bellevue) experienced an 8 percent reduction. Similarly, northbound volume on I-405 (between Tukwila and Bellevue) was down by 2 percent. However, during the evening peak period, traffic volumes on both the I-405 evening commutes from Bellevue to Everett (northbound) and Bellevue to Tukwila (southbound) remained unchanged. Daily traffic volumes decreased up to 5 percent north of Bellevue, and up to 1 percent south of Bellevue.

Interstate 405 commutes between Tukwila, Bellevue, and Everett have shown travel time growth during the past few years. Similar to I-5 routes, travel times on the I-405 routes had one of the four largest travel time increases among the 18 monitored trips: a four-minute increase on the northbound Tukwila to Bellevue morning commute. The three other commutes along I-405 saw travel times increase by up to two minutes.

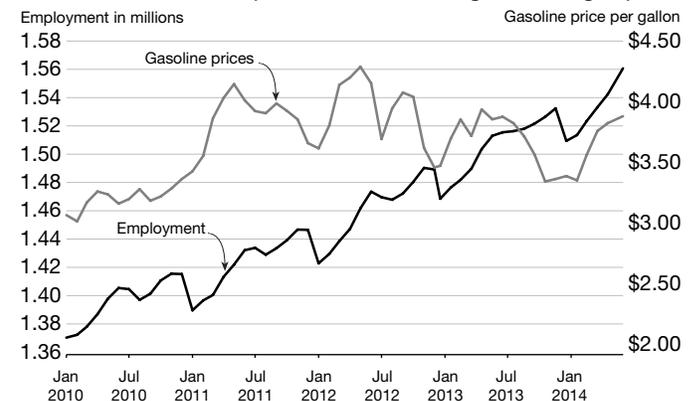
SR 167 corridor (2014 vs. 2013): Peak period traffic volumes on SR 167 between Auburn and Renton decreased by 1 percent on the northbound morning commute and increased by 1 percent on the southbound evening commute.

State Route 167 commutes between Renton and Auburn have shown moderate travel time growth. Travel times on the Renton to Auburn southbound evening commute increased by three minutes in the first half of 2014, while the Auburn to Renton northbound morning commute travel time increased by one minute.

A list of 18 monitored Puget Sound area commutes during the first half of 2014 can be accessed at http://wsdot.wa.gov/publications/fulltext/graynotebook/GNB56_Extra/2014_FirstSemi-AnnualTravelTimes.pdf.

Employment rises, gas prices stabilize

January 2010 through June 2014; Employment for the Seattle-Bellevue-Everett metropolitan area; Washington state gas prices



Data source: Bureau of Labor Statistics – Local Area Unemployment Statistics; US Department of Energy – Energy Information Administration.

Note: Gas prices are inflation adjusted using the Consumer Price Index.

Employment growth adds to travel time increases

Economic activity continued to grow in the Puget Sound region in the first half of 2014. The employment trend that began in 2011 continued, with employment in King and Snohomish counties increasing by 3.2 percent from June 2013 (1,513,000 nonfarm jobs) to June 2014 (1,560,700 nonfarm jobs). Gas prices can also impact travel volumes. The price of regular gas in the region edged up from \$3.85 per gallon in June 2013 to \$3.88 in June 2014. Gas prices typically begin to decline in the mid-summer months and fall until the end of the year and then begin to rise again around late February and early March.

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