Travel Time Trends Semi-Annual Report 58

Notable results

- ***Puget Sound region travel times increased on 11 out of the 18 routes evaluated, while traffic volumes changes were mixed***
- ***Some I-5 and I-405 commutes experienced travel time increases of up to six minutes, while SR 167 saw modest increases***

Puget Sound region travel times on the rise

Puget Sound region travel trends observed during the second half of 2014 show that the corridor travel times trended up while the traffic volume changes were mixed depending on the corridor and location. The increases in travel times on Puget Sound region freeways come at a time of growth in region's economy.

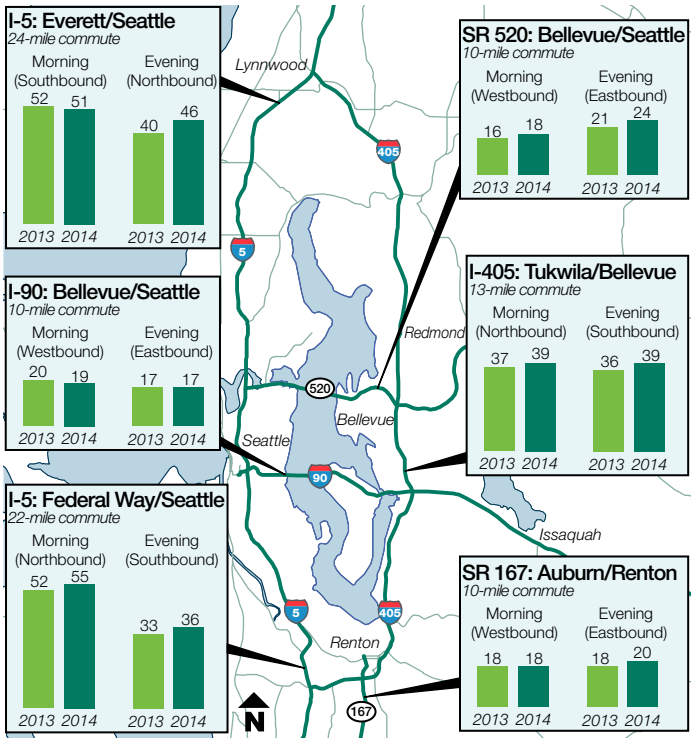
This semi-annual travel time trends analysis looks at traffic conditions in the central Puget Sound region for July through December 2014, relative to the same time period in 2013. Key observations include:

Travel times: Peak period (Monday through Friday, 5-10 a.m. and 2-8 p.m.) travel times increased on 11 of the 18 commute routes. Out of the remaining seven commutes routes, three saw travel time improvements while four remained unchanged. The largest travel time increases from 2013 to 2014 occurred on the north-south corridors of I-5 and I-405, continuing the trend observed in the first half of 2014. The cross-lake afternoon trip from Seattle to Bellevue via SR 520 saw largest improvement of two minutes.

Traffic volumes: Between 2013 and 2014, 14 out of the 18 commute routes showed minor changes (changes of 2 percent or less) in traffic volumes (number of vehicles passing a location), during peak periods. The remaining four commute routes experienced variations in traffic volumes, ranging from a 3 percent decrease to a 4 percent increase.

Economy: Employment levels increased by 3 percent between December 2013 and December 2014 in the Seattle-Bellevue-Everett metropolitan area, indicating continued economic growth.

A list of 18 monitored Puget Sound region commutes during the second half of 2014 can be accessed at http://bit.ly/GNB58_TravelTimes.



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

Cross Lake traffic volumes mixed

Between 2013 and 2014, travel times along SR 520 and I-90 commute routes remained unchanged (fluctuating by two minutes or less) on seven of the eight cross-lake commute routes while traffic volumes increased on six of the eight commutes by up to 4 percent depending on the direction of travel and the time of day.

SR 520 corridor (2014 vs. 2013): Travel times on SR 520 are on the rise – meaning it took more time to cross the bridge in 2014 compared to 2013 on three out of four commutes between Bellevue and Seattle. The SR 520 morning commute, between the cities, took roughly two minutes longer to cross Lake Washington. However, during the afternoon, commute travel time changes are subject to direction of travel. Travel time improved on the

Travel times escalate on I-5 and I-405 during peak hours

eastbound direction roughly by two minutes while the westbound commute saw a three minute increase.

All four of these commutes saw an increase in traffic volumes ranging from 2 to 4 percent during peak commute hours. Similarly, daily volumes on these routes increased by 3 percent in both directions.

I-90 corridor (2014 vs. 2013): Travel times on I-90 (between Bellevue and Seattle) were unchanged on three out of four commutes while the westbound morning commute from Bellevue into Seattle improved by one minute into Seattle. Peak period traffic volumes during morning commutes increased by 1 percent while afternoon commutes saw a reduction of up to 2 percent in both directions of travel.

North-south corridors experience longer travel times in 2014

Between 2013 and 2014, travel times along the north-south (I-5, I-405, SR 167) commute routes increased on eight out of 10 commute routes ranging between two minutes and six minutes. Of the remaining two commutes, the morning commute from Auburn to Renton remained unchanged while the Everett to Seattle morning commute saw a one minute improvement in travel time.

I-5 corridor (2014 vs. 2013): Changes in peak period travel times on I-5 were more substantial during afternoon commutes compared to morning. Morning commute travel times on I-5 increased by three minutes from Federal Way to Seattle while Everett to Seattle saw a one minute improvement. Afternoon commute travel times on I-5 from Seattle to Everett increased by six minutes while Seattle to Federal Way increased by three minutes.

While three out of four monitored I-5 commutes saw increases in travel times, traffic volumes on the I-5 corridor either remained unchanged or decreased. Between 2013 and 2014, I-5 morning commutes saw no change in peak period traffic volumes while afternoon commutes saw a reduction of 2 percent. Significant increases in afternoon travel times paired with lower traffic volumes shows that the I-5 corridor demand is exceeding available capacity.

I-405 corridor (2014 vs. 2013): During the morning and afternoon peak periods, travel times on I-405 commutes increased by up to four minutes. The Everett to Bellevue morning commute saw a four minute increase in travel time despite a 1 percent decrease in traffic volume.

On the other hand, the Bellevue to Everett afternoon commute saw a four minute increase in travel times along with a 2 percent increase in traffic volume.

The morning commute between Tukwila to Bellevue saw a two minute increase in travel times while the traffic volume decreased by 2 percent. Similarly, the Bellevue to Tukwila afternoon commute saw a three minute increases in travel times, while peak period traffic volume decreased by 3 percent. This shows that I-405 is experiencing congested traffic conditions during peak periods.

SR 167 corridor (2014 vs. 2013): Changes in peak period travel times on SR 167 (between Auburn and Renton) were relatively small to non-existent. The morning commute from Auburn to Renton saw no change in travel time while traffic volume was up by 1 percent. Afternoon commute travel time from Renton to Auburn increased by two minutes while traffic volume remained unchanged.

Regional employment improves

Economic activity continued to grow in the Puget Sound region in the second half of 2014. Regional employment grew during the second half of 2014, continuing a trend that began during 2011; employment in the Seattle-Bellevue-Everett metropolitan division increased by 3 percent year over year from the end of 2013 (1,533,900) to the end of 2014 (1,580,500). Large changes in gasoline prices can influence travel volumes statewide. The average Washington gas price during December 2014 was $2.83 compared to $3.35 in December 2013.

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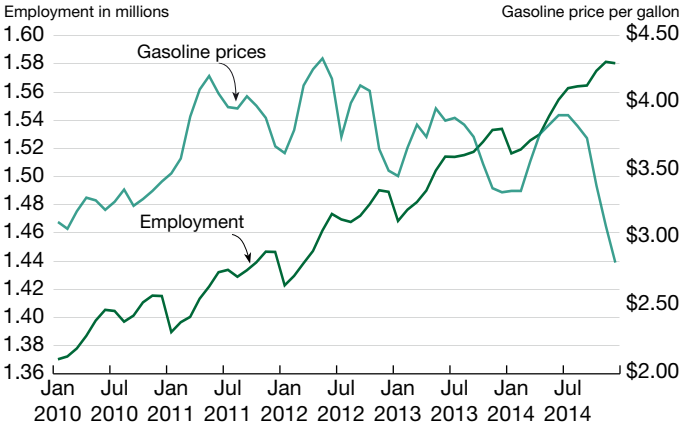
Employment grows, gas prices drop at end of 2014

January 2010 through December 2014; Washington state gas prices; Seattle-Bellevue-Everett employment



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

Note: Gas prices are reported in 2014 dollars.