

# **Livable Communities Policy**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is guided by a statewide vision for transportation. The Vision was developed by the Washington State Transportation Commission with its transportation partners across the state. It is a leading element in the current update process of the Washington Transportation Plan (WTP).

The Vision calls for changing the way we approach transportation to ensure that Washington remains a desirable place to live in the future. The vision contrasts with current transportation trends that project growing congestion problems and deteriorating transportation systems that will negatively impact the quality of life in our state, and livability of our communities.

Supporting livable communities is one of the WTP Vision's supporting goals. "Livability" is a concept that conveys an image of a future that is enduring, vibrant, responsible (civil), and offers a desirable quality of life. Since a "Livable Future" is an overarching goal for transportation planning and investment decisions, the WTP's Vision lists "Livability" as the central theme for its vision model. The vision model suggests that through a balance of the three key societal goals; vibrant communities, vital economy and sustainable environment, a "Livable Future" may be attained. The goal of the vision is to change the direction of current trends and chart a new course for the future. This will result in new and innovative ways of doing business and address our needs to support a desirable future.

The two desirable outcomes listed in the WTP which support livable communities are:

- effective community based design, and
- collaborative decision making.

However, the Washington Transportation Plan update process does not currently include a formal definition for what constitutes a "livable community" nor does it have a statewide policy to guide how transportation can help promote and support livable communities. The Washington Transportation Commission asked a statewide livable community workgroup representing WSDOT and our transportation partners (see appendix) to develop draft recommendations. The Livable Community workgroup's recommendations are below.

## **Findings**

1. Traditionally WSDOT has focused on delivering projects "on time" and "on budget", within highway design and state priority programming standards.
2. No one anticipated the impact of the use of the auto on land use, as the sole means of transport in most parts of the U. S. The advent of the auto meant that homes, jobs and other activities could be located further apart. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century auto-oriented development patterns changed the form of communities from walking, transit and connecting city street grid systems to strip and single family development accessed primarily with regional auto corridors.
3. Working to change existing patterns should focus on integrating transportation and land use in urbanized regions and protect undeveloped rural and resource lands and wildlife corridors from the impacts of new, unplanned development.

4. One livability solution doesn't fit all situations. The differences between rural, urban and suburban needs as well as differences between neighborhoods should be given higher priority than in the past.
5. Federal Interstate Highways and regional/state arterial or highway corridors provide access routes through major urban centers, and opened opportunities for low density development at the edges of urban fringes. Low density "sprawl" land use patterns have created more dependency on automobile trips and often generate the need for longer trips as evidenced by the state's sharp increase in vehicle miles. In 1990 the state passed the Growth Management Act (GMA) in an effort to stop urban sprawl, its environmental degradation and subsequent high infrastructure costs. In 1990 the federal Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) was also passed. This federal legislation was the first effort by national policy leaders to encourage states and local transportation agencies to develop alternative transportation modes to the single occupant vehicle mode.
6. Since 1998 the GMA has required that the local plans address their impacts on state highways of statewide significance by the end of 2000. Collaborative planning processes between local and regional jurisdictions and WSDOT need to be strengthened.

WSDOT Livable Communities goals, policies and strategies that support concentration growth in mixed-use centers within urban growth boundaries, should reinforce the efficient use of existing public infrastructure and alternative modes of travel. If implemented, over time the results could be a reduction of costly highway capacity expansions, congestion, sprawl and auto-dependent patterns of development.

## **PREAMBLE**

WSDOT and its transportation partners can effectively support and promote the concept of Livable Communities. The Livable Communities workgroup recommends the following definition, goal, policy and strategies to the Washington Transportation Commission to guide the State's transportation planning and programming processes. These processes will create stronger cost sharing partnerships and contribute to more sustainable infrastructure investment priorities.

## **DEFINITION OF LIVABLE COMMUNITIES**

Livable Communities provide & promote civic engagement and a sense of place through safe, sustainable choices for a variety of elements that include housing, transportation, education, cultural diversity and enrichment and recreation.

## **LIVABLE COMMUNITIES POLICY GOAL**

The following is an overall state transportation goal for Livable Communities.

Transportation plans and actions will support and encourage partnering with local communities to achieve our mutual interests in promoting livable communities.

## **POLICY STATEMENT**

Transportation will foster livable communities in transportation projects within rural and urban areas by working with its partners to:

- Foster multimodal transportation systems that enhance communities. Promote mobility for the workers, students, shoppers, visitors and products of communities and neighborhoods. This mobility should include, as appropriate, a good mix of public transit, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, with adequate roadways, rail, and ferries.
- Develop collaborative transportation actions sensitive to community values. Collaborate with local residents and officials to enhance the community's livability. This can mean the addition of sidewalks, traffic-calming features, safe pedestrian crossings and landscaping to improve the environment.
- Coordinate access to funding. Provide access to federal and state funding which supports livable communities.

## **LIVABLE COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION POLICY STRATEGIES**

The following are a list of strategies that transportation agencies can choose from to support and encourage livable communities:

### **FOSTER MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS THAT ENHANCE COMMUNITIES**

- Provide training and education on Livable Communities concepts to stakeholders.
- Preserve existing corridors by creating special places in both rural and urban areas to promote community livability.
- Encourage multimodal access to transportation facilities i.e., design and placement of facilities to provide for safety and access to services or jobs.
- Consider community and neighborhood connectivity when improving transportation corridors by providing bicycle and pedestrian networks.
- Ensure new or expanding transportation facilities are consistent with local land use and regional policies, plans and agreements.

### **DEVELOP COLLABORATIVE TRANSPORTATION ACTIONS SENSITIVE TO COMMUNITY VALUES**

- Allow flexibility in design standards/procedures to adjust to local plans.
- Promote tools for livable communities such as model ordinances, codes, regulations.
- Partner with local governments in community planning-during all phases of a project.
- Encourage communities to define their values through the transportation planning and design process.
- Ensure environmental quality by addressing air, drinking water and noise concerns, watershed restoration, and preservation of habitats and green space corridors.
- Enhance community aesthetics with transportation facilities, incorporating unique local features (i.e., scenic views, community neighborhoods, historic districts, etc.) and providing

focal points for communities through those facilities such as multimodal stations, pedestrian plazas, and parkways.

#### **COORDINATE ACCESS TO FUNDING**

- Support local planning efforts.
- Fund (support) projects and efforts that enhance local livability.
- Support projects consistent with local plans.
- Encourage the use of funding resources like Transportation Enhancements and the National Scenic Byways program to support livable communities.
- Provide innovative financing tools which provide positive incentives to promote livable communities.
- Include livability criteria in funding of projects.
- Encourage funding partnerships by simplifying transportation and community infrastructure funding programs

For these reasons, WSDOT would like to change the way it builds new parts, or retrofits, of the transportation system. By working in partnership with the communities where WSDOT has a project, both the economy and the livability of that community will be improved.

#### **OUTCOMES AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES**

WSDOT, with its transportation partners, has developed and will support performance measures to evaluate the effectiveness of the Livable Communities policy. These performance measures will be an element of the WTP Performance Measurement System.

These performance measures assess the effectiveness of applied solutions. The evaluation results of these performance measures will be communicated to our transportation partners and the general public on a regular basis as part of the WTP impact assessment.

It needs to be recognized that there is a broader issue which needs to be addressed.

WHAT IS THE DEGREE TO WHICH LOCAL GOVERNMENTS ARE ACHIEVING THE VISION IN THEIR COMPREHENSIVE PLANS, SPECIFICALLY THE EFFECTIVE ALLOCATION OF LAND USE AND THE ACHIEVEMENT OF DENSITY GOALS?

These two measures need to be recognized as the true overall performance measure for Livable Communities. Neither WSDOT, nor local governments, on an individual basis, control this outcome. However, collectively and collaboratively we can achieve it.

**OUTCOME:** Effective Community-Based Design

**OUTCOME STATEMENT:** Integrated community design, land use and transportation investments improve the quality of life.

**WSDOT PERFORMANCE MEASURE:** WSDOT will work with local communities to increase communities' satisfaction with the creation and implementation of community based designs for our transportation projects.

Biennially, WSDOT will survey communities to assess their level of satisfaction with the creation and implementation of community based designs for our transportation projects.

**OUTCOME:** Collaborative Decision Making

**OUTCOME STATEMENT:** Collaboration occurs between federal, state, regional, local and private sector partners.

**WSDOT PERFORMANCE MEASURE:** Four to six years in advance of a project start, WSDOT will notify local communities and appropriate federal, state, regional and private sector partners of the opportunity to collaborate on the creation and implementation of a transportation project.

Biennially, WSDOT will measure this by the advance time given and number of partners involved.

## **APPENDICES**

### **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

#### **NATIONAL AND STATES LIVABLE COMMUNITY EFFORTS**

At the federal level, an initiative was developed to enhance communities' livability. It originated from a nationwide grassroots outcry by all types of communities to give them more flexibility in the design options, funding decisions, and project processes -- from cities, and small towns to rural areas. The major issues include:

- more sustainable and cost effective land use and transportation patterns;
- reducing infrastructure cost created by sprawl;
- creating mixed-mode opportunities for children, adults and senior citizens to enhance healthier lifestyles; and
- environmental considerations.

The resulting Federal Initiative promotes inclusive locally driven partnerships, has broad scopes focused on creating resilient local economies, incorporates smart growth elements, be regional in scale, is performance based and represents community values. The mission is to design programs to broaden development choices to communities and empower them to sustain prosperity and economic opportunity, enhance quality of life, and build a stronger sense of community. The Federal Transit Administration has taken an active role in developing a livability program. The Transportation Equity Act for the 21 Century (TEA-21) calls for a balanced investment in highways, transit systems, and intermodal facilities. Its goal is to provide “people” with opportunities to lead safer, healthier lives; and strategies to safeguard public health and the environment.

States such as Oregon, Maryland and Florida have also incorporated “livability” into their transportation policies. Their general “livability” policy themes include:

- (1) encouraging balanced transportation systems to assure mobility through a mixture of modal choices, especially at the community and neighborhood level;
- (2) locally driven community and partnership based projects; and
- (3) funding sources that transportation partners can use to enhance livable communities.

**Members of the Livable Communities Workgroup included:**

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2. Virginia Gunby, Chairperson 1000 Friends of Washington
3. Dennie Houle, DCTED, Resource Development and Coordination
4. Glenn Miles, Transportation Manager Spokane Regional Transportation Council (SRTC)
5. Maggie Fimia, King County Council
6. Skye Richendrfer, Mayor of Mt. Vernon
7. Sandra Nourse-Madson; Planning Director of City of Colville
8. Rebecca Chaffee; Raymond City Superintendent
9. Leonard Pittman, WSDOT SC RA
10. Brian Ziegler, WSDOT Design
11. Tom Green, Washington Transportation Commissioner
12. Dave McCormick, WSDOT NW Region Traffic
13. Chris Rose, Washington Transportation Commission Administrator
14. Rosemary Nye, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
15. Shari Schaftlein, WSDOT Environmental Affairs