

Safety Rest Area Report: Additional Operations, Maintenance, and Planning Activities

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As required in ESSB 5689, Section 216 (15) this is a report to the transportation committees of the Washington State Legislature regarding the status of openings and closures of safety rest areas that were impacted by the additional activities funded by the budget proviso, including security efforts, and a status update on the Safety Rest Area strategic plan.

Safety Rest Area Closures Impacted by Security Efforts

- Smokey Point NB/SB were closed from July 18, 2022 - July 29, 2022, so WSDOT, in partnership with Washington State Patrol, could create a plan to keep people from staying beyond posted parking limits. To support change:
 - Washington State Patrol has supported additional patrols.
 - WSDOT has put up new parking signage clearly labeling a commercial trucks-only parking lot.
 - A cross-agency collaboration between WSDOT, Washington State Patrol, the Department of Commerce, and Volunteers of America has been created to provide outreach and support for individuals that are experiencing homelessness.
- In addition to sharing resources with people who may need them, crews have closed RV parking at the Smokey Point rest areas until further notice to prevent people in RVs from staying there for weeks or even months.
- Gee Creek SB was closed on July 21, 2022, due to police activity for a report of weapon brandishing between two individuals residing in the RV parking lot. Similar to Smokey Point, crews have closed RV parking at Gee Creek until further notice.

Funding Provided to Keep Safety Rest Areas (SRAs) Open

Included in the effort to keep SRAs open was a budget to support work efforts. This funding has been directed towards immediate needs to keep Safety Rest Areas open including:

- Repairing damage caused by vandalism at Toutle Safety Rest Area.
- Improved signage at the I-5/Smokey Point locations near Marysville to remind travelers that general parking is limited to eight hours in a 24-hour period. Commercial vehicle parking is limited to 11 hours.
- Replaced damaged fencing, removed litter, cleaned up graffiti, and repaired damaged pavement where RVs have parked long term.
- Repairing water and sewer systems in several locations.
- Repairing RV dump stations in several locations.
- Ability to bring in portable toilets where practicable to keep rest areas open.

Strategic Plan Update

WSDOT's mission is to provide safe, reliable, and cost-effective transportation options to improve communities and economic vitality for people and businesses. Safety rest areas are a critical part of that mission supporting the traveling public with a safe, sustainable option for needed rest.

Our Safety Rest Area Program consists of 47 locations statewide that provide services to 24 million annual users. In addition, the program operates 16 RV dump stations. The following sections overview the plan update process, timeline, and information collected to date.

Safety Rest Area Strategic Planning Process

The Safety Rest Area (SRA) strategic planning effort evaluated SRA services, assets, and funding to determine what changes are needed in the future. Since the last strategic plan update in 2008, rest area users' needs have evolved because of changing technology coupled with social, health, environmental, and economic issues, including environmental justice and social equity.

In addition, WSDOT Steering Committees have explored several focus areas including Truck Parking, Personal Safety, Highway Safety, SRA Facilities, People experiencing homelessness, RV, Recreation & Tourism, and operations.

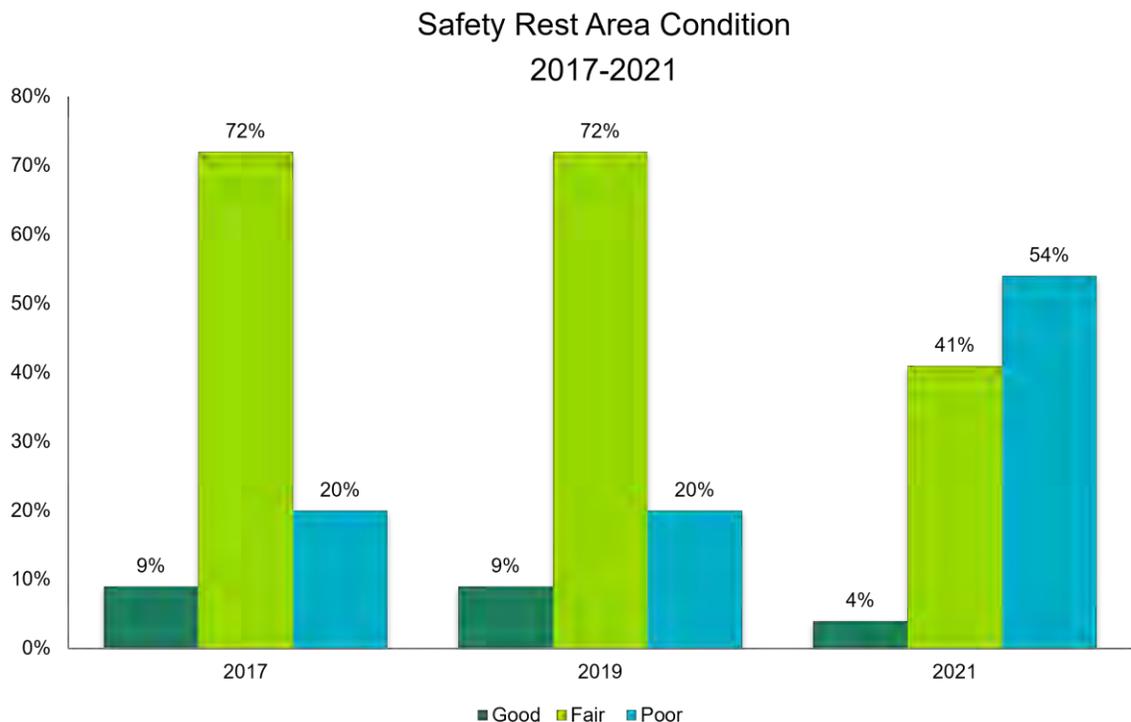
Focus Areas

The following section summarizes the major focus areas for the Strategic plan:

Facilities:

- Of the 47 Safety Rest Areas (SRA), in the 2021 Condition Assessments, 54% of the SRAs were rated in poor condition, and 28 SRA buildings will reach 50 years of age or more in the next 5 years.
- Review of SRA condition since 2017 shows a continuing decline in the number of locations rated as good and a sizable increase in the total locations rated as poor. *See Figure 1*
- With the decline in condition ratings and SRAs reaching 50 years of life, there is an urgent need for considerable investment in the rehabilitation of buildings.

Figure 1 | Safety Rest Area Condition 2017-2021



People Experiencing Homelessness:

- Safety Rest Areas are intended for short-term visits by the traveling public and freight haulers. Vehicles parking at the Safety Rest Area for longer than the legally posted limits has led to ongoing safety and public health issues.
 - SRAs located near urban communities, especially along the I-5 corridor, tend to experience the highest levels of homelessness.
 - A Washington State Supreme Court¹ ruling determined that vehicles individuals use to live in are considered homesteads, creating challenges for enforcement of time limits.
 - Some individuals have stayed long-term at our SRAs and need assistance. Work is underway with state and local partners to connect individuals living in our SRAs with support services and housing alternatives.
 - As part of the strategic planning process, we have collaborated with 211² and Volunteers of America to support the development of solutions for connecting individuals experiencing homelessness within our SRAs to support services.

Truck Parking

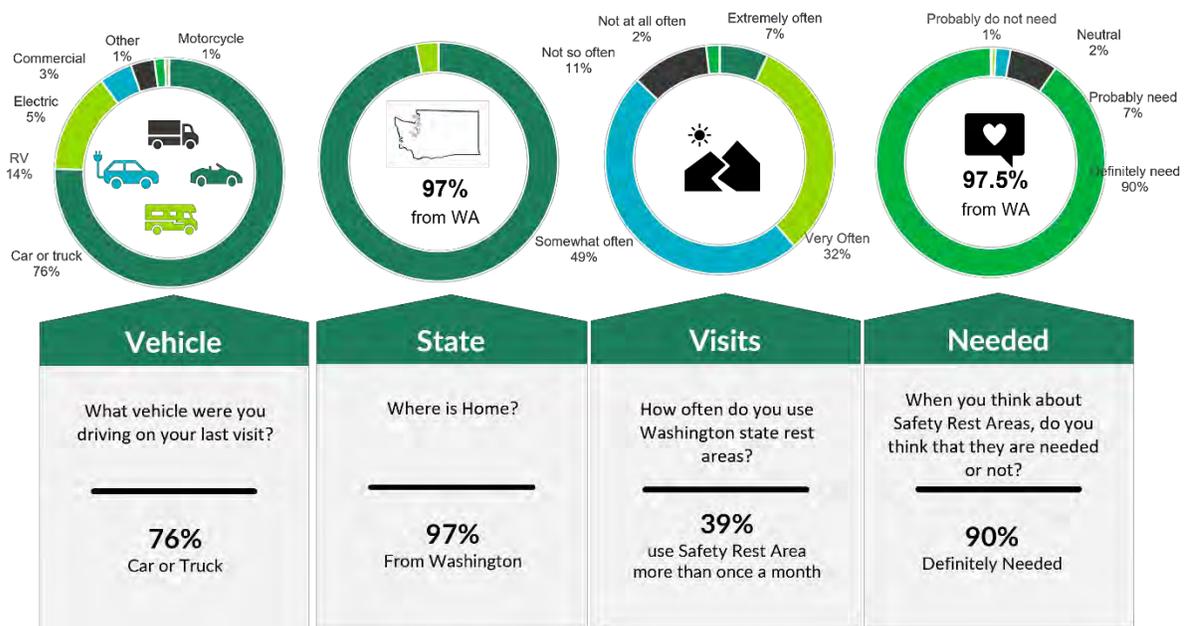
- Nationally, there is just one parking space for every 11 truckers. Roughly 98% of truckers have difficulty finding safe parking.³
- 60% percent of respondents from a *WSDOT Truck Parking survey* reported it takes an hour or longer to find overnight parking.⁴ When safety rest areas are over capacity, undesignated truck parking occurs on rest areas on/off ramps, corridor shoulders, and in RV and passenger vehicle spaces.
- According to the *2021 Joint Transportation Committee study*⁴, participants identified a lack of available truck parking near urban areas, near mountain passes, and at state borders.
- Communication is critical to commercial truck drivers. A need for improved communication with drivers about truck parking options was identified as part of the *WA Truck Parking Assessment*⁴ “Undesignated truck parking often occurs when truck drivers have irregular schedules and routes, leaving them without the knowledge of when and where to look for legal truck parking.” In addition, drivers may continue to drive while fatigued when they are unable to find parking. Fatigue is a contributing factor in 16 percent of truck collisions and 8 percent of fatal truck collisions, according to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA).⁴
- The Women of Trucking Advisory board has reported safety as a major concern for female drivers. The industry has seen the number of female drivers double between 2010 and 2021.³ A national poll of female truck drivers indicated that 33 percent of female commercial drivers have been inappropriately touched. Survey respondents would like to see facilities with better lighting, security, and additional parking.³
- Safety Rest Area strategic planning survey themes from commercial drivers included:
 - There is not currently enough parking at night in most Safety Rest Areas.
 - Facility designs were not made for female drivers, with restrooms located further from the commercial truck driving lot and lack of security and lighting.

- Washington rest areas should have more staffing supporting cleaning and safety. Washington lacks the same levels of staffing and security that is present in locations in other states in the US.¹

WSDOT Safety Rest Area Public Survey

In June 2022, WSDOT began a public survey outreach to support the strategic planning process. The survey was available in eight languages and twenty-two Safety Rest Areas were visited in person to hear feedback from users. The survey received a strong response with 5156 respondents providing their feedback. Most respondents were from Washington, and 76 percent were driving a car or truck. In addition, 39 percent reported using SRAs more than once a month and 90 percent felt that SRAs were needed. *See Figure 2*

Figure 2 | Safety Rest Area Survey Groups



Survey Key findings included:

- Travelers appreciate the convenience of SRA locations as they can quickly stop without looking for alternative locations off the highway. It also reduces their perception of an obligation to purchase at alternative locations.
- 85 percent of car, 87 percent of RV, and 84 percent of commercial truck drivers indicated that they would be inconvenienced if their SRA had been closed for maintenance. *See Figure 3*

¹ Responses come from commercial truck drivers in the Safety Rest Area public survey to the question: What changes would most improve the Safety Rest Areas? Based on data compiled from multiple DOTs including Arizona, Texas, Illinois, Florida, New Jersey, Ohio, and Louisiana.

- SRA usage differs by the type of traveler that is visiting our SRAs. 69 percent of commercial trucks indicate that they visit more than one time per week. RV and car passengers indicate that they visit 3-6 times per year. *See Figure 4*

Figure 3 | Safety Rest Area Usage

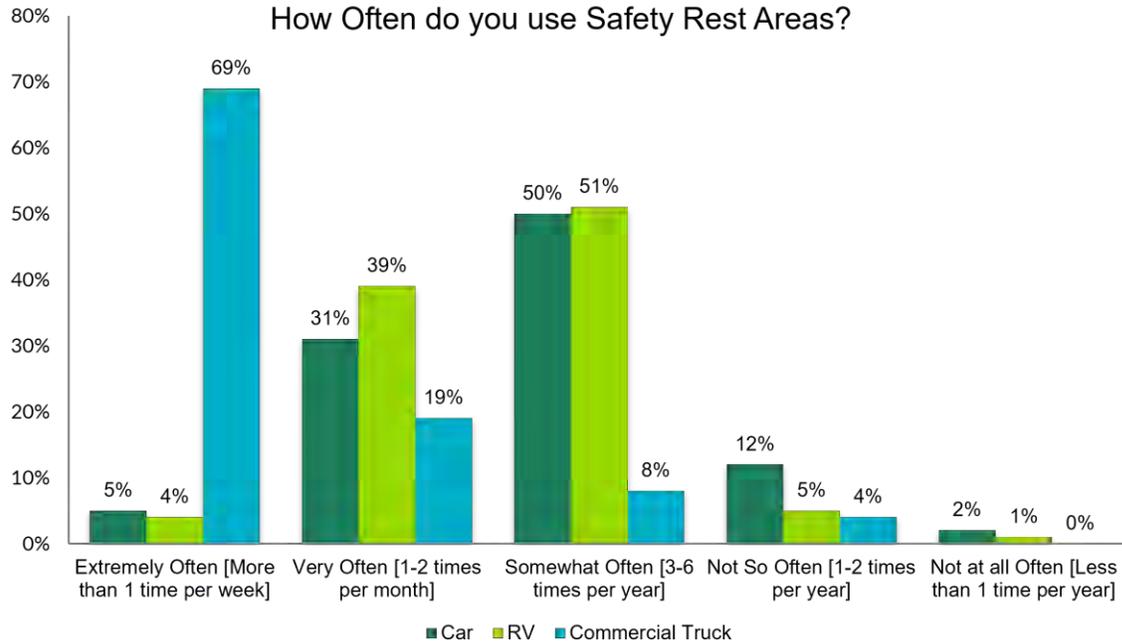
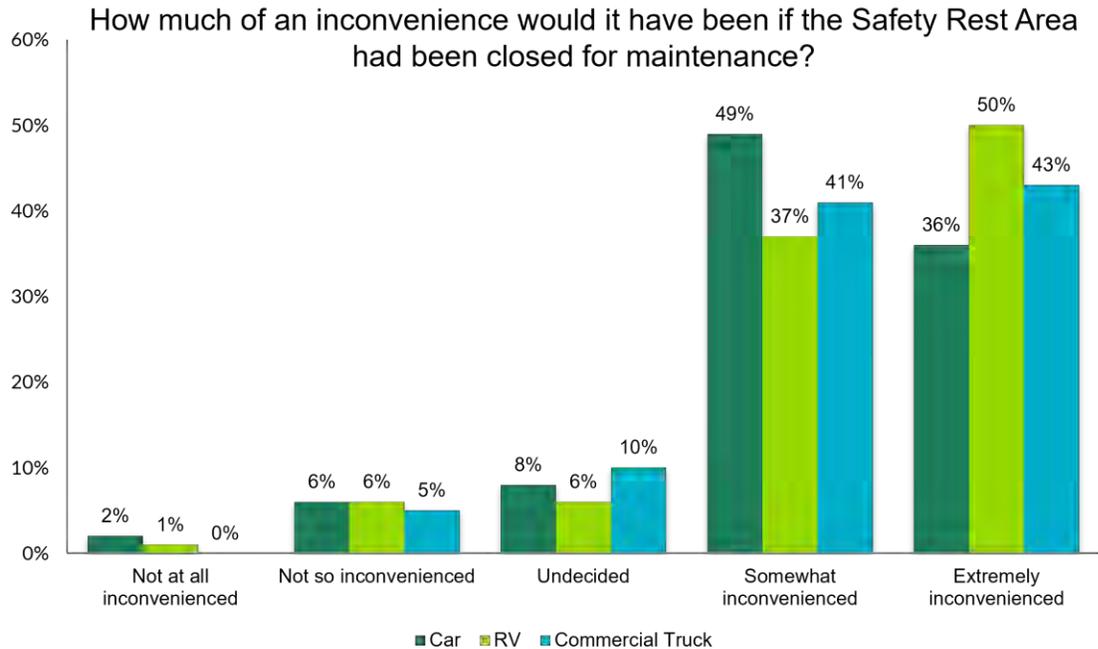
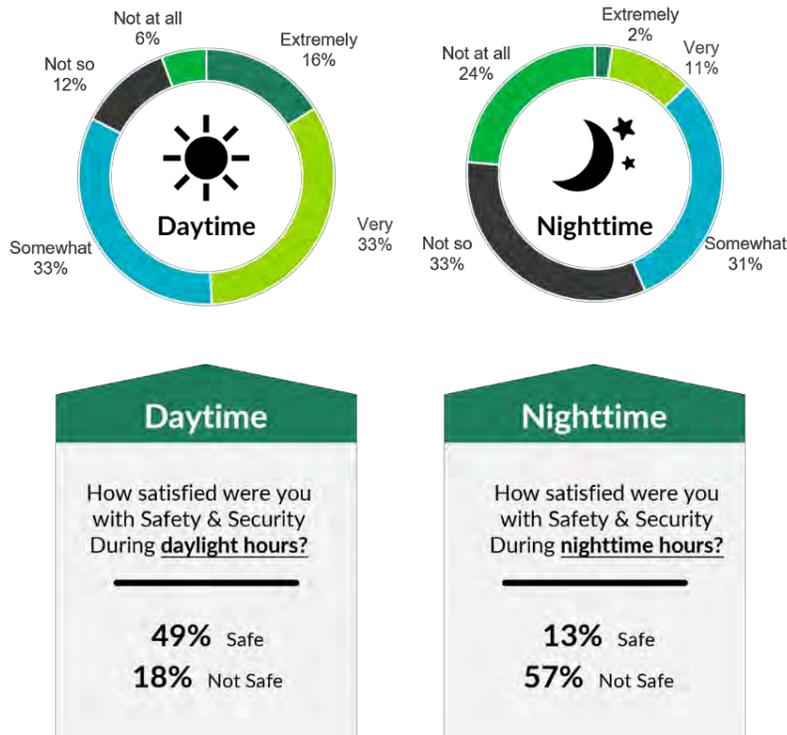


Figure 2 | How Often do you use Safety Rest Areas?



- Personal safety is a concern for the traveling public.
 - During daytime hours, 49 percent of users indicated that they feel safe, and 18 percent of the users indicated that they did not feel safe using our rest areas. *See Figure 5*
 - During nighttime hours, 13 percent of users indicated that they feel safe, and 57 percent of the users indicated that they did not feel safe. *See Figure 5*

Figure 5 | Satisfaction with Safety & Security



- The traveling public was offered the opportunity to provide additional feedback that may not have been included in previous questions. Several key themes emerged from the feedback including:
 - Limiting unintended usage by people who are staying beyond posted time limits. There was a high correlation in the comments connecting individuals experiencing homelessness to safety.
 - Modernize facilities including addressing accessible and family stalls, updating signage, and providing gender-neutral restroom options for parents traveling with children of the opposite sex.
 - Address safety with patrols, security, updated lighting (including pet areas), updated landscaping for clear lines of sight to the restrooms, and design such as having parking as close to the restrooms as possible.
- Users were asked if there were services or amenities that they had encountered in other states that they would like to see in Washington. Some reoccurring themes came from their comments including:
 - Additional food options, 24-hour coffee, and water bottle refill stations.
 - A staffed common area and additional staffing supporting facility cleaning.
 - Modernized facilities including family restrooms equipped to support caregiving for adults, bright lights, and enhanced landscapes.

- The ability to purchase permits for other Washington State recreation partners such as camping, hiking, and boating.
- Pet amenities such as fenced off-leash areas, better lighting, and sidewalks for walking pets.
- Respondents were asked to evaluate focus areas including facility condition, cleanliness, available parking, and traveler's info. *See Figure 6*
 - 35 percent of users were not satisfied with the facility's condition.
 - 36 percent of users were not satisfied with the facility's cleanliness.
 - 62 percent were satisfied with the available parking.
 - 60 percent of Commercial Truck Drivers did not feel there was adequate truck parking.
 - 30 percent were satisfied with the traveler's information.

Figure 3 | User responses to satisfaction with facility condition, cleanliness, available parking, and traveler's info



Recommendations & Next Steps

The Strategic Plan is anticipated to be released by the end of the 2021-2023 biennium. With the massive response levels from the public survey, the Safety Rest Area Strategic Planning Team is working to ensure that responses from the traveling public are considered in the recommendations. Included in the plan will be strategies, recommendations, and next steps to support the traveling public with solutions to the core concerns addressed above. Once the draft is released, there will be a public response period to allow for additional comments regarding recommendations.

¹ [City of Seattle v. Long](#) (Majority and Concurrence). August 12, 2021

² Washington 211. <https://wa211.org>

³ [Harassment of Women Truckers Spurs Drivers, Agency to Seek Fixes](#), Bloomberg Law, December 2022

⁴ [2022 Washington Truck Parking Assessment](#)