

Commuter Trip Reduction Law Update 2021

EVOLUTION OF A PROVEN PROGRAM TO BETTER ADDRESS EQUITY AND CLIMATE

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide the Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Executive Board and the TDM Technical Committee, with WSDOT support, with a framework from which to engage in a policy discussion with legislators and stakeholders on the expanded direction and necessary funding for the Commuter Trip Reduction (CTR) Program. Once the policy direction has been set, specific program changes will be articulated.

Potential new CTR program emphasis areas

In its 2021-2023 session, the Legislature directed the Commuter Trip Reduction Board (aka the Transportation Demand Management Technical Committee and Executive Board) and WSDOT to conduct an update of the commuter trip reduction law ([SHB 1514](#), Sec. 4).

After consultation with key stakeholders, the TDM Technical Committee, Executive Board, and WSDOT developed recommended emphasis areas for an updated CTR law and program to address trends that are driving change in transportation. These emphasis areas would be in addition to the original program focus on commuter trips at large employer worksites. If the program is expanded to address one or more of these emphasis areas, CTR jurisdictions would customize their program based on local conditions to address commuter and non-commuter trips and travel outside the peak morning commute. Recommended emphasis areas:

- **Address mobility gaps in urban and rural areas for essential workers and people with special transportation needs.**
Expand the program to support more multimodal transportation options throughout the state for essential workers; shift workers; and other people with special transportation needs, including historically marginalized communities, people with low incomes and/or disabilities, tribes, BIPOC, and residents of rural areas.
- **Address congestion in urban areas any time of day by providing more support to existing CTR locations.**
Strengthen the program by providing current CTR jurisdictions greater flexibility to specifically address congestion at all hours.
- **Address congestion in urban and rural areas by expanding CTR to new locations.**
Expand the program beyond existing CTR jurisdictions to address major congestion anywhere on the transportation system (e.g., congestion during weekends, events, or seasonal activities).

Accomplishments of the current CTR Program

As stated in the CTR law (RCW 70A.15.4000-4110), the purpose of the state’s CTR Program is to improve air quality, ease congestion, and reduce gasoline consumption.

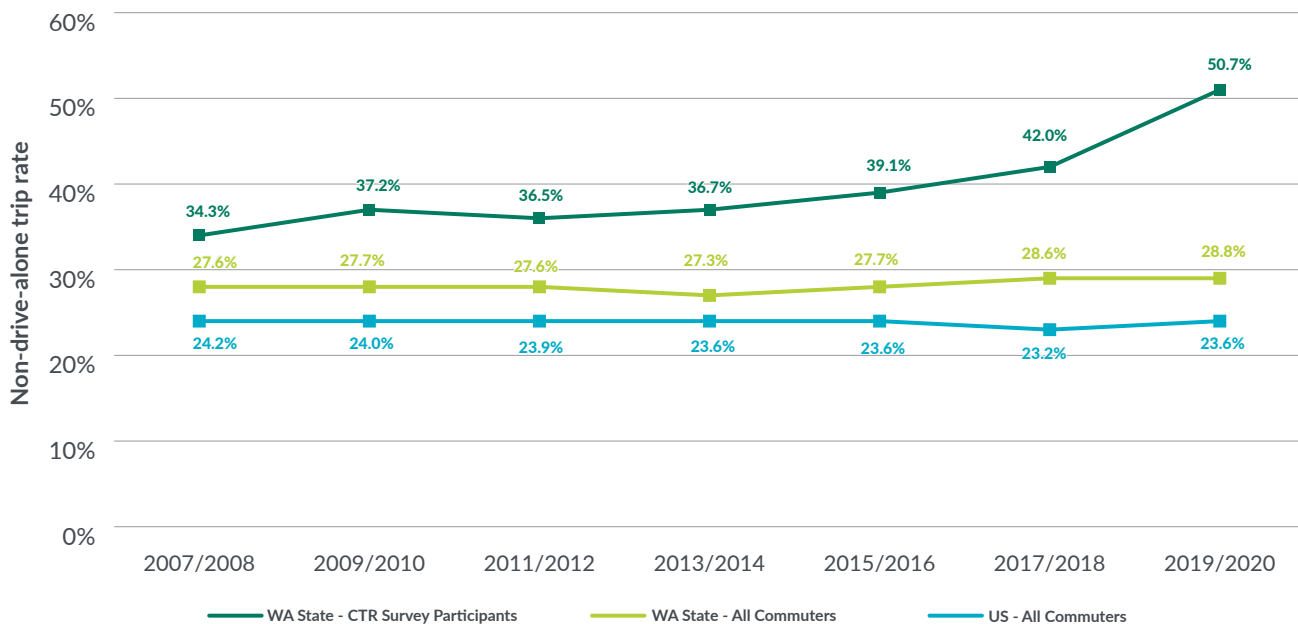
There are two major actions mandated by the CTR law to accomplish this purpose:

1. To reduce vehicle miles traveled, greenhouse gas emissions, and fuel consumption. To achieve this, CTR requires major employers to develop CTR plans aimed at reducing the number of drive-alone commute trips to their worksites by shifting trips away from single-occupancy vehicles to other travel modes such as transit, vanpooling, carpooling, telework, biking, and walking.
2. Require local, regional, and state governments to collaborate on CTR programs.

The CTR Program has been very effective in accomplishing its stated goals. In the 30 years since the CTR law was adopted in 1991, jurisdictions have partnered with employers and state, regional, and local agencies to implement CTR programs in affected urban growth areas. As required by the CTR law, these programs largely focus on employers who have 100 or more full-time employees who commute to a worksite on weekdays between 6:00 and 9:00 a.m. These programs also largely focus on enabling and incentivizing employees to ride the bus, rideshare, walk, bicycle, or telework. Local CTR coalitions have:

- Boosted transit ridership through widespread availability of employer-sponsored transit passes.
- Created thousands of employer-supported vanpools.
- Expanded the use of compressed work schedules, flex schedules, and telework.

Of the nearly 600,000 employees working at CTR-affected worksites from 2019 to 2020, 50.7 percent chose alternatives to driving alone for their commute to and from work. This is 76 percent higher than the state average (28.8 percent), and 115 percent higher than the national average (23.6 percent).¹



¹ Performance data were influenced by two unusual circumstances related to COVID-19. First, there was a significant increase in telework for the sites that surveyed after March 2020. Second, almost 200 fewer worksites surveyed in 2019-20 than in 2017-18. These sites have historically reported vehicle miles traveled above the current cycle’s statewide average. It is likely that part of the improvement in the numbers is due to those sites not surveying. While the gains from telework are sustainable, the next cycle that surveys all CTR-affected worksites will likely have results that fall somewhere between the numbers from 2017-18 and 2019-20.

While CTR has continued its focus on large employers over the years, the CTR law also provides discretion for the program to evolve and to allow a broader reach and more flexibility to jurisdictions. Several jurisdictions including Redmond, Seattle, Snohomish County, Spokane, Tacoma, Tukwila, Vancouver, and Yakima have availed themselves of the flexibility provided in CTR to form Growth and Transportation Efficiency Centers (GTECs) or submit alternate plans to focus CTR efforts on all trips in a geographic area.

Why expand the CTR Program?

Despite all the worthy accomplishments of the current CTR Program, there are a number of important statewide considerations that cannot be addressed under the current law. Expansion of the law would enable these considerations to be addressed in the CTR Program. Gaps identified by the current law include:

- The CTR Program addresses only 4 percent of daily trips in Washington with its current focus on commute trips at large employers. Expansion of the program to the recommended emphasis areas would begin to capture the other 96 percent of daily trips in the state. That substantial number of trips and their effects on congestion and air quality could now be addressed under CTR.
- The current program reaches largely white-collar office workers. The current program does not address shift workers, retail workers, hospitality workers, health care workers, part-time workers, workers at small businesses, or any workers traveling outside of the 6-9 a.m. weekday timeframe. It does not address congestion happening on weekends; congestion caused by events such as sports, conferences, or concerts; or congestion caused by recreational activities such as skiing and hiking. Expansion of the program to include these groups and activities would extend the program benefits to underserved people and localities and address congestion wherever and whenever it occurs.
- The current program is required only in affected urban growth areas. Most of the state is not covered. By expanding the program to communities that are currently not covered by the program (see map 1), program benefits would increase to more communities. These benefits include more travel options, reduced congestion, and improved air quality.
- The current CTR law allows other communities to opt in. However, funding levels have kept this from happening. Funding would need to be increased to cover expansion of the program.

Challenge to adapt

Transportation, like so many industries and aspects of our lives, must adapt to rapid changes in the world. Some of the trends driving those changes in transportation include:

- More widespread and intense traffic congestion.
- Climate change as indicated by wildfires, droughts, and extreme weather.
- Displacement of middle- and low-income people from the housing market in cities.
- Aging populations, particularly among people over 80 years old.
- Ongoing and increasing inequity including by race, income, education, and rural/urban location.
- Technology advancements including on-demand information and modes of travel, low- and zero-emissions vehicles, and automation.
- Surges in telework and home deliveries accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Shifts in transit ridership due to COVID-19, away from white-collar commuters (who can telework) to frontline workers required to travel to their workplace to do their jobs.

Change is always a part of life, but the pace of change has increased noticeably and does not appear to be slowing down in the foreseeable future. To respond effectively, the transportation industry must remain nimble, respond quickly, and use every tool available to adapt to these trends. “Nimble” is not a word usually associated with an infrastructure-based industry. Yet nimbleness is what the current world demands.

Practical Solutions

The Practical Solutions approach is WSDOT’s response to the demand for nimbleness. The Practical Solutions approach, along with strategies for managing and operating the transportation system, emphasizes preserving and making the most of existing transportation infrastructure and systems before expanding them. The CTR Program is one of the key statewide programs that focuses on making the most of existing transportation infrastructure by encouraging and facilitating the shift from drive-alone trips to other modes of transportation including transit, telework, vanpools, carpools, shuttles, bicycling, on-demand service, scooters, and walking.

The CTR Program also aligns closely with Active Transportation—a range of increased mobility options for people with special transportation needs and historically marginalized communities—and its promotion of multimodal transportation choices. Expansion of the CTR Program into these areas would reinforce the good work being done by these programs.

Potential of the CTR Program

The state’s CTR Program offers extensive potential to meet travel and community needs. The program can generate results in much less time than the 7-10 years a typical road-building project takes to complete – and at dramatically lower cost. Further, because local jurisdictions determine the focus of their CTR program, the program is responsive and can be tailored to local conditions.

With its long and successful track record and decentralized approach, the CTR Program is well-positioned to adapt to the trends driving the changes in transportation throughout the state. The program can help advance an array of statewide goals while carrying out the program’s original goals of easing congestion and improving air quality by reducing drive-alone commute trips to and from large worksites.

Next steps

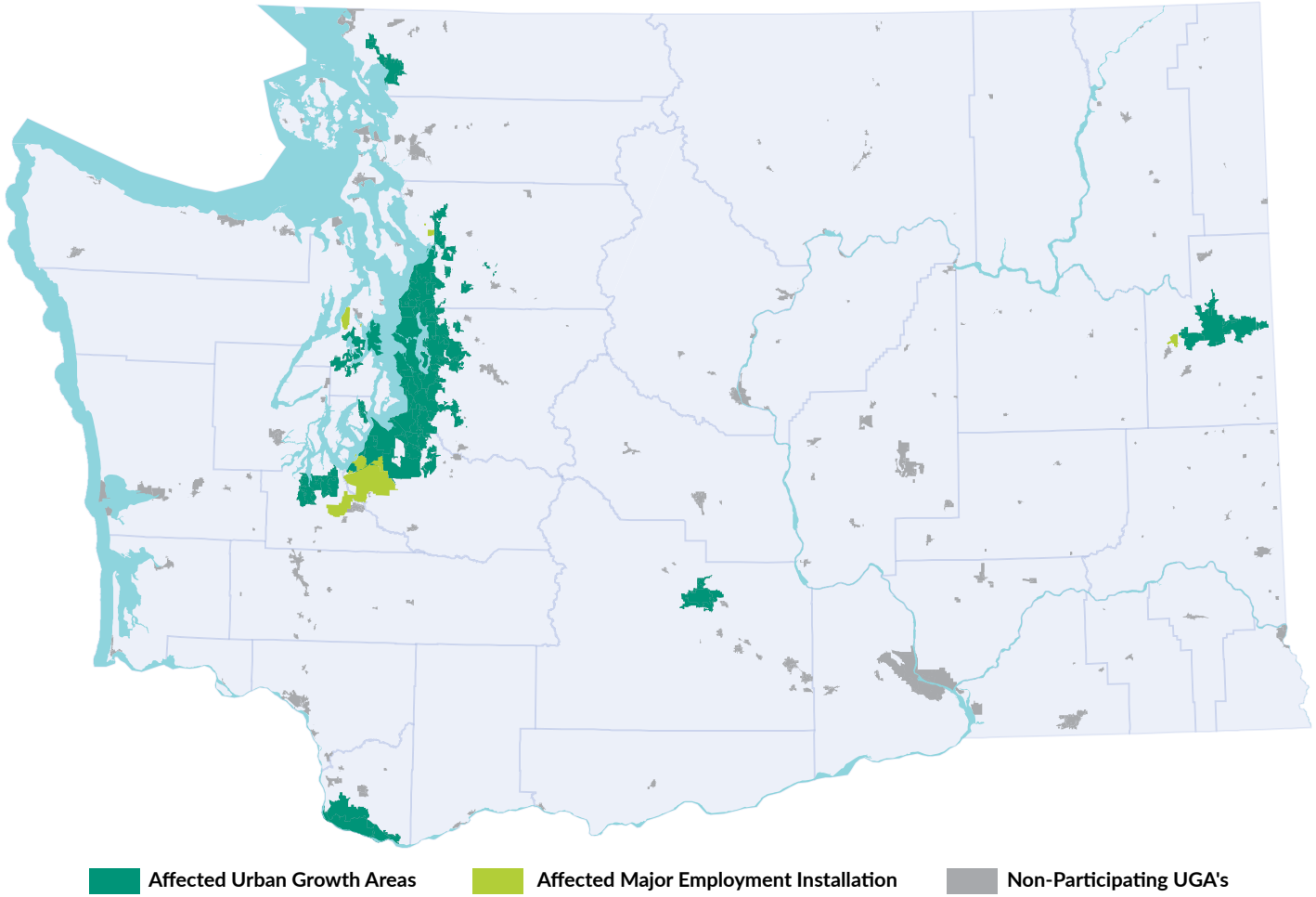
The TDM Board and TDM Technical Committee will take the following steps to explore expansion of the CTR Program:

Fall/winter 2021 – Develop and deliver a full report to the Legislature on an update to the CTR Program. The report will detail CTR Program history and requirements, governance practices, and relevant social and economic trends. Continue legislative and stakeholder outreach.

Spring/Summer 2022 – Engage the Legislature and other stakeholders to develop consent on future CTR Program emphasis areas.

Fall/Winter 2022 – Develop and submit legislation to the House Transportation Committee that supports updated CTR Program emphasis areas.

Affected Areas in the CTR Program



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