

# Whatcom County Commute Trip Reduction Four-Year Plan Update: 2025–2029

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## Benefits of CTR

### 1. Describe the local land use and transportation context and objectives.

*a) Describe the setting in the jurisdiction as it is today or will be in the near future.*

The Whatcom Smart Trips program, administered by the Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG), will play a pivotal role in Whatcom County's CTR program. The Whatcom Smart Trips program provides an incentive for members of the community to be mindful of the trips they are making throughout the day by providing discounts at local participating retailers, milestone rewards, cash prizes, and recognition. The program allows participants to enter a trip log whenever a single occupancy vehicle trip was replaced by walking, biking, utilizing transit, carpooling, or other multimodal transportation trips. Since the inception of the program, it is estimated that 32,706 tons of carbon dioxide emissions have been avoided.

To address the growing demand for diverse transportation options, Whatcom County adopted the Whatcom County Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan; aiming to enhance the safety, equity, and connectivity of the multimodal transportation network by encouraging more people to walk, bike, and use other non-motorized forms of transport for their daily needs. The specific objectives of these plans include detailing specific facilities both on and off road to create a region-wide network while addressing gaps through identified steps and policies. Community engagement efforts have been integral to the development of these plans, with numerous public workshops and surveys conducted to gather feedback and ensure the plans meet the needs of all residents. In conjunction with the transportation network plans and the Smart Trips Program, the county collaborates closely with the regional transportation provider, Whatcom Transit Authority (WTA). WTA offers a comprehensive range of services, including fixed-route buses, paratransit, vanpool, and zone services throughout both the county. Future developments include the planned expansion of bus routes and the introduction of additional electric buses to further reduce the County's carbon footprint.

*b) Describe features of land use and transportation facilities and services that affect commuters.*

Most of the nonfederal land in unincorporated Whatcom County is dedicated to forestry and agricultural uses. The next largest category of land use is residential. Much smaller areas of the county are dedicated to industrial, commercial, and other uses.

The current Comprehensive Plan includes goals and policies aimed at enhancing the multimodal transportation network through capital improvements, development requirements, street standards, equity in engagement, service delivery, and investment. This plan is currently being updated to expand on and continue these initiatives.

The 2025-2030 Whatcom County Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) outlines various projects to improve multimodal safety and connectivity.

c) *Describe whether and how commuting patterns have changed in the past few years.*

1. **Remote and Hybrid Work:** The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly shifted the way people work, with many employers adopting remote or hybrid work models. This reduction in daily commutes suggests decreased traffic congestion during traditional commute times and lower demand for parking facilities near large employment centers.

**CTR Program Implications:** The increase in remote work suggests a reduction in daily commute trips, aligning with the goals of the CTR plan to reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality. This shift supports the CTR objective of minimizing the number of commute trips.

2. **Increased Use of Bicycle and Pedestrian Networks:** There has been a rise in biking and walking as primary modes of transportation. Community interest in health and fitness, along with local initiatives and events promoting active transportation, have contributed to this trend.

**CTR Program Implications:** Investing in the development and maintenance of safe and connected bike lanes and pedestrian pathways supports the increased preference for active modes of transportation. Enhancing infrastructure that encourages biking and walking helps reduce car dependency and promotes sustainable commuting options, reinforcing the goals of the CTR plan.

3. **Enhanced Public Transportation Services:** The Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA) has expanded and improved its services, making public transportation a more viable option for many commuters. The improvement of bus routes and schedules has contributed to this positive change.

**CTR Program Implications:** The growing use of public transportation is in line with the CTR plan's objectives. Promoting and supporting public transit use through incentives like free bus passes and improved access to transit services will help reduce single-occupancy vehicle trips, thereby supporting the goals of the CTR plan.

d) *List the most important land use and transportation objectives from your city or county's plans that commute trip reduction most directly affects.*

#### **Multimodal Transportation Network Enhancement:**

- **Objective:** Improve and expand the multimodal transportation network to ensure safe, efficient, and accessible options for all users.
- **Impact on CTR:** Enhancing the multimodal transportation network encourages residents to use alternative modes of transportation, such as biking, walking, and public transit, thereby reducing reliance on single-occupancy vehicles. This aligns with CTR goals by decreasing traffic congestion and improving air quality.

#### **Support for Compact and Infill Development:**

- **Objective:** Promote compact and infill development within Urban Growth Areas to accommodate growth while utilizing existing infrastructure and services.
- **Impact on CTR:** By focusing on compact and infill development, the distance and need for commuting can be reduced.

### **Sustainable Land Use Practices:**

- **Objective:** Implement sustainable land use practices that balance environmental, economic, and social needs.
- **Impact on CTR:** Sustainable land use practices support the development of green infrastructure and transit-oriented development, which are crucial for reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and supporting a shift towards more sustainable commuting practices.

### **Equity in Transportation:**

- **Objective:** Ensure that transportation planning and investment decisions are equitable and meet the needs of all community members, including underserved and vulnerable populations.
- **Impact on CTR:** An equitable transportation system provides accessible and affordable commuting options for all residents, which is essential for achieving the objectives of the CTR program by ensuring that everyone has viable alternatives to driving alone.

### **Integration with Regional Transportation Plans:**

- **Objective:** Collaborate with regional transportation agencies to create a cohesive and efficient transportation network across the region.
- **Impact on CTR:** Integrating local and regional transportation plans helps to create seamless commuting options for those traveling throughout the County, supporting the overall goals of the CTR plan by improving connectivity and reducing commuter traffic.
  - e) *Describe critical aspects of land use and transportation that should be sustained and key changes that should be considered to improve commute trip reduction's contribution to the land use and transportation objectives you reference.*

Due to the continued planned growth, the County will continue all elements related to CTR in the on-going Comprehensive Plan Update and subsequent plans.

## **2. Describe how the CTR program will help achieve the jurisdiction's land use and transportation objectives.**

- a) *Describe how and to what extent your CTR program will help your city or county achieve the land use and transportation objectives referenced in question 1.*

Whatcom County's CTR plan and Whatcom Council of Governments Smart Trips Program significantly support and encourage key land use and transportation objectives outlined in the Comprehensive Plan. By promoting the use of alternative transportation modes such as biking, walking, and public transit, the CTR plan supports the continued expansion of the County's multimodal transportation network. This encouragement reduces dependency on single-occupancy vehicles, alleviating traffic congestion and improving air quality, which aligns with the goals of providing safe, efficient, and accessible transportation options for all users.

The CTR program also supports compact and infill development by reducing the necessity for long commutes. By encouraging compact and infill development in Urban Growth Areas, the program helps reduce the pressure on transportation infrastructure. This directly contributes to the efforts to utilize

existing infrastructure and services efficiently, creating walkable and bike-friendly communities that enhance residents' quality of life.

Additionally, by ensuring that transportation planning and investments meet the needs of all community members, including underserved and vulnerable populations, the CTR program promotes transportation equity. This approach ensures that all residents, despite income levels, have practical alternatives to driving alone creating a transportation system that benefits all members of the community.

Finally, the CTR program continues collaboration with WTA to create an efficient transportation network, enhancing connectivity throughout the County and improving commuter options. By aligning local commuting initiatives with regional transit services, the program supports the County's objective of creating a seamless transportation network across the region, reducing commuter traffic, and supporting sustainable growth. Through these efforts, the CTR program advances the County's land use and transportation objectives, contributing to a more connected, livable, and environmentally friendly community.

**3. Describe how the CTR program will help achieve the jurisdiction's environmental objectives.**

- a) *Describe how the CTR program will support jurisdiction greenhouse gas emission reduction efforts.*

The CTR program aligns closely with the County's Climate Action Plan by addressing transportation as one of the primary sources of greenhouse gas emissions. The Climate Action Plan identifies transportation as a significant contributor to the County's overall emissions and outlines strategies to mitigate this impact.

The CTR program supports these efforts by encouraging alternative transportation modes such as biking, walking, carpooling, and public transit. By reducing the number of single-occupancy vehicle trips, the program helps lower the overall vehicle miles traveled (VMT), directly contributing to the reduction of transportation-related emissions.

In collaboration with the WCOG Smart Trips Program, the CTR program enhances its impact by offering incentives and resources to support sustainable commuting options.

- b) *Describe how the CTR program will support jurisdiction environmental objectives in addition to greenhouse gas emission reductions.*

In addition to the improved air quality from the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, the reduction in roadway demand will support the environmental objective to preserve greenspace. The decrease in roadway demand will allow more land to be undeveloped and left in its natural state.

**4. Describe how your CTR program will help achieve regional and state objectives.**

- a) *Summarize the local, regional, and state benefits that would be gained if you achieve your CTR targets.*

**Local Benefits:**

**Reduced Traffic Congestion:** By encouraging CTR affected employees to use alternative transportation modes such as public transit, biking, walking, or carpooling, the CTR program would alleviate traffic congestion on local roads and highways. This leads to smoother traffic flow, shorter commute times, and higher quality of life for residents.

**Improved Air Quality:** Fewer vehicles on the road means reduced emissions of pollutants such as carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, and particulate matter. This contributes to cleaner air and a healthier environment for residents, particularly those living near major roadways and commuting corridors.

**Enhanced Public Health:** Cleaner air resulting from reduced vehicle emissions can lead to improved respiratory health and a decrease in respiratory diseases such as asthma among the population. Additionally, promoting active transportation options like walking and biking supports physical activity and overall wellness.

**Cost Savings for Residents:** Commuting by public transit, carpooling, or biking can reduce individual transportation costs related to fuel, parking fees, and vehicle maintenance. This leaves residents with more disposable income, which can benefit the local economy through increased spending on goods and services.

### **Regional Benefits:**

**Improved Regional Mobility:** Decreasing congestion can have effects throughout the region, improving overall mobility and connectivity between neighboring communities.

**Environmental Conservation:** Lowering vehicle emissions not only benefits air quality locally but also contributes to larger regional environmental goals, such as reducing the region's carbon footprint and mitigating climate change impacts.

**Collaborative Planning:** Implementing the CTR program involves collaboration between Whatcom County, the City of Bellingham, Whatcom Council of Governments, and Whatcom Regional Transit Agency. This encourages cooperation and shared responsibility in addressing transportation challenges and achieving sustainable development goals.

### **State Benefits:**

**Compliance with State Regulations:** Washington State requires cities and counties throughout the state to implement CTR programs as part of broader efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote sustainable transportation solutions. Achieving CTR targets demonstrates compliance with state regulations and contributes to statewide environmental goals.

**Economic Efficiency:** By reducing congestion and improving transportation efficiency in Whatcom County, the state benefits from enhanced productivity and reduced costs associated with maintaining and expanding interstate transportation infrastructure.

b) *List adjacent CTR-affected cities and counties.*

### **Cities:**

**Bellingham:** The City of Bellingham is the county seat of Whatcom County. The CTR program within the County would also impact commuting patterns and transportation planning strategies within the City of Bellingham.

c) *Describe the top few cross-border and regional transportation issues that affect your jurisdiction.*

**Regional Commuter Traffic:** Within Whatcom County, the City of Bellingham is the largest population, employment, and service center drawing a significant amount of regional commuter traffic. Due to the city being the county's largest employment center, many individuals who live in surrounding areas, including

other parts of Whatcom County and nearby cities, commute to the City of Bellingham for work, education, or other services. The influx of regional traffic places considerable strain on the transportation network.

**Cross-Border Traffic from Canada:** Located on the Canadian border, Whatcom County experiences significant commuter traffic from Canadians visiting the region for shopping or recreational opportunities. The cross-border traffic from Canada contributes to congestion on major routes such as Interstate 5, which serves as a main thoroughfare for both regional and cross border commuters.

**Regional Housing Affordability:** Due to the high cost of living within the urban areas, as compared to the surrounding areas, a significant number of individuals choose to live outside of the cities and commute in for work. This trend increases the number of daily commuters using the transportation systems, adding pressure to infrastructure, and creating challenges for transportation planning and management.

*d) Describe the strategies you, adjacent cities and counties, and your region have agreed to use to address the top issues described in the previous bullet.*

**Regional Transportation and Planning Coordination:** In partnership with WCOG and neighboring jurisdictions, the County actively participates in regional transportation planning. These regional planning efforts ensure that transportation planning is aligned across the region and addresses the needs of the commuters. The comprehensive planning efforts focus on improving the connectivity of transportation networks and managing traffic flow to reduce congestion.

**Whatcom Smart Trips:** The Whatcom Smart Trips program provides an incentive for members of the community to be mindful of the trips they are making throughout the day by providing discounts at local participating retailers, milestone rewards, cash prizes and recognition. The program allows participants to enter a trip log whenever a single occupancy vehicle trip was replaced by walking, biking, utilizing transit, carpooling, or other multimodal transportation trips.

## **Performance targets**

### **5. List your jurisdiction's CTR performance target(s).**

*a) List performance targets that reflect only CTR-affected worksites.*

Weighted average drive-alone-rate (DAR) of 64 percent or less for CTR-affected worksites at the jurisdiction level. This target is a 15.5 percent (or greater) reduction of the jurisdiction's census performance in 2019. <sup>1</sup>

*b) List any additional performance targets.*

None

### **6. List the base value you'll use for each performance target.**

*a) For each performance target, provide the number you'll use as the baseline (or starting number). You'll measure the difference between this number and your results to report performance.*

DAR during the 2023-2025 CTR survey cycle will be the base value.

### **7. Describe the method you used to determine the base value for each target.**

a) *Provide the source for each base value listed*

2023-2025 CTR worksite survey results pertaining to drive-alone trip-making will be aggregated to the jurisdiction level and used as the base DAR value.

**8. Describe how you'll measure progress toward each target.**

a) *List the method you'll use to measure progress for each target.*

Progress will be measured using the subsequent survey results (2025-2027)

**9. List your jurisdiction's CTR-affected worksites.**

a) *List all your CTR-affected sites.*

Alpha Technologies, Inc

Anvil Corporation

Whatcom County – Northwest Annex \*

*\*Indicates voluntary site*

**10. List a performance target for each CTR-affected worksite.**

a) *For any performance targets tied to the CTR survey, indicate that you'll establish performance targets during the 2023-2025 survey cycle.*

Base year performance targets will be established during the 2023-2025 survey cycle.

**11. List the base value you'll use for each site.**

a) *For any performance targets tied to the CTR survey, indicate that you'll establish a base value during the 2023-2025 survey cycle.*

A base value will be established during the 2023-2025 survey cycle.

**Service and Strategies**

**12. Describe the services and strategies your jurisdiction will use to achieve CTR targets.**

Whatcom County will continue to work with Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG) to implement the Whatcom Smart Trips Program. Whatcom Smart Trips is a collection of initiatives and tools that help and encourage community members to use more efficient and sustainable transportation modes. These include:

- An online trip diary for tracking trips made by walking, bicycling, sharing rides and riding the bus (non-drive alone modes)
- Incentive distribution, which includes discount cards, gift certificates, cash prizes and recognition to motivate community members to try new forms of transportation
- Employer partnerships to provide support to businesses and organizations that want to promote sustainable transportation to their employees (including CTR employers)
- School Smart Trips program, which provides classroom activities for middle school students and

bicycle skills courses for elementary school students, as well as summer adventure camps

- Bicycle education for children and adults
- Community outreach activities
- An ongoing public awareness campaign that includes advertising and public presentations to make the community aware of the benefits of participation in the Smart Trips program

Whatcom County will support WCOG's partnership with Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA) on Smart Trips programming, including:

- Advertising and community relations
- Emergency rides home using a limited, free taxi service so bus riders and other Smart Trips participants who experience an emergency or become ill at work can get home
- First Time Rider Pass distribution among Smart Trips employer partners

**13. Describe how jurisdiction services and strategies will support CTR-affected employers.**

- The online trip diary will encourage employees of CTR-affected employers to be more mindful of the trips they are taking daily. The trip diary will also provide the program with the data needed to employ incentives.
- The incentive distribution will keep employees engaged in the program and will award and recognize users that replace single occupancy vehicle trips with alternative transportation modes.
- The employer partnerships offered through the program provide high quality materials and services to CTR worksites. Materials included in the partnership include but are not limited to employee recognition posters, employee transit maps, preferential parking signs and permits, smart trip brochures, and more. Services included in the partnership include but are not limited to worksite presentations to employees, bike to work and school day, first time rider passes with WTA, and more.
- Although K-12 schools are not CTR affected sites, the School Smart Trips Program provides students with the knowledge and skills to safely commute throughout the County.
- Many employees of CTR affected sites may not have the confidence or skills to safely commute to work by bike. The Smart Trips Program will provide bicycle education for both youth and adults.
- The program also includes community outreach activities and a public awareness campaign to inform the community about the benefits of the Smart Trips Program.

**14. Describe barriers your jurisdiction must address to achieve CTR targets.**

*a) Describe how you'll address these barriers.*

Several barriers must be addressed to meet Whatcom County's CTR targets. These strategies will be implemented in coordination with the Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG) Smart Trips program, Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA), and other regional partners.

**Barrier:** Personal Barriers to Using Public Transit



**How addressing:** One of the major barriers is the lack of familiarity or comfort with using public transportation. Many potential transit riders may face personal challenges such as not understanding bus routes, schedules, or how to integrate transit into their daily routines. Smart Trips addresses this through its education and outreach efforts, including guided rides and individualized trip planning assistance. These initiatives help remove personal barriers by making public transit more accessible and user friendly for commuters.

**Barrier:** Limited Employer Engagement in Sustainable Transportation

**How addressing:** Engaging local employers to actively participate in CTR programs can be challenging, especially in promoting carpooling, biking, and transit use. Smart Trips addresses this by offering regular meetings with Employee Transportation Coordinators (ETCs), where best practices, tools, and resources are shared. These meetings provide a forum for employers to collaborate and learn how to successfully implement CTR strategies within their organizations, encouraging greater participation in sustainable commuting practices.

**Barrier:** Lack of Awareness of Transportation Options

**How addressing:** Many residents are unaware of the sustainable transportation options available to them, such as biking, walking, or carpooling. The Smart Trips program includes a public awareness campaign to educate the community on the benefits of walking, biking, sharing rides, and taking the bus. By raising awareness and offering incentives like gift cards and recognition for participants, Smart Trips encourages more residents to make sustainable transportation choices.

These strategies, implemented through the Smart Trips program, address key barriers to achieving CTR targets by focusing on education, employer engagement, and infrastructure support. By overcoming these barriers, Whatcom County and its regional partners can increase the use of sustainable transportation modes and reduce single-occupancy vehicle trips, helping to meet CTR goals.

**15. Describe the transportation demand management technologies your jurisdiction plans to use to deliver CTR services and strategies.**

The Whatcom Smart Trips website is used to track non-drive alone trips, facilitate employer partnerships, provide education and assistance related to bike and transit options, and incentivize non-drive alone modes.

The Whatcom Smart Trips website can be accessed at the following link:

<https://www.whatcomsmartrips.org/>

Whatcom County will support WCOG's use of the state's CTR tool to conduct CTR surveys and gather program data.

**16. Transcribe or link to your local CTR ordinance.**

[Chapter 16.24 COMMUTE TRIP REDUCTION \(codepublishing.com\)](#)

**17. Describe your financial plan.**

The tables below show estimated costs and funding sources for the Whatcom Smart Trips program, which serves as the primary CTR strategy region-wide.

a) Describe the estimated average annual costs of your plan.

Activity	Estimated average annual cost
Employer Engagement	\$40,000
Performance Reporting	\$5,000
Administration	\$5,000
CTR Plan*	\$3,000
School Engagement	\$269,000
Community Outreach	\$173,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$495,000</b>

b) Describe likely funding sources, public and private, to implement your plan.

Source of Revenue	Estimated Average Revenue
Commute Trip Reduction Funding (state)	\$53,000
Regional Mobility Grant (state)	\$212,000
Mobility Management Grant (federal)	\$124,000
Local Government Funding	\$106,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$495,000</b>

**18. Describe your implementation structure.**

a) Describe who will conduct the activities listed in your plan

The activities listed in the plan will be conducted in collaboration between Whatcom County, the City of Bellingham, Whatcom Council of Governments, and Whatcom Transit Authority.

b) Indicate who will monitor progress on your plan. List job title, department, and name.

Cliff Strong | Senior Planner | Whatcom County, Planning and Development Services

**19. List your implementation schedule.**

*a) Provide the timeline for anticipated projects.*

Smart Trips Program Implementation Schedule	1 <sup>st</sup> Biennium July 2025-June 2027	2 <sup>nd</sup> Biennium July 2027-June2029
Actions	Identify worksites and employee transportation coordinators. Train and assist employee transportation coordinators. Create and distribute informational materials about transportation options for CTR sites. Coordinate transportation focused events. Manage trip data and incentive distribution. Secure funding for incentives. Administer worksite surveys. Conduct employer program reviews.	Identify worksites and employee transportation coordinators. Train and assist employee transportation coordinators. Create and distribute informational materials about transportation options for CTR sites. Coordinate transportation focused events. Manage trip data and incentive distribution. Secure funding for incentives. Administer worksite surveys. Conduct employer program reviews. Prepare for 2029-2033 CTR plan.

**20. Describe the CTR plan for jurisdiction employees.**

*a) Describe the services, programs, information, and other actions your city or county put in place to help its employees reduce their drive alone commute trips.*

Whatcom County offers a range of services and programs to reduce single-occupancy vehicle commuting among its employees. In collaboration with Smart Trips programming, the County has increasingly supported work-from-home flexibility to reduce the need for daily commuting. Secure indoor bike storage is provided at the courthouse (our largest employment site), and bike racks have been installed at satellite locations to encourage cycling as a viable commuting option. Employees are also eligible for the Free Ride Home program, allowing up to three emergency rides home per month for those who regularly commute via alternative transportation methods, reducing concerns about flexibility and emergencies.

To further encourage the use of public transportation, Whatcom County provides free bus passes to new employees and first-time riders to help establish good commuting habits. For employees who actively participate in Smart Trips, the county organizes recognition programs to celebrate those who consistently choose sustainable travel options. In addition, employees take part in incentive raffles, where those who complete a set number of Smart Trips are eligible to win gift cards.

Parking rate increases are also part of the County’s strategy to discourage single-occupancy vehicle use by making alternative transportation options more financially attractive. Through these coordinated efforts, Whatcom County is committed to reducing the number of cars on the road, promoting sustainability, and supporting healthier commuting habits for its employees, our community, and our environment.

**21. Describe how the CTR plan for jurisdiction employees contributes to the success of the overall plan.**

*a) Describe how the plan for jurisdiction employees reinforces the success of the jurisdiction plan?*

The plan for jurisdiction employees in Whatcom County supports the broader jurisdiction plan by encouraging sustainable transportation behaviors within the County's employees, which aligns closely with community-wide transportation goals. This approach helps to show the practical benefits of alternative commuting methods. This reduction in parking demand and encouragement of public transit use not only reduces overall traffic congestion but also increases the utilization of public transportation services.

**Alignment with Plans**

**22. List the transit agencies that provide service in your jurisdiction.**

Whatcom Transit Authority (WTA)

**23. List the transit plans you reviewed while developing this plan.**

WTA 2040 Long Range Transit Plan

**24. Describe how this CTR plan supports the transit plans.**

Whatcom County's CTR plan supports the transit objectives of the Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA) by promoting multimodal transportation options that complement and enhance public transit usage. By encouraging a shift from single-occupancy vehicle use to more sustainable commuting options like biking or walking, the CTR plan helps increase ridership levels for WTA services by providing first and last mile connections. This support is vital in achieving WTA's goals of expanding and optimizing transit services throughout the region. Additionally, this CTR program promotes the improvement of the safety and accessibility of transit access points such as enhancing pedestrian routes and bicycle facilities near bus stops directly align with WTA's initiatives to make transit more appealing and accessible. These coordinated efforts contribute to a more integrated transportation network, reducing congestion and environmental impact while supporting WTA's mission to provide efficient and reliable transportation.

**25. Describe any comprehensive plan updates that are needed and when they will be made.**

Whatcom County is currently engaged in its Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update, which is projected to be completed in 2025. This update is part of a two-year project aimed at guiding the County's growth and development over the next 20 years, ensuring it aligns with the community's vision for a sustainable and equitable future. The Update will address several key areas including housing, transportation, and climate resilience, and will establish high-level goals and policies that will shape development, capital investments, and various County programs. This comprehensive update process includes opportunities for public input to ensure that the plan reflects the community's needs and preferences.

In terms of the CTR program, any updates needed in the Comprehensive Plan related to land use and transportation objectives may influence the effectiveness and focus of the CTR initiatives. Adjustments to zoning regulations and the development of new policies can help optimize the CTR program by ensuring that it supports and is integrated with broader urban planning goals. The ongoing public engagement and

planning processes provide an ideal opportunity to align the CTR program with transportation infrastructure and promoting sustainable commuting options.

## **Engagement**

### **26. Describe stakeholder engagement.**

- a) *Who did you talk to? When did you talk to them? What did they have to say? How did what they said influence the plan?*

The existing Whatcom Smart Trips program is informed by a comprehensive survey effort that took place from 2004-2009 and reached over 14,000 local residents. This resulted in the 2012 Mobility Report, which can be accessed at the following link:

[https://www.whatcomsmarttrips.org/news/mobility\\_report](https://www.whatcomsmarttrips.org/news/mobility_report)

The Whatcom region has grown and changed since this initial engagement effort so more recent engagement results will also be incorporated into the 2025-2029 CTR Plan. Whatcom County will support and utilize WCOG engagement efforts, which include 1) a review of existing engagement results, 2) public surveys, and 3) public review of the Draft CTR Plan.

### **Review of Existing & Relevant Engagement Results:**

The City of Bellingham recently conducted community engagement related to their updated Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plans. This engagement effort took place primarily in 2022 and 2023. The results of the outreach contain relevant information and feedback from the public which can also be used to inform this CTR Plan. Bellingham's engagement effort is particularly relevant to this CTR Plan because the majority of the county's CTR-affected sites are located very near Bellingham city limits. Additionally, the Whatcom Smart Trips strategy goes beyond commute trips and aims to promote non-drive alone trips of all kinds, whether for work, leisure, errands or other purposes. Given the breadth of the Smart Trips program, we can utilize a wide variety of public feedback about non-drive alone modes and trips, whether they are commute trips or not.

Relevant findings from the City of Bellingham's Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan community engagement effort are summarized below:

Over 500 people interacted with the Pedestrian Master Plan survey and webmap, and over 1,000 people interacted with the Bicycle Master Plan survey and webmap. Engagement also included in-person events, direct emails, comments received, and technical review committee meetings. Some of the survey questions show that driving is still the most selected form of transportation for getting around Bellingham, but significant numbers of people are also choosing non-driving modes like walking, rolling, or biking.

Survey questions also showed that the most popular reasons people ride bicycles in Bellingham are for exercise, running errands/shopping, and various forms of recreation or leisure rides (on paved trails, on city streets, and on dirt trails). Commuting to work was the 6th most popular answer. This supports the broader approach that Whatcom Smart Trips takes by going beyond commute trips to encourage non-drive alone trips of all types, particularly those taken for errands or leisure.

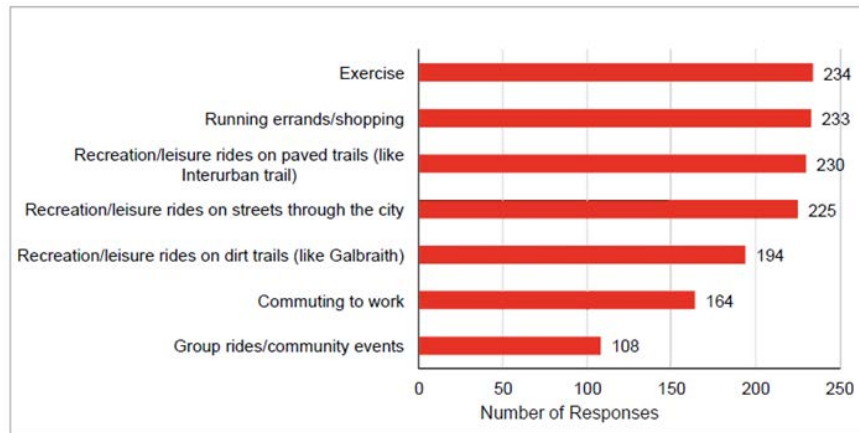


Image description: A screenshot of a bar chart from the Bellingham Bicycle Master Plan showing survey responses when participants were asked “The main reason I ride a bicycle is for \_\_\_\_\_. “

In another survey question, people selected options that would improve their experience and/or lead them to choose to ride a bike more in Bellingham. The most popular responses were “a connected network of bike lanes”, “streets that feel safer for biking”, and “secure places to park a bike at your destination”. Overall, participants seemed to prioritize infrastructure-based responses to this question.

When asked about other ways bicycling can be supported in Bellingham, survey respondents ranked “providing commuter benefit or employer wellness programs” an average of 4.51/5 in importance (sixth overall). In contrast, the highest ranked option overall was “enforcing traffic safety laws with the greatest impacts (e.g., driving under the influence, speeding)”, and some other highly ranked options were “mandating bike-friendly development (e.g., installation of bike racks)” and “installing automated speed safety cameras (school zones, red light running, speeding)”. These top three responses emphasized infrastructure improvements and safety. Additionally, respondents ranked “educating people around safe biking” an average of 3.97/5 in importance and fourth overall. As part of existing programming, Whatcom Smart Trips offers bicycle education classes and facilitates commuter benefit programs.

Other overall themes that emerged from the City of Bellingham’s engagement effort are:

- The importance of a connected pedestrian network for people to access their daily needs and recreation.
- A need for a connected network of higher comfort bikeways (such as separated or protected bike lanes, bike boulevards, and trails).
- A desire to feel safer at intersections and crossings, for both pedestrians and bicyclists
- Concerns about driver behavior, speeding, and safety.

### Public Surveys:

Based on the review of existing engagement results, WCOG designed public survey questions to fill in knowledge gaps and build on the existing engagement information available. WCOG utilized the following two public surveys to inform this CTR Plan and our regional CTR strategy:

- The CTR worksite survey and

- The Regional Safety Action Plan public survey ('The Whatcom Crash Test')

The CTR worksite survey tool provided by WSDOT was distributed to all CTR work-sites in May of 2024. This survey reached employees at CTR work sites and included questions about commuters' daily modes of transportation and their motivations and considerations in choosing that mode. A total of 3,275 employees completed the survey. The results show that the majority of CTR worksite employees currently commute by driving alone (58% of commutes) although a significant portion make smart trips (22% of commutes when combining walk, bus, bike and carpool trips) or work from home (19%). Employees' top travel considerations were 'Time/duration' (80%), 'Flexibility/convenience' (67%), and 'Weather' (33%). Additionally, this survey showed that the majority of CTR worksite employees were either unaware of any incentives or subsidies their employer offered surrounding commute trip reduction or confused about any offerings (56%). This lack of awareness will be addressed by the educational aspects of the Smart Trips program as well as the employer partnerships.

The Whatcom Crash Test survey was part of a broader engagement effort focused on roadway safety and funded by the Safe Streets For All federal grant program. The Whatcom Crash Test survey will primarily inform WCOG's Regional Safety Action Plan, but the survey also included questions about peoples' trip choices. The Whatcom Crash Test survey was available online during July, August, and September of 2024. It was promoted via local newspaper ads, WTA bus boards, social media, an in-person booth at the Northwest Washington Fair, and most prominently, a mailed postcard.

The Whatcom Crash Test survey was taken by 3,560 Whatcom County residents aged 16 or older. The results of the survey are stated below:

- Most popular mode: The majority of Whatcom County residents selected drive alone as the form of transportation they use most often (88%), although 43% selected walk/roll, 25% selected carpool/rideshare, 23% selected bike and 10% selected bus/paratransit (up to three selections were allowed).
- Gauging interest in other modes: When asked if they had considered using any other modes more often, 35% of drive alone respondents said that they were not interested in any other modes. Those who were interested in trying out a new mode were most interested in bus/paratransit (24%), biking (19%), and carpooling (10%).
- Preventative factors: When asked what prevented them from using the non-drive alone mode they were interested in, the top reasons were summarized as accessibility/availability, time, and danger/safety.
- The people who already don't drive alone: Non-drive alone respondents said that 'Travel time' (52%), 'Environmental Impact' (50%), and Health/fitness (47%) were their most influential factors in choosing a non-drive alone mode (multiple selections allowed).

The Whatcom Crash Test showed that significantly more Whatcom County residents drive alone as compared to CTR worksite employees. While the structure of the questions was different, this suggests some relative success for the CTR program and any worksite incentives/subsidies provided. The survey also shows that Whatcom County residents have limited interest in new modes and value their time highly. Accessibility/availability concerns will be partially addressed through Smart Trips' educational programs and First Time Rider Pass distribution among Smart Trips employer partners.

## **Public Review of the Draft CTR Plan:**

After WSDOT review, WCOG will solicit feedback on the Draft Regional CTR Plan through:

- public notice advertised in the local paper,
- email distribution lists, and
- online at [www.wcog.org](http://www.wcog.org)

Whatcom County will also make this Draft Whatcom County CTR Plan available for public review and comment.

### **27. Describe vulnerable populations considered.**

WCOG collected optional demographic information as part of both the CTR worksite survey and the Whatcom Crash Test survey in order to identify vulnerable populations who engaged with each survey. Low income populations and people of color were the primary vulnerable populations considered when filtering the survey results. These populations were highlighted based on their presence in WCOG's newly developed Social Vulnerability Index (SVI), which includes three factors: low income, people of color, and limited English proficiency populations. Unfortunately, both surveys resulted in lower responses from non-white racial and ethnic groups than would be considered representative of Whatcom County as a whole. Response rates for Native American/Alaska Native and Hispanic/Latino populations were particularly low relative to Whatcom County populations.

The respondents of the CTR worksite survey were 78% White, 5% Multiracial/ethnic, 4% Asian, 2% Hispanic/Latino, 0.75% Black/African American, and 0.72% American Indian/Alaska Native, with an additional 8% preferring not to answer. In raw numbers, the survey reached 414 people of color (non-white alone). The CTR survey respondents were mostly higher income earners, although approximately 20% of respondents reported less than \$60,000 in annual household income (less than the Whatcom County median household income of approximately \$70,000 in 2021).

In order to promote the Whatcom Crash Test and maximize responses, WCOG mailed postcards to all Whatcom County addresses. The respondents of the Whatcom Crash Test survey were 87% White, 6% Multiracial/ethnic, 2% Asian, 2% Hispanic/Latino, 1% Black/African American, and 0.5% American Indian/Alaska Native. In raw numbers, the survey reached 343 people of color (non-white alone). The distribution of annual household income among survey respondents was fairly equal, and approximately half of all survey respondents fell into one of the three following groups: 11.3% reported earning less than \$25,000, 16.9% reported earning \$25,000-\$49,999, and 19.7% reported earning \$50,000-\$74,999 in annual household income.

### **28. Describe engagement focused on vulnerable populations.**

- a) *Who did you talk to? When did you talk to them? What did they have to say? How did what they said influence the plan?*

Engagement efforts reached the demographics and vulnerable populations described in question #27.

Based on a filtering of free response questions on the CTR Worksite Survey (May 2024), people of color submitted various comments about the accessibility of bus routes/schedules, the need to commute from longer distances, international border travel, and disability considerations.



Based on another filtering of free response questions on the CTR Worksite Survey, lower income earners (less than \$60,000) submitted various comments about interest in flexible work schedules and remote work, the accessibility of bus routes/schedules, and weather considerations.

Based on a filtering of free response questions on the Whatcom Crash Test Survey (July, August, and September 2024), people of color submitted various comments about lack of pedestrian/biking infrastructure, the accessibility of bus routes/schedules, and safety concerns.

Based on another filtering of free response questions on the Whatcom Crash Test Survey, lower income earners (less than \$50,000) submitted various comments about the cost barrier of getting a bike, the accessibility of bus routes/schedules, lack of non-drive alone options and infrastructure in rural areas, time and scheduling considerations.

These comments will help to inform future Smart Trips programing and employer partnerships. Comments about flexible schedules and remote work will be communicated to CTR employers through Smart Trips' employer partnership program. Bus accessibility will be partially addressed through Smart Trips' bus education classes, ongoing public outreach campaigns, and First Time Rider Pass distribution among Smart Trips employer partners.

### **29. List employers' suggestions to make CTR more effective.**

Employers expressed interest and/or support for the following:

- Increased promotional material and ad campaigns to promote non-drive alone modes
- Upgraded bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, particularly in the smaller cities and rural areas of Whatcom County
- A more effectively connected bike network between Bellingham and the smaller cities in the county, particularly Ferndale and Lynden
- Subsidies for improved transit service in more rural areas, particularly increased frequency of transit service and longer service hours which could allow employees to use the bus despite early start times.

### **30. Describe results of engagement focused on vulnerable populations that will be provided for use in comprehensive plan and transit plan updates.**

The City of Bellingham engagement results related to infrastructure (desires for connected bike/pedestrian pathways) from the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plans will be considered in their next Comprehensive Plan update.

Concerns about driver behavior, speeding, and general roadway safety, particularly as it affects active transportation modes, will be considered by WCOG in the upcoming Regional Safety Action Plan.

## **Regional transportation planning organization CTR plan review**

### **RTPO comments**

The Whatcom County Draft CTR Plan was reviewed by WCOG and is consistent with the regional CTR plan.