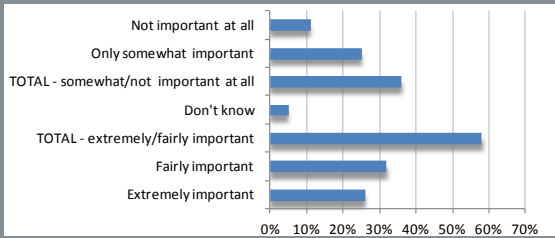


# Five Principles of Responsible Transportation Policy

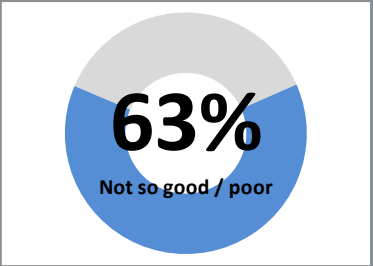
## What are your thoughts?

To understand how people feel about government’s role in transportation, respondents were asked the following questions.\*

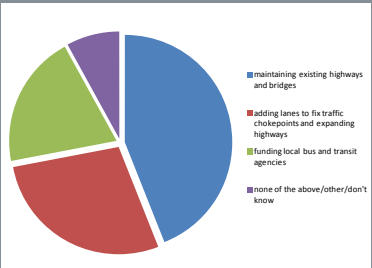
How important to you personally is it for government officials to reduce traffic congestion and reduce travel times?



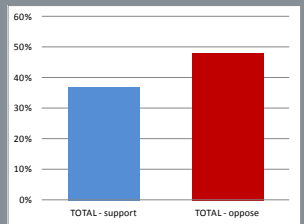
Thinking about the government’s role in transportation, how would you rate public officials’ performance on relieving traffic congestion?



When spending your tax dollars, which one of the following should be state government’s most important transportation priority?



Right now, local bus agencies are funded by local taxes. State lawmakers are considering a new, state-level tax to fund local transit service while keeping local taxes in place. Would you support or oppose this new tax?



\*Source: 2013 Washington Policy Center Traffic Congestion Poll

## 1. Tie spending to performance measures, like traffic relief and economic development

*Traffic relief is the most basic goal of any transportation policy, yet it does not exist as a priority in Washington state.*

Mobility should mean traffic relief, but instead state officials define it as a strategy to move people, rather than to improve traffic flows. This means spending shifts from actually fixing congestion to providing alternatives to congestion. This strategy is more expensive, less efficient and ironically, will always lead to greater congestion. According to the Federal Highway Administration, private passenger vehicles represent about 85 percent of all forms of transportation in the Seattle region. This means all other modes, including transit, walking, biking and telecommuting, serve only 15 percent of travelers. Adopting a policy that disproportionately ties spending to only 15 percent of the market will always lead to greater congestion, because the system that supports the remaining 85 percent is left to languish.

Prior to 2007, the state had specific performance benchmarks to guide limited transportation dollars. Lawmakers then replaced those benchmarks with six policy goals of transportation, severing the official tie between congestion relief and transportation spending. To best serve the traveling public, Washington policymakers should return to a system that prioritizes congestion relief and performance measures. Performance measures create accountability among decision-makers and allow them to operate outside of political agendas and influential constituencies. In eastern Washington and other rural areas, economic development should be key.

## 2. Respect people’s freedom of mobility

*Government policies in transportation should respond to the market and improve the freedom of citizens to live and work where they choose. Government serves society, not the other way around.*

Manipulating policies to force a particular behavior coerces people to abandon their individual liberties in favor of central planning by which, supposedly, a greater collective good is created. These measures always fail because of what Milton Friedman called “one of the strongest and most creative forces known to man,” rational self interest; or people’s desire to do what they believe is best for their own lives.

In land use and transportation policy, some policymakers continue to implement artificial policies, like urban growth boundaries and strict zoning laws, to increase population density in the urban core, drive people into alternate modes of travel, and “manage” traffic demand instead of respecting people’s freedom to live and travel how they please.

Proponents of social change should work in the marketplace of ideas to persuade others to share their vision and work towards it. They should not use the power of government to force through their own ideas, but should seek to change policy, if that is needed, once reform is broadly supported by the public. Policymakers should respect people’s choices and allow for a greater freedom of their mobility.

## 3. Deploy resources based on market demand

*Transportation money should be spent based on market demand rather than in ways that are somehow meant to engineer demand.*

In economics, supply is a function of demand. This means a willingness to use a service must exist before a supply of that service is created. Boeing executives do not make 300 airplanes knowing they will only sell 100. Likewise, governments should not spend a disproportionate amount of taxes in low-demand sectors, where the public’s willingness to use the service does not justify the spending.

European transit systems provide an example of how these economic concepts apply.

In Switzerland, transit is successful, not because of the amount of service or infrastructure, but because the country has certain demographic and economic characteristics that induce demand.

In other words, there is an existing market with a customer base and Swiss policymakers respond with proportional infrastructure investments. As a result, mode share, ridership and fare box recovery are high. In the United States, transit resources are distributed in just the opposite way.

Under the “build it and they will come” theory, policymakers think that increasing the supply of transit will somehow create more public demand.

This speculative model fails because most U.S. cities do not possess the economic or demographic characteristics that create enough voluntary consumers for public transit.

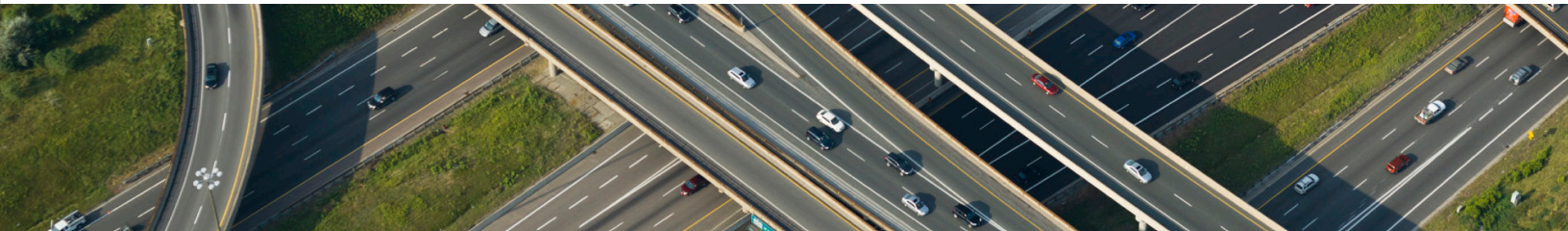
Using the economic principles of supply and demand shows that building excess transit capacity before there is an equal amount of willingness to use it leads to an underperforming system. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Puget Sound region where Sound Transit officials are spending billions of dollars on a light rail system. Despite this massive spending on trains, light rail will only carry about one percent of daily person trips in the region by 2040.

When prioritizing transportation projects, policymakers should use consumer demand to guide spending, not the other way around.

## 4. Improve freight mobility

*Freight mobility should play a significant role in transportation policy since it is the key building block to our state’s economic strength.*

Washington state’s prosperity depends on trade, including intra and international exports. Highways, which carry 70 percent of all commercial truck freight, are already congested, and that congestion is expected to double in the next twenty years. A Washington State Department of Transportation study analyzed the economic impacts to the state, households and freight movers should congestion continue to increase. Measuring the one-time shock to the economy, the study found that a 20% increase in congestion would immediately result in over \$14 billion in increased costs to freight-dependent industries. The study estimates that 60% to 80% of these costs would be passed on to consumers in the form of higher prices. In addition, the increased costs would reduce the state’s overall economic output by \$3.3 billion and cost the state over 25,000 jobs.



The Washington Transportation Commission estimates Washington has up to \$200 billion of unmet transportation infrastructure needs between 2010 and 2030. Yet, local and state leaders spend billions of our transportation tax dollars in areas that do not help.

Replacing the Seattle Viaduct with two fewer lanes, replacing the Highway 520 Bridge with no additional general purpose lanes, replacing the center lanes on the I-90 Bridge with light rail, and ignoring the I-5 bottleneck through Seattle are not long-term solutions.

This means the number of general purpose highway lanes connecting the state to its largest employment hub will **decrease** in the next twenty years, despite regional population increases of more than one million new residents.

Policymakers must acknowledge that the freight industry is paramount to Washington’s economic health and fund projects that improve mobility, not make it worse.

## 5. Utilize public-private partnerships

*Using private investment through public-private partnerships (PPP), lawmakers can fund new projects, shift risk, maintain current transportation infrastructure and increase value to taxpayers.*

There are many benefits associated with a PPP. These include leveraging private dollars for public use, shifting risk from taxpayers to the private sector, using competition to create incentives that lower capital and operating costs, and gaining a more efficient distribution of scarce transportation resources.

Other factors like public oversight, asset ownership, long-term maintenance, liability and labor costs, will dictate which PPP is a better fit. In some cases, these issues have been treated as obstacles and have prevented partnerships from forming. Yet other states have solved these problems and have adopted several types of partnerships. Undoubtedly, these concerns are important, but they should not deter us from pursuing the benefits of a public-private partnership. Partnering with the private sector is one way to increase financial resources and get roads built.

Washington state’s experience with PPPs has been limited to the design/build format, which is an extremely passive approach and underutilizes the potential of private investment.

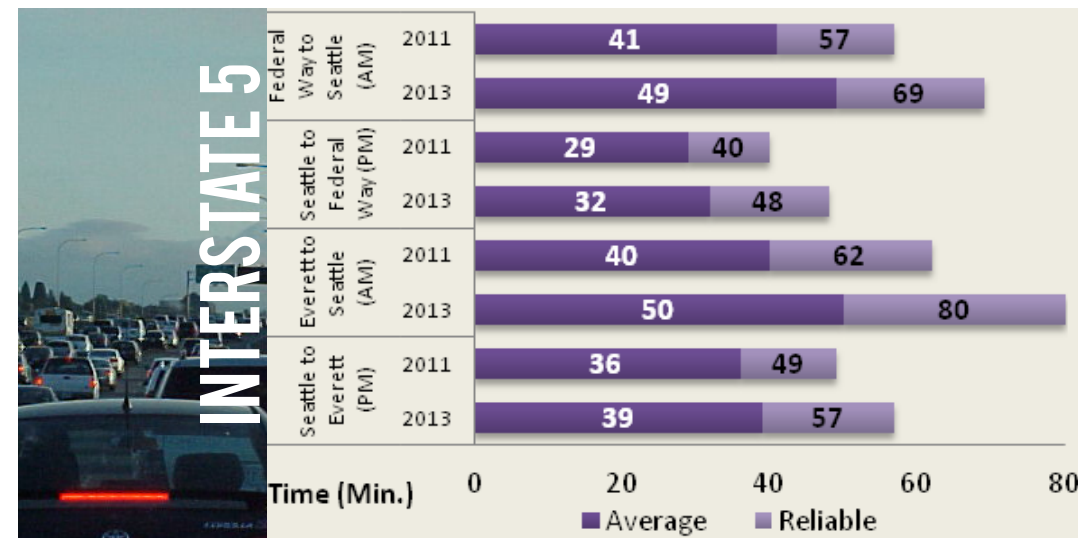
Washington state does allow PPPs by statute, but the law contains provisions that effectively prevent them from forming. Washington law requires that debt must be issued by the state treasurer, which eliminates financial incentives for private investment. Washington law also prohibits unsolicited proposals and requires a lengthy and inefficient approval and oversight process.

Public-private partnerships have a proven track record across the United States and should be embraced by public officials in Washington. However, reform is required if lawmakers want to take full advantage of PPPs to fund transportation projects in Washington state.



# The Problem

## Bottlenecks and lack of capacity lead to traffic jams on urban state highways



### Congestion Report for I-5

Between 2011 and 2013, average travel times increased along the Interstate 5 corridor between Federal Way and Everett during the commute periods. Average travel times on the peak morning commute from Everett to Seattle increased 25% to 50 minutes.

The time needed to make it to Seattle from Everett dependably increased to 80 minutes. In the absence of congestion, the trip takes 23 minutes at the posted speed limit.

### Congestion fact:

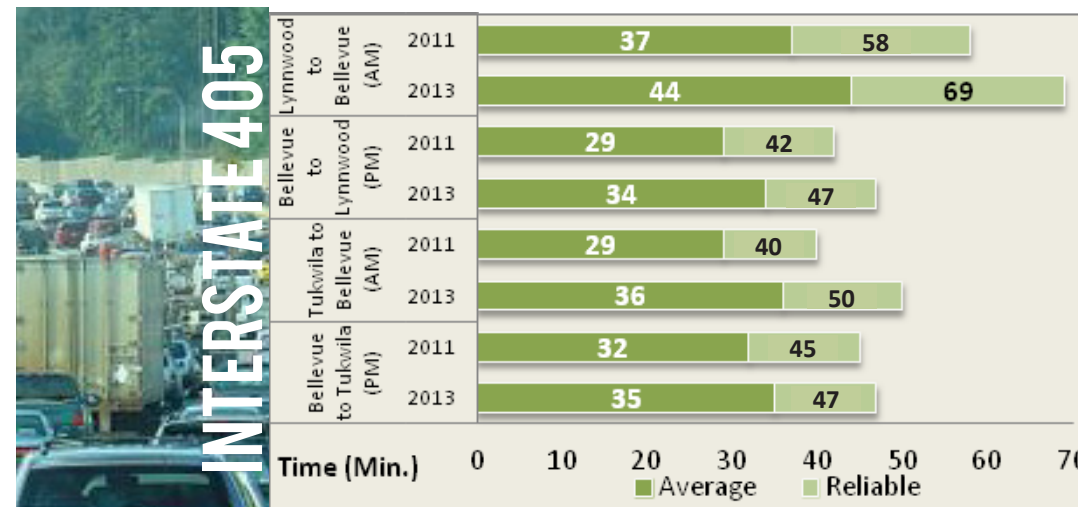
Interstate 5 SB between 139th St. and Union St. is the sixth most congested corridor in the United States. (INRIX)

### Unfunded projects:

- Redeck I-5 between Northgate and south city limits – estimated cost: \$2 billion
- Corridor improvements between I-5 and 520 – estimated cost: \$1.4 billion
- I-5 Tacoma to Everett mobility improvements, HOT lanes – estimated cost: \$570 million

### Notable bottlenecks on I-5 include:

- I-5 at Northgate
- I-5 at Snohomish County Line
- I-5 at Seneca Street



### Congestion Report for I-405

Between 2011 and 2013, average commute times increased along the Interstate 405 corridor. The largest increase from 2011 to 2013 was on the peak morning commute from Tukwila to Bellevue, with a 24% jump in average travel time to 44 minutes.

The average morning commute between Lynnwood and Bellevue takes 19% longer in 2013 than it did in 2011, at 44 minutes.

In the absence of congestion, the Tukwila to Bellevue commute takes 13 minutes at the posted speed limit.

### Congestion fact:

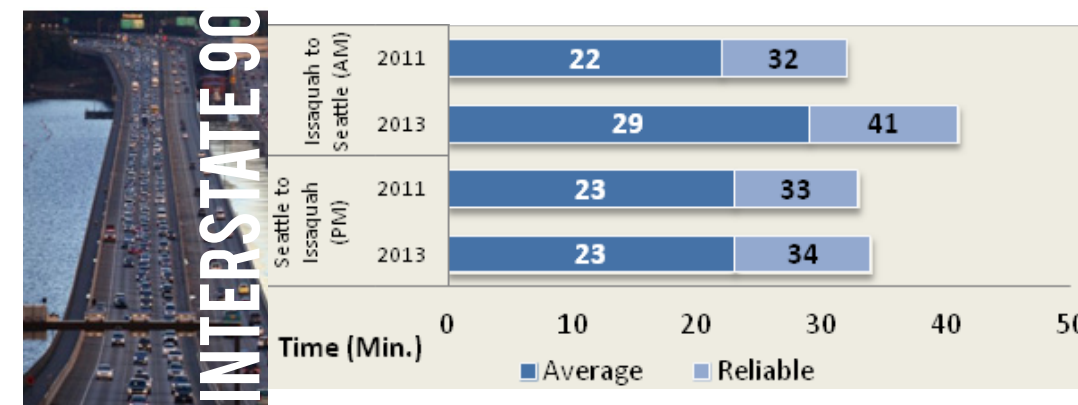
Interstate 405 SB between 8th St. and SE Coal Creek Pkwy is the 12th most congested corridor in the United States. (INRIX)

### Unfunded projects:

Widening I-405 between Renton and Bellevue including implementing HOT lanes – estimated cost \$1.8 billion

### Notable bottlenecks on I-405 include:

- SR-522 to I-405
- I-405 at SR-520 bridge
- I-405 at Coal Creek Parkway



### Congestion Report for I-90

Between 2011 and 2013, average commute times increased 32% during the peak morning commute from Issaquah to Seattle in the Interstate 90 corridor.

### Congestion fact:

Public officials are replacing the center express lanes on I-90 with light rail. They plan to restripe I-90's main bridges and add an HOV lane. However, according to the State Department of Transportation Center Roadway Study, light rail will reduce overall vehicle capacity on the bridge by 15% during the morning peak and 8% in the afternoon peak. In addition, vehicle delay will increase 27% during the morning peak and 24% during the afternoon peak. The number of freight trucks able to cross into Seattle will drop by 24%. Trucks leaving Seattle will see a 19% reduction in capacity.

## COLES CENTER *for* TRANSPORTATION

Congestion relief is not a priority in Washington state. This is confirmed by the Washington State Auditor and other studies that show traffic will double in the next 20 years. This should be a concern for every working mom and dad who worries about being home in time for dinner, for Boeing executives who need to move airplane parts around the region, and for the freight industry that needs to get goods to market.

The Coles Center for Transportation at Washington Policy Center, headed by Center Director Bob Pishue, researches and analyzes the best practices for relieving traffic congestion by recapturing a vision of a system based on freedom of movement. It provides policymakers, citizens and the media with access to current research on transportation issues through in-depth studies, regular op-eds, issue forums and legislative testimony. It has been featured in numerous news outlets around the state and across the country, including *The Seattle Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, Bloomberg News, *Investor's Business Daily*, and CNN. Please join our mailing list and consider supporting Washington Policy Center. Your investment makes a measurable difference in advancing transportation solutions to end the gridlock, grow our state's economy, and improve our quality of life.



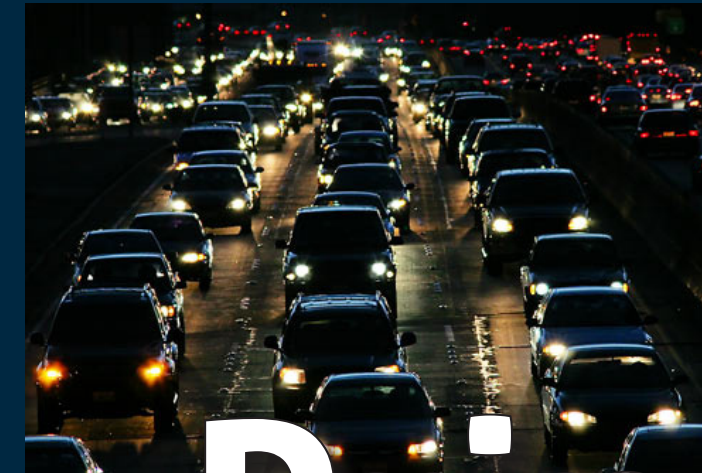
To learn more about the developing trends in transportation policy and congestion relief, visit us online at:

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[washingtonpolicy.org](http://washingtonpolicy.org)

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# 5 Principles of Responsible Transportation Policy

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