

Issue/Solution Paper Assessing Requirements Accurately

The Growth Management Act (GMA) created a framework for the management of population growth within the State of Washington. Each County administers the GMA in concert with State and regional organizations, such as the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC). The PSRC seeks a regional approach by incorporating and addressing the requirements of King, Snohomish, Kitsap, and Pierce Counties.

One of the goals of the GMA is to ensure infrastructure requirements are identified early, are part of the Comprehensive Plan process, and are met in a timely fashion. Accurately assessing future transportation needs is key to viable and sustainable growth within the State and, in particular, within King County—one of the fastest growing counties in the country.

The GMA requires jurisdictions to establish growth targets: *“A growth target is the minimum number of residents or jobs that a jurisdiction must accommodate and will strive to absorb in some future year. Growth targets reflect aspirational goals, but must be rooted in objective analysis....They are a primary input to developing a comprehensive plan, with the target impacting or guiding nearly every plan element, particularly the land use, housing, and transportation elements. This in turn guides the development regulations, as they are required to be consistent and implement the comprehensive plan policies.”* (Ref. 3, p. 5.)

Currently, *“No direction is given in the GMA as to the methodology for setting growth targets. Cities and counties have a duty to accommodate the targets, but are provided broad discretion on how they do so.”* (Ref. 3, p. 11.) This can result in an opaque process through which cities utilize selective criteria to furnish information they deem relevant or advantageous. Further, jurisdictions can grossly exceed their growth targets. This was the case in 2012, as a small city in Southeast King County, in one of the fastest growing and heavily congested areas in the State, with a growth target of 1,900 people, signed Development Agreements that would eventually bring an *additional* 6,050 residences, or approximately 20,000 people, into the city. This scenario could easily repeat itself throughout the county and state as long as it remains to each county and its cities to determine what is relevant in developing such projections.

To compound the problem, another disconnect occurs when King County uses adopted growth targets for both the cities and the unincorporated areas to forecast future traffic loads, which then are used to identify road capacity needs on unincorporated area roads.

A great dichotomy exists between growth targets, which are not forecasts, and identifying and addressing future transportation infrastructure needs. Such a gap complicates planning efforts and, as more development occurs, could result in inadequate infrastructure to meet GMA Concurrency requirements.

It is desired that forecasts, not allocated growth targets, be the primary information that supports Comprehensive Planning and the identification of infrastructure needs.

Potential solution paths for discussion: State law could be revised to establish criteria to ensure forecasting, not growth targets, inform Comprehensive Planning and Transportation Needs Reports.

We have identified the following RCWs that could provide such opportunities:

RCW 43.62 -- DETERMINATION OF POPULATIONS -- STUDENT ENROLLMENTS

43.62.035 -- Determining population -- Projections

RCW 36.70A -- GROWTH MANAGEMENT -- PLANNING BY SELECTED COUNTIES & CITIES.

36.70A.040 -- Who must plan -- Summary of requirements—Development regulations must implement comprehensive plans [Requires cities and unincorporated areas to plan for future growth through formation of Comprehensive Plans. In King County, Comprehensive Plans are reviewed/revised every four years with the current target year of 2025. Many King County cities currently are updating their Comprehensive Plans to be completed by June 2015.]

References:

1. *Vision 2040*, PSRC, December 2009.
2. *Transportation 2040 Plan Update*, PSRC, May 29, 2014.
3. *“Growth Management by the Numbers,”* PSRC, July 2005.
4. *“The First Round of Growth Targets Since VISION 2040 Adoption,”* PSRC, Presentation to the Growth Management Policy Board, March 2014.