



King County Department of Local Services by Peter Rimpos, GMVUAC Corresponding Secretary

On Monday, December 5, the Area Council held its regular monthly meeting at the King County Sheriff's Precinct #3 at 22300 SE 231st St in Maple Valley and online via Zoom. **Guest Speakers, all from the King County Department of Local Services (DLS)**, were: Department Director, John Taylor; Permitting Division Director, Jim Chan; and Roads Division Director, Tricia Davis. DLS serves all King County Unincorporated Areas including the part of the Rural Area that makes up the Area Council's territory. In attendance were members from three other Unincorporated Area Councils and Associations, as well as members of the Public.

Question and Answer Session with DLS

DLS Department Director, John Taylor

Q1. This is about funding and its sources. It is well known that over half of all use of county arterials is by through traffic between cities, not generated within the rural area at all. This results in county arterials carrying 2x to 3x the traffic volumes of county roads elsewhere in the state. But funding of county roads is derived almost exclusively from the county road tax assessed *only* on rural county residents. It is also well known that the county road budget is grossly underfunded. What will the county do to obtain compensation from suburban cities for their use and gradual wearing out of county roads due to such over-use of existing roads?

A1. State legislative action would be needed to provide some regional mechanism. King County primarily relies on property tax with a small contribution from a portion of the gas tax. Could move to a usage tax based on miles driven, but would need a revenue-sharing arrangement authorized by the State Legislature. Finally, a regional approach could be looked at, but whenever that has been proposed, the cities don't agree with any revenue sharing. A Transportation-Benefit District does provide the county with the ability to toll, but that would present many complexities and would have to extend regionally to have any hope of working. Grants have helped, but not enough to make things sustainable. When the State's Growth Management Act (GMA) was developed over 30 years ago, it was understood that if it were implemented as intended, i.e., all urban areas became part of cities, the remaining rural and exurban areas would have insufficient tax bases to support an appropriate level of local services. So, some form of revenue sharing or a countywide tax devoted to rural services would be needed. However, as is so often the case, this agreement never translated into a proposal the cities would support. Since the cities had far more population and, hence, more legislators, nothing ever happened at the State level, either. King County has more fully implemented the GMA than any other county. As a result, counties such as Kitsap, Pierce, and Snohomish still have large commercial areas in their unincorporated areas and, thus, have far greater tax revenue to support Sheriff services, roads, etc. The State has made no effort to try to force these counties to

comply with the GMA. As a result, King County is essentially alone in facing this GMA-induced problem.

Q2. Also about funding. Will the county consider limiting the use of funds derived from the local road tax to only those road improvements that specifically benefit the rural residential users, and avoid repaving or reconstructing roads that are heavily used by through traffic and thus wearing out such roads at a rate 2x to 3x the normal rate envisioned by the framers of the state law that establishes the county road tax?

A2. No, King County is responsible and liable to maintain all county roads. However, given the unsustainable nature of available revenue sources, the county might close some roads and not replace some bridges.

Q3. Is the proposed culvert replacement on Issaquah-Hobart Rd at Carey Creek fully funded? Although Federal monies appear to be involved, does the KC Council need to approve any County contributions to the work? When will the work start? Finally, as we are concerned about impacts to traffic along the road and have seen some closures take up to 4 months in the past, is there a timetable for start and completion?

A3. The project is funded for design, which is underway. King County Surface Water Management (SWM) fee provides about a quarter of the funding and a State grant provides the rest of funding. The 2023-2024 King County Council's adopted budget authorizes funding for construction, but full funding will require substantial grant support, which the County is currently seeking. Construction could occur as early as summer 2025, but the final schedule is dependent on the timing of grant funding. Roads is fully cognizant of and concerned about any impacts to any road closures or delays on the Issaquah-Hobart Rd.

DLS Permitting Division Director, Jim Chan

Q1. How does Permitting intend to use the increased monies it has received in the just-passed 2023-2024 Budget?

A1. Plan to recover the 17 positions lost during the pandemic due to revenue shortfalls and retirements. Competitive market for hiring good people. We are hopeful that existing temporary workers will be successful in filling permanent positions.

Q2. How will Code Enforcement be bolstered so that the County can truly enforce its Code and Conditions placed on permits?

A2. The King County Council doubled their abatement fund to really go after egregious violations when due process for a site is completed.

Q3. King County Code (KCC) **Title 21A22.050 [DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS - MINERAL EXTRACTION] Periodic review.** states Periodic Reviews of mineral extraction (i.e., mining) and/or materials processing sites are to be conducted at 5-yr intervals. We understand that such Periodic Reviews no longer are being done due to person-power shortfalls—when will they be resumed?

A3. There are only a handful of mines that are behind on such reviews. King County Code is ambiguous and unclear when new proposed mine activities resets the 5-year clock. Teddy Taddese, Engineer, was brought in to kickstart Periodic Reviews. There is much work to be done on updating several portions of the King County Code to be done during the ongoing 2024 King County Comprehensive Plan Major Update.

DLS Roads Division Director, Tricia Davis

Q1. How does Roads prioritize projects within its perpetually dwindling (through no fault not its own) budget?

A1. Roads follows the priorities in its 2014 Strategic Plan—safety, regulatory compliance, maintenance/preservation, enhance mobility, and address capacity (in that order). Roads does not have enough funds to fully address the first three goals and none for the last two goals. In addition to the strategic priorities, Capital Improvement Project (CIP) programming decisions are made using a combination of technical priority arrays (prioritized lists of projects derived from a data driven analytical process), with consideration of a number of other factors, including: leveraging grant opportunities; equity and social justice considerations; dependencies and efficiencies among projects (such as opportunity to address multiple needs on one road segment); coordination with projects of other internal or external agencies; geographic distribution; continuity of phased improvements along a particular corridor; construction seasonality; and others.

Q2. Why were numerous rural county roads upgraded to higher classifications in about 2018 (e.g., minor arterials --> principal arterials), when those roads have historically served first and foremost the purpose of access to the local residents? Also, will the county consider selectively regulating or declassifying or decommissioning county roads or road segments, in order to encourage through traffic to stay on state highways? If not, why not?

A2. Road reviews and, if necessary, updates the road classifications during King County Comprehensive Plan (KCCP) Major Updates. Changes are included in the Executive's proposed draft plan, and the public can comment. Road classifications are intended to reflect a road's current function and its role in the transportation network. Changes are proposed when the road's function appears to have changed. Factors considered include traffic volume, speed, adjacent land uses, and the road's relation to the rest of the network. The last time Roads updated classifications was during the 2020 KCCP Mid-Point Update. Nine changes were proposed, none in the GMVUAC's territory. In the 2016 KCCP Major Update, Roads reclassified two roads, neither in the GMVUAC's territory. For the 2024 KCCP Major Update, Roads only is considering one change (at this time)—raising the classification of a road in the urban unincorporated area. Roads currently is not considering lowering the classification of any roads. Roads does not use reclassification, decommissioning, or closure to control traffic volume. We do use access control—such as turn-movement restrictions—when needed to help guide safe and appropriate road usage.

Q3. This region places high priority on supporting all modes of travel, not just cars. That is not just a concern of cities. Many rural county arterials are used regularly by joggers and bicyclists, often at their peril because most such arterials do not have shoulders or other features to support the safety of such users. Will the county use a portion of its current budget to add such improvements to some high priority locations, such as where sight distance is impaired, traffic volumes are high, and non-motorized use is evident? The GMVUAC transportation committee has provided its own study ("Opus Trafficus") to KC Roads and we are eager to collaborate further on prioritizing such improvements.

A3. Roads agrees that supporting active transportation is important in all areas of the county, and active transportation investments should match the road context. Improvement needs are evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Roads is thinking about multi-modal transportation needs and will be working on a complete streets ordinance. Active transportation improvements that may appear simple, such as shoulder widening, can trigger other requirements that are complex and costly, such as stormwater runoff requirements that require expensive drainage systems. Roads planning staff would be glad to talk further about active transportation in general or any specific locations of concern.

Q4. Wouldn't the concern that roads are underfunded be greatly reduced if county priorities were revised to only maintain roads at the level needed by rural residents, and refuse to provide improvements that are caused by or benefit through traffic - unless funding is provided by the cities that cause the through traffic? Also, the magnitude of unfunded road needs appears to depend highly on the assumed reconstruction of many arterials in the Transportation Needs Report (TNR), and the TNR seems to apply higher design standards than existing conditions (e.g., adding 8 ft shoulders and other amenities)? Existing roads were deemed adequate for previous decades, and most rural residents don't care to see their rural roads widened into quasi-highways that encourage higher speeds and mostly benefit through traffic not local traffic.

A4. We already addressed the urban/rural funding issue in a previous question. The TNR cost estimates are at a very high level (i.e., planning level). Road reconstruction projects address locations where the road is failing and can't be repaved anymore. These projects are costly, and Roads rarely has the funds to initiate them. Countywide, reconstruction projects constitute 17% of the total estimated need in the current TNR. For the TNR, Roads uses planning-level cost estimates and assumes the road will be constructed to meet current road design standards so that all transportation needs are met, such as lane width for traffic safety, sufficient multi-use shoulders for people walking/biking (as referenced in the previous question) and drivers to pull over in emergencies, and adequate drainage infrastructure to maximize the life of the roadway and meet environmental requirements.

Q5. A member of the Public asked Tricia Davis about truck traffic impacts on road wear and tear. Ms. Davis responded by stating they use Haul-Route Agreements (HRAs). The Area Council followed up by asking: How does the County enforce HRAs? The Area Council also provided the specific example of Elk Heights gravel pit on Lake Francis Rd and its HRA. The Area Council had been told by the previous Roads Director that a "Holistic Study" of the road was needed and would be done. The Area Council stated it has never seen that study. Tim O'Brien of the Enumclaw Plateau Association asked a similar HRA question, but for the case where several mines are clustered along a specific road.

A5. Ms. Davis stated these questions, especially the ones related to specific gravel/mining operations or HRAs, should be addressed to County Road Engineer (CRE) Joann Kosai-Eng (who replaced Rick Brater in the CRE role).

Next Area Council Meeting

The next Area Council monthly meeting will be held Monday, January 9 (the second Monday due to the New Years' Day Holiday) from 7 - 9:30 PM at the King County Sheriff's Precinct #3 at 22300 SE 231st St in Maple Valley. As a *hybrid meeting*, people will be able to attend either in-person or virtually via Zoom. **Our Guest Speakers will be the King County Department of Local Services (DLS) Division Planners.** They will discuss **Subarea Planning** for the Greater Maple Valley / Cedar River (GMV/CR) Community Service Area (CSA).

All regular monthly meetings are held on the *first* Monday of the month (except for Holidays, when they are held on the *second* Monday), from 7 - 9:30 PM. Meeting announcements, Agendas, and Zoom information are published in the *Voice of the Valley*, the Area Council's website (www.gmvuac.org) and local *NextDoor* platforms. You can also find us on our *FaceBook* page: <https://www.facebook.com/GMVUAC/>. Each meeting begins with an open Public Comment period where anyone can voice concerns, comments, etc. to the Area Council.

Area Council Membership

Your Area Council serves as an all-volunteer, locally recognized advisory body to King County on behalf of all rural unincorporated area residents living in the Tahoma School District. The Area Council's *Vision Statement* is:

“Our community’s Rural Character will be supported by facilitating strong local ties and communication between the public, organizations, and government; promoting locally owned businesses and supporting quality education; protecting the environment, and maintaining landowners’ rights and responsibilities; promoting controlled and well-planned growth with appropriate infrastructure; ensuring proper representation for rural interests and needs; and supporting the health and safety and the privacy of our vibrant community.”

The Area Council also work *regionally* throughout the King County with other Rural Area organizations through both *Joint Planning* and its *Joint Transportation Initiative*.

The twelve-seat Area Council has four open seats. If you have an interest in joining, please send an e-mail to: info@gmvuac.org *or* attend (either in-person or virtually) a monthly meeting and express your interest. To be eligible to join the Area Council as a member you need to live *within* the Tahoma School District. Anyone, even those who do not live *within* the Tahoma School District, are eligible to become *Associate Members* who can serve on any Area Council Committee: *Environment, Growth Management, Transportation, Public Relations, or Train Show*. Each committee votes for its own Chair and Vice-Chairs and *Associate Members* are eligible for those positions.

The Area Council welcomes your participation. For information on each of these committees please see the Area Council’s web site: www.gmvuac.org and use the drop-down menu under *Committees*. Again, if you have an interest in joining any Area Council committees, please send an e-mail to: info@gmvuac.org. Thank you.