

OPUS TRAFFICUS

(The Trouble with Traffic in Rural King County)

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on behalf of the
Joint Transportation Initiative,
a collaboration of multiple Rural Area Councils throughout King County
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What's Gone Wrong in Rural King County?



Once upon a time...

Rural roads were...

- *Pleasant to drive on*
- *Uncongested*
- *With few conflicts*

But not in rural King County.
Not any more.

GMA – the Growth
Management Act - was
supposed to prevent such
things from happening by
stopping “suburban sprawl”.

Something has gone wrong!

Urban Traffic Has Taken Over



Rural county roads are being overwhelmed by traffic
that is not generated by rural area residents.

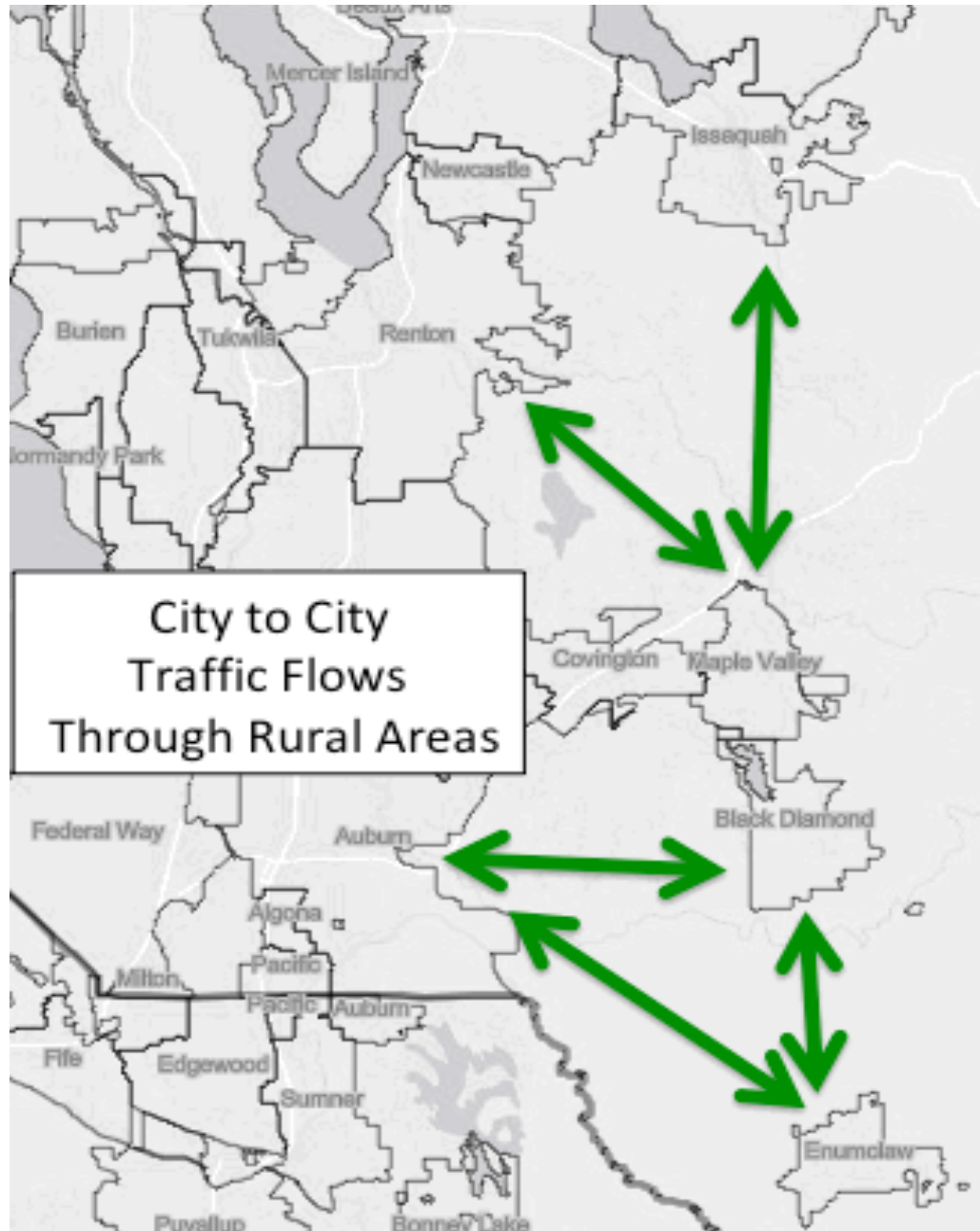
Excess traffic is generated by urban commuters

from new homes in outlying cities
(Enumclaw, Black Diamond, etc.)

to new jobs in the urban core.
(Auburn, Kent, Renton, Bellevue, Redmond, even Seattle)

GMA didn't address the problem of outlying rural towns becoming bedroom cities for the urban core.

City-to-City Commuter Corridors Have Emerged

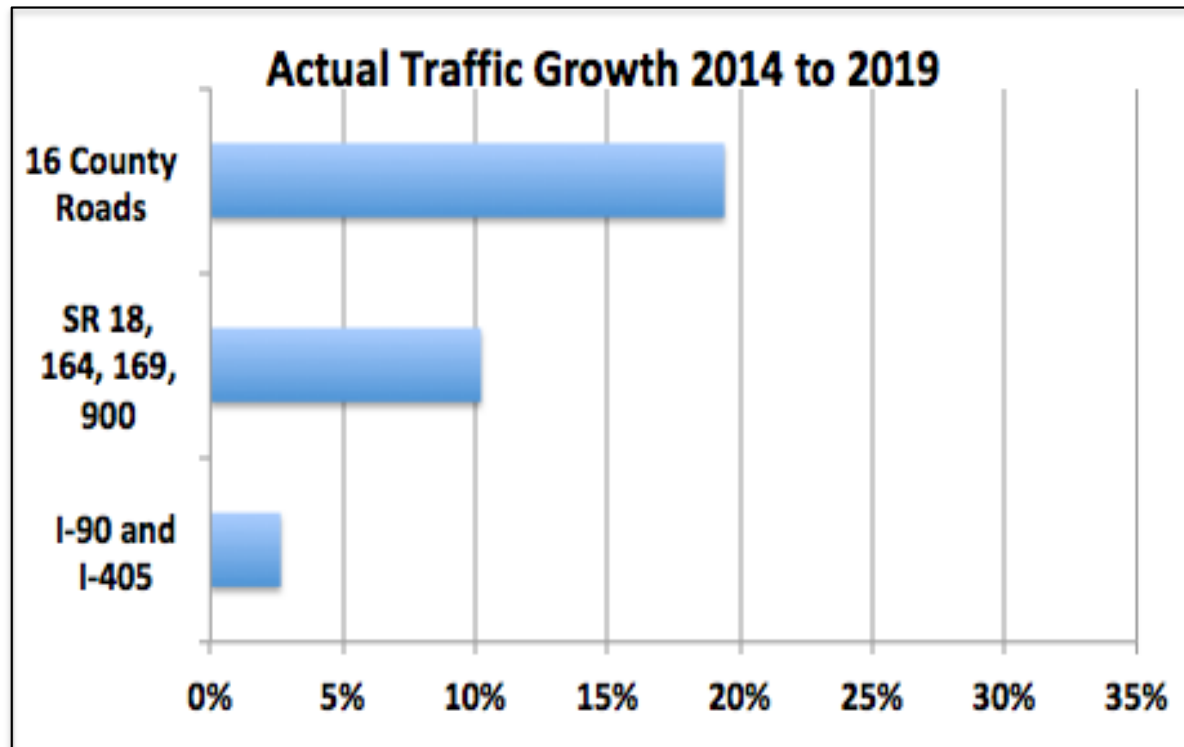


Under GMA, several rural towns in SE King County have evolved into cities, becoming centers of suburban growth:

- *Covington*
- *Maple Valley*
- *Black Diamond*
- *Enumclaw*
- *Buckley*
- *Bonney Lake*

New residents of these cities commute through rural King County, using county roads, to reach their jobs in the region's center.

Rural County Roads are Doing the Work of State Highways

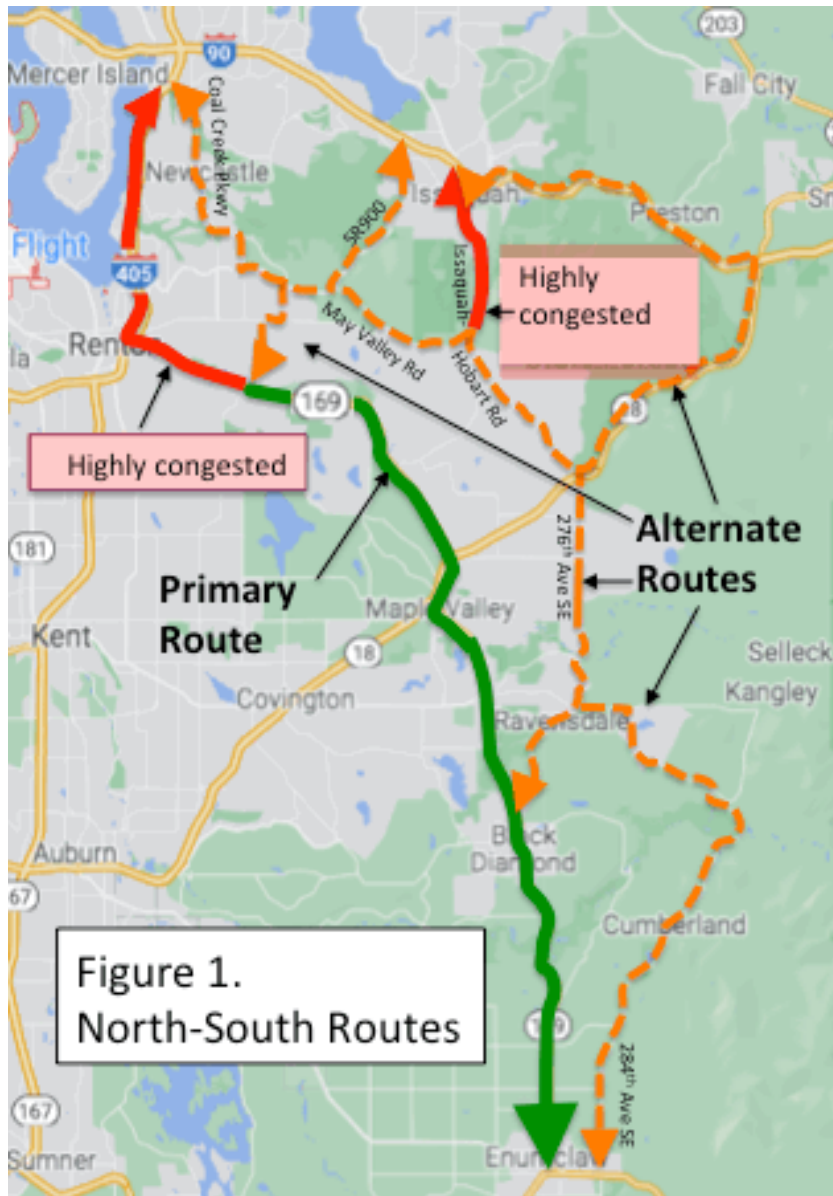


Most traffic growth in rural King County uses rural county roads, not state highways.

Lack of capacity on state routes causes growth to spill over onto county roads and this increases every year.

But isn't connecting cities the very reason we have a state highway system?

Rural County Roads Substitute for SR 169



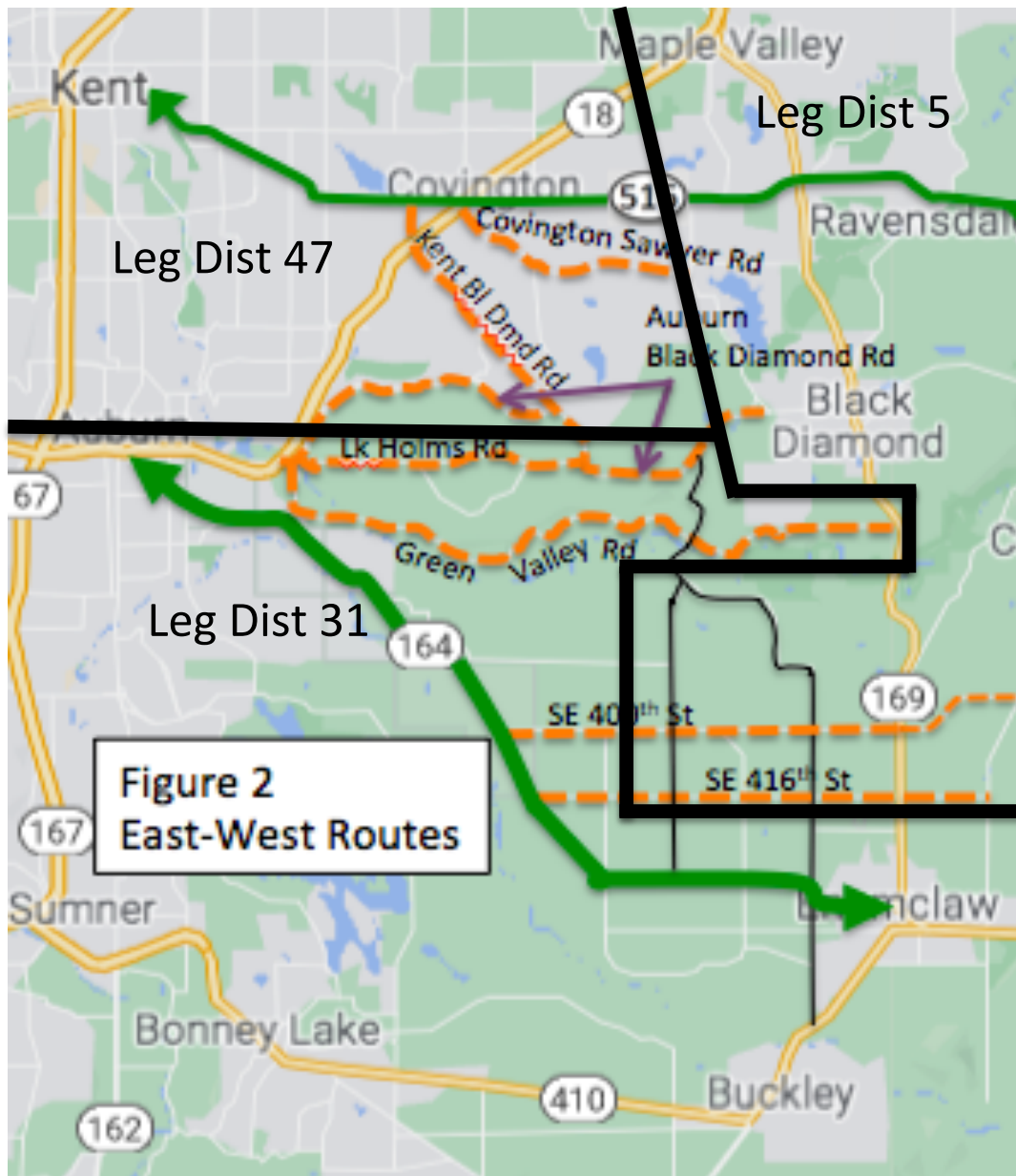
North-south traffic centers on SR 169 from Enumclaw to Renton.

Congestion is severe on SR 169 through Maple Valley and into Renton. Traffic on Issaquah Hobart Road is stop-and-go. Connecting routes are also affected.

Outlying cities continue to grow. Black Diamond alone plans ~6000 new homes in Master Planned Developments.

There is no capacity – neither existing nor planned - for that much new urban traffic. Congestion will become more severe throughout this rural area.

Rural County Roads Substitute for SR 164 and SR 516



East-west traffic relies on SR 164 and SR 516.

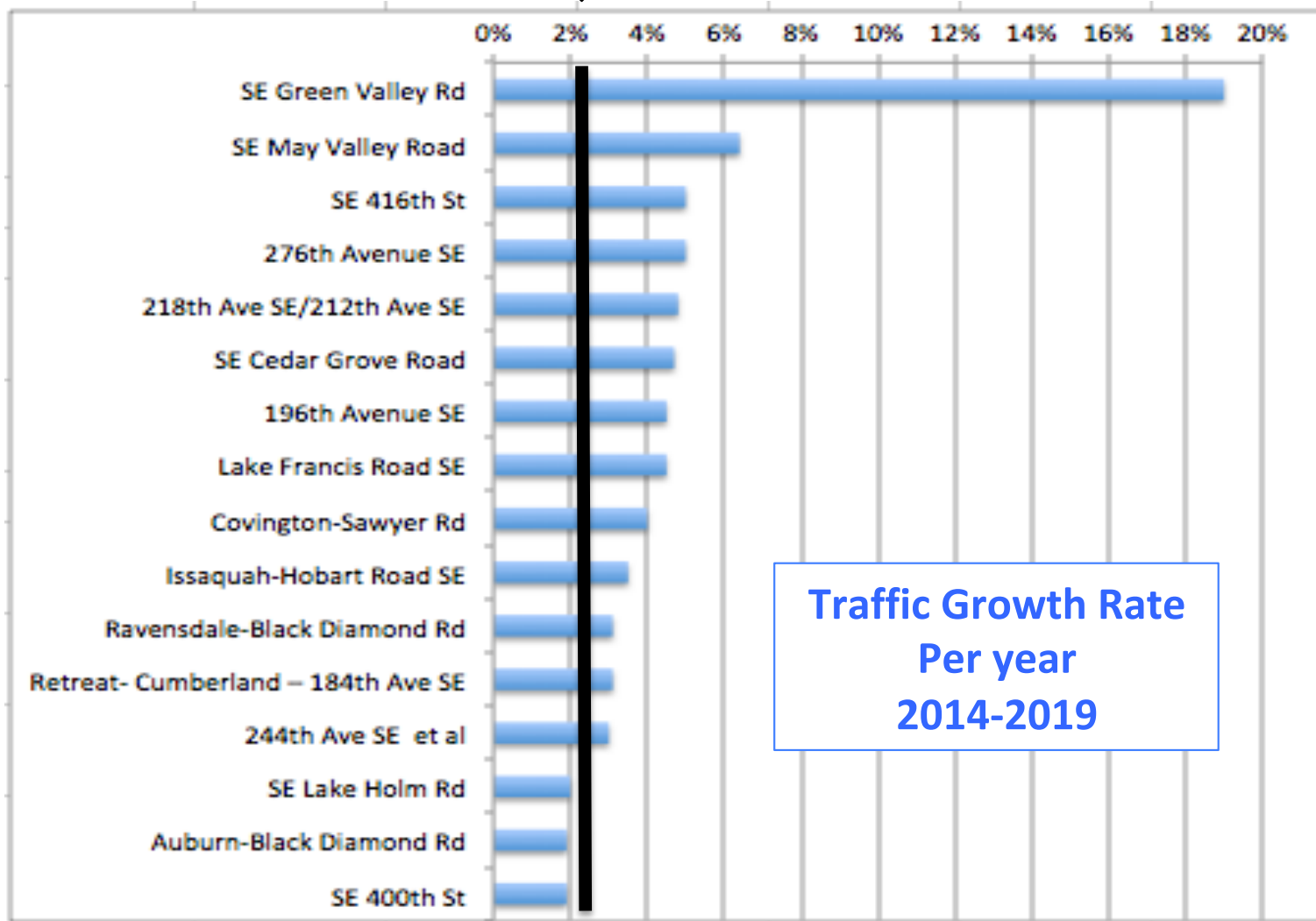
The large area in between is served only by rural county roads.

Rural roads lack urban design features needed for high volumes. No shoulders, no bike lanes, deep ditches. Plus sharp curves and steep hills.

Tranquil rural areas are increasingly exposed to heavy traffic flows, becoming much like Issaquah Hobart Road or Kent Kangley Road.

Traffic Growth on County Roads Greatly Exceeds Population Growth

King County's *total* population growth rate was 2.2%/year



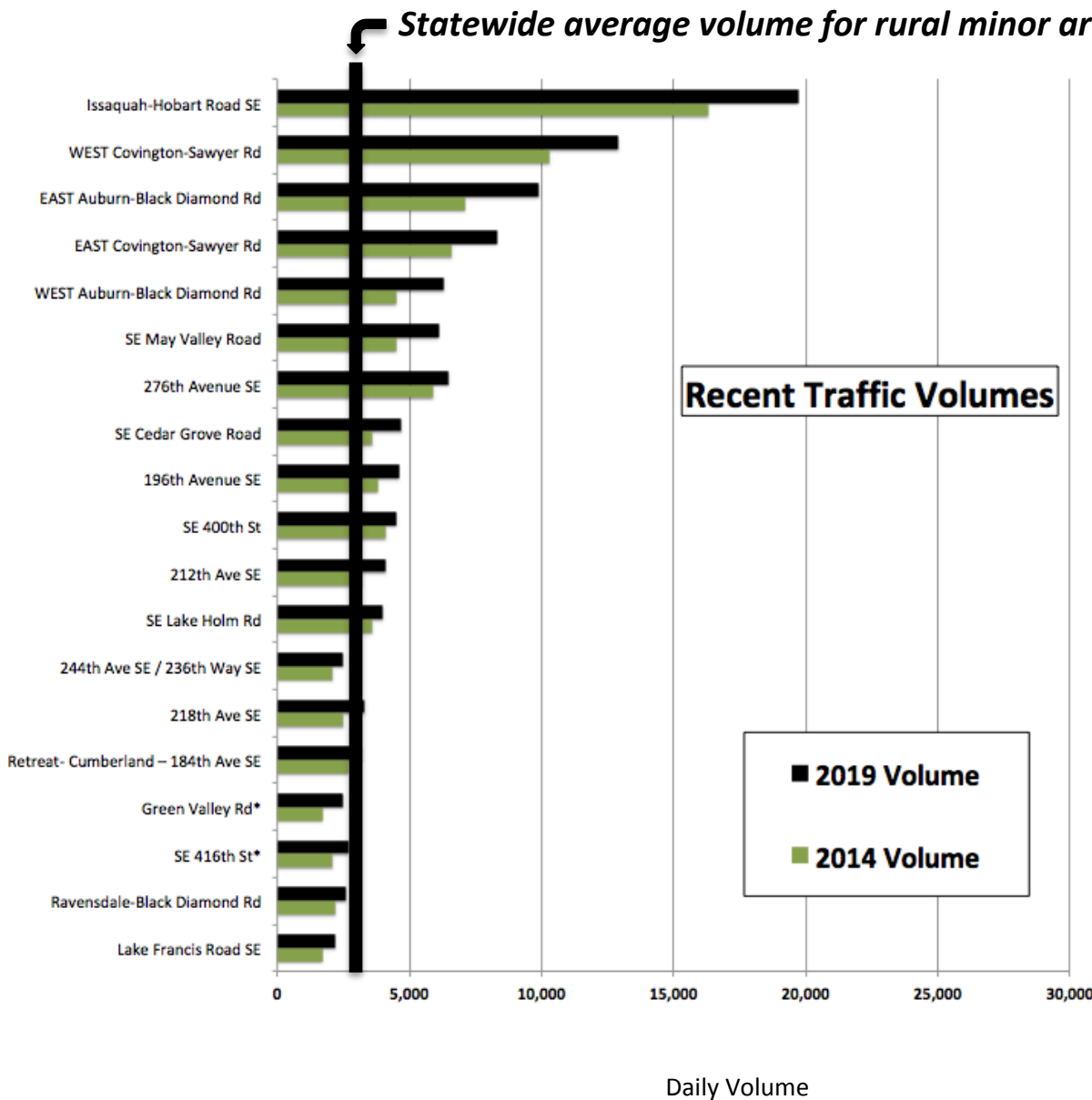
**Traffic Growth Rate
Per year
2014-2019**

While rural population is stable, traffic on rural roads is growing rapidly.

Why?

City-to-city traffic is using county roads to avoid congestion on state highways.

Traffic on Rural Roads in King County Greatly Exceeds Statewide Norms



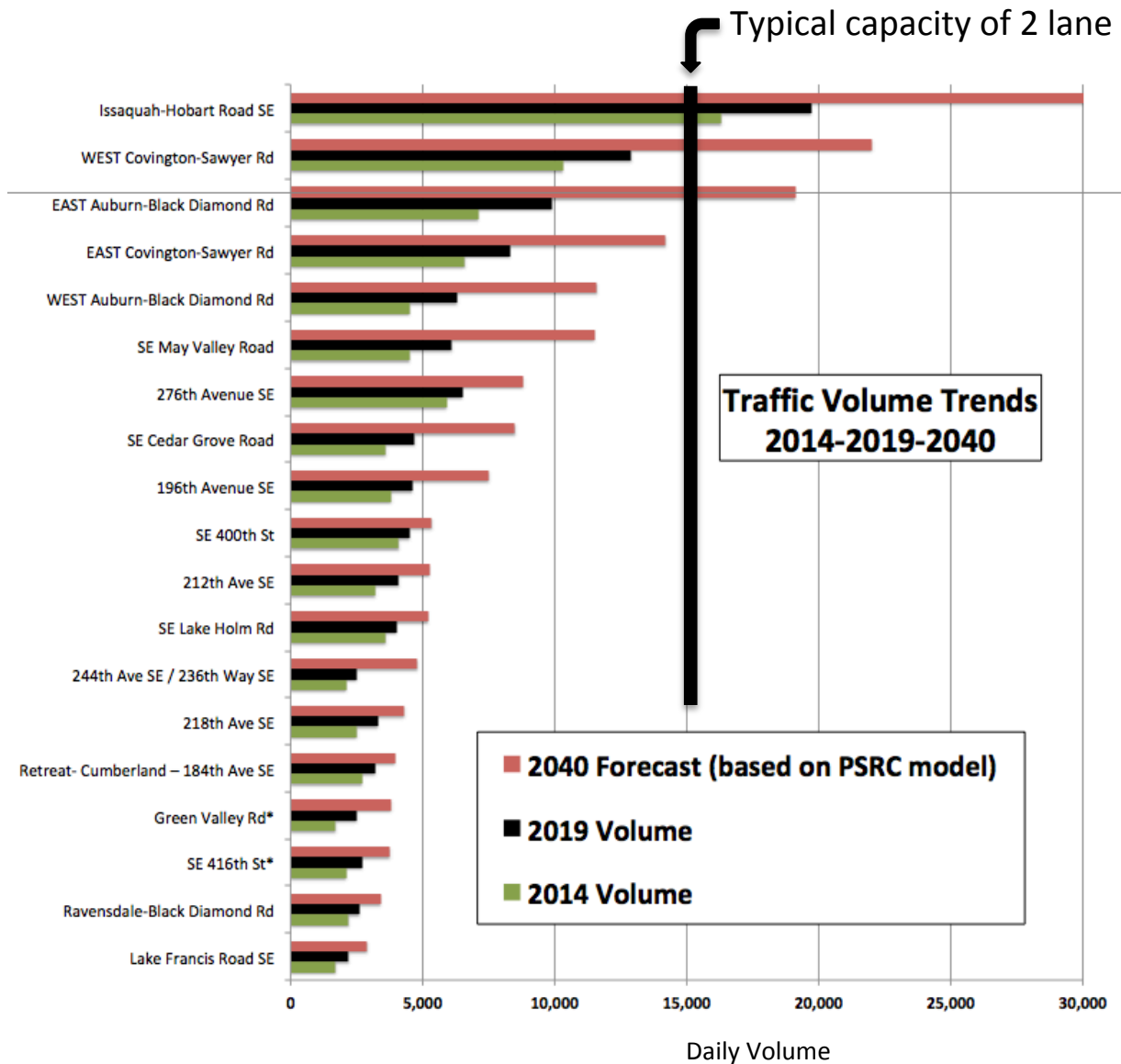
Statewide, rural minor arterials are uncongested, with few conflicts.

As it should be. Pedestrians and bicycles and horses coexist with cars and trucks.

But not in King County.

Something's wrong.

And Congestion Just Keeps Getting Worse...



Regional plans foresee more traffic growth coming.
(PSRC Vision 2040)

Hugely increased congestion is implied.
Which assaults the rural quality of life.

These troubles are not addressed in any transportation plans.

- *Not PSRC*
- *Not King County*
- *Not any city*

Rural Roads Aren't Safe for Urban-Scale Traffic Volumes



Common rural road issues:

- blind curves
- blind hillcrests
- serpentine hill climbs
- undersized shoulders



Why Is This Happening?

A. Incomplete Regional Planning under GMA

- Isolated rural cities are not addressed by GMA
- Rural towns are mandated to grow *but unskilled in managing growth*
- GMA *doesn't require* systematic *regional* enforcement nor funding
- GMA only requires “*coordination*” between cities and counties

B. Fragmented, Incomplete, Outdated Local Planning Structures

- Rural county roads shouldn't carry such traffic (*not designed for high volumes*)
- State highways can't handle all traffic (*too few routes; too few lanes*)
- Transit's priority is urban – no funding to mitigate rural commuting impacts
- County road tax *is only assessed on the rural population (~5% of the county)*
- County road tax can't & shouldn't pay for road improvements due to cities
- County can't impose mitigation on cities for their external traffic impacts
- Cities do not volunteer to mitigate their external traffic impacts

IN SHORT: *NO SPECIFIC LOCALITY IS RESPONSIBLE. ONLY THE STATE HAS THE BROAD POWER TO ENACT EFFECTIVE CHANGES.*

Legislative Action Can Make the Difference

HOW CAN THE LEGISLATURE HELP?

- Update GMA for stronger regional coordination of plans across jurisdictional boundaries
- Increase funding for state highways to absorb forecast urban commuter traffic growth so rural county roads only serve rural needs
- Fund safety and active transportation programs for counties with urban traffic impacts in rural areas (“complete streets”)
- Support/enable counties and cities to jointly solve problems across jurisdictional boundaries

HOW CAN JTI HELP OUR LEGISLATORS?

- Coordinate with other interested parties? Whom?
- Supply information, conduct research?
- What else?