

# Employment Access and Coordinated Human Services (EACH) Transportation Plan for Whatcom County

Approved by Whatcom Regional Transportation Planning Organization Board  
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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	5
Introduction: Coordinated Transportation	7
Participation: Who needs Transportation Assistance?	9
EACH Stakeholder Group Formation	10
Vision, Mission, Goals for Coordinated Transportation	10
Initial Objectives	11
Special Needs Transportation Populations	15
Existing Transportation Services	17
Transportation Service Gaps	21
Common Origination Points	23
Common Destinations	25
Recommendations for Action	27
Coordinated Transportation Project Priorities	29
Coordination for the Future	31
Appendix 1: Map of Specialized Transit Service, 2005	A1
Appendix 2: Map of Estimated Gaps in Fixed Route Service	A2
Appendix 3: Map of Census Data Population Densities	A3
Appendix 4: Whatcom Smart Trips Program Description	A4
Appendix 5: Meeting Summaries of Stakeholder Group 2006	A5



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	<i>Newly Involved in Transportation Planning</i>
• BellAir Charters	
• City of Lynden Planning Department	
• Department of Social and Health Services	X
• Lummi Nation	
• Mt. Baker Ski Area	X
• Opportunity Council	X
• Northwest Regional Council	
• St. Joseph Hospital	X
• Whatcom County Health Department	X
• Whatcom Coalition for Healthy Communities	
• Whatcom Transportation Authority	
• Washington State Department of Transportation	
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• Early Childhood Opportunities Northwest	X
• Aging and Disabilities Services Administration	
• City of Bellingham Transportation Options	
• Whatcom Yellow Cab	X
•	

The Community Transportation Advisory Group (CTAG) and the Transportation Technical Advisory Committee (TTAC) assisted with plan review and comment.

Community Transportation Advisory Group Members include:

Larry Wickkiser, BellAir Charters  
 Carol Berry, WWU Sustainable Transportation Coordinator  
 Rick Gantman, Mt. Baker School District Superintendent  
 Kelly Beerman, Developer  
 Chris Hatch, Forestry Industry  
 Jack Haupt, St. Joseph Hospital/PeaceHealth  
 Kathy Berg, Birch Bay Community  
 Scott Dorough, Energy Conservation Consulting

Glenn Hallman, Council on Aging  
Robert Lowe, Whatcom Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Committee  
Carol Macdonald, Mt. Baker Foothills Chamber of Commerce  
Patrick Pollock, Cherry Point Industrial Area

Transportation Technical Advisory Committee members include representatives from the Public Works Engineering and Planning Departments of the following agencies and jurisdictions:

City of Bellingham  
City of Blaine  
City of Everson  
City of Ferndale  
City of Lynden  
City of Nooksack  
City of Sumas  
Whatcom County  
Whatcom Transportation Authority  
Port of Bellingham

CTAG and TTAC advise the Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) Policy Board on transportation issues and priorities. The RTPO Board is composed of elected officials from each of the member jurisdictions in Whatcom County. Whatcom Council of Governments is the Regional Transportation Planning Organization and prepares the *Whatcom Transportation Plan* in fulfillment of federal and state requirements.

## **Introduction: Coordinated Transportation**

In the broadest sense, everyone in Whatcom County benefits when transportation planning and implementation is done in a coordinated way: coordination of transportation services can result in less duplication of service and better stewardship of public funds. The EACH Transportation Plan focuses on improving coordination in transportation for community members who have special needs. WCOG invited representatives from a wide variety of agencies serving special needs populations so that the stakeholder advisory group would represent those most likely to benefit from improved transportation coordination. The following organizations were invited to participate:

### Public and Private Transportation Services:

- Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA)
- BellAir Charters (Airporter Shuttle)
- Whatcom Yellow Cab

### Human Services Organizations:

- Northwest Regional Council (Agency Council for Coordinated Transportation)
- Whatcom County Senior Centers
- St. Joseph Hospital
- Mt. Baker Planned Parenthood
- Whatcom Health Department
- Opportunity Council
- Dept. of Social and Health Services
- Kulshan Land Trust
- Whatcom Human Rights Task Force
- Community to Community Development
- Whatcom Volunteer Center

### Schools:

- Whatcom Community College
- Bellingham Technical College
- Mt. Baker School District
- Western Washington University

### Governments Agencies and Committees:

- City of Bellingham Planning Department
- Lummi Nation
- Nooksack Indian Tribe
- Port of Bellingham
- Washington State Department of Transportation

- Community Transportation Advisory Group (WCOG)
- Transportation Technical Advisory Committee (WCOG)

#### Advocacy Organizations

- Whatcom Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Committee
- Bellingham Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Committee
- Mt. Baker Bicycle Club

#### Business Partners:

- Mt. Baker Ski Area
- Bellingham/Whatcom Chamber of Commerce
- Sustainable Connections

The EACH Stakeholders recognized that there are many more agencies, organizations, and individuals who should be part of the coordinated transportation process. Many who were invited were not able to participate in meetings. Others were not contacted due to the short time frame for the initial plan. EACH Stakeholders identified the following additional groups who should be involved in future planning and updates:

- Transportation Managers at each school district
- Educational Service District for the Whatcom Region
- SeaMar Health Center
- Workforce Development Council
- Interpretive/Translation agencies
- Bellingham and Lynden Food Banks
- Readiness to Learn Program Coordinators
- Whatcom County Superior Court Case Managers
- Bellingham/Whatcom Housing Authority
- Anti-Hunger Coalition
- Farm worker Associations
- Chambers of Commerce

The development of a truly coordinated transportation system will require additional time to involve representatives of these and other groups. This is included as a priority action item for implementation and update of the EACH plan.

## Participation

### Defining EACH focus: Who needs transportation assistance?

Transportation planning in Whatcom County is carried out by several agencies: Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA), Whatcom Council of Governments, the Port of Bellingham, and the planning and public works departments of each jurisdiction. These agencies do not always involve human service agencies when formulating plans. Schools and human service agencies such as hospitals and food banks do not often have the funds or resources to do transportation planning or offer transportation services. But lack of transportation is often a barrier for community members to access human services. The following examples illustrate some of the transportation challenges identified by social service providers:

- A person living in a shelter has an average of six case managers, each located in different places and each requiring regular visits.
- Head Start formerly provided bus service but now coordinates bus service with Nooksack School District
- Some Head Start students in Blaine and Ferndale can't enroll because of lack of transportation
- One mother reported that she needs four bus transfers to get to work and drop her child at child care
- For low income families, missing an energy appointment for their house can result in not having heat during the entire winter.
- The Nooksack Valley school district planned to bus kids to dental appointments but was unable to due to lack of a vehicle
- Residents who want to see a doctor four miles away sometimes require a 25 mile taxi ride because of their distance from the taxi base
- The hub-and-spoke model of the current bus routes leaves gaps for those who need to travel between the "spokes" (e.g., Sumas to Lynden, etc.)
- Lummi Nation instituted a pilot project Community Use Van to serve disadvantaged populations that served more than 1900 riders per month, unfortunately the service ended in 2006.

Transportation planning includes a variety of activities. Special needs transportation often focuses on public bus service, specialized vans, private bus shuttle service, or taxi service. Transportation service providers described some challenges to meeting the needs of social service travel and employment access:

- Low population in remote areas makes regular bus service too costly
- Policy barriers prevent "grouping" some travelers to common destinations in the same taxi
- Policies regarding funding sources can prevent combining trips for different purposes, resulting in higher overall costs per trip
- The cost of maintaining and operating vehicles has become too expensive for many social service organizations

- Transportation planners and WTA hold public outreach meetings to gather suggestions about how to improve service but few members of special needs populations attend

Every jurisdiction does transportation planning and every jurisdiction pays for transportation facilities. They do this by investing in public bus service and also by building and maintaining roads, sidewalks, trails, and other infrastructure. Leaders in Whatcom County have begun to recognize that the traditional pattern of investing primarily in road projects that serve private car drivers may not continue to be the most cost effective way to provide transportation. Coordinated transportation planning for human services may be an important step toward serving everyone's transportation needs and reducing the perception that driving a car should be the "default" method for getting around.

### **EACH Stakeholder Group Formation**

WCOG began to form its advisory group for the EACH Transportation Plan by asking:

- What types of people need access to employment?
- What are the demographics of people who need access to medical care and other human services?
- What organizations serve these populations?
- What services could help meet unfilled transportation needs?

Organizations that work with people who need transportation assistance include almost every demographic group: employers, schools, hospitals, and more. The stakeholder group was formed of representatives from human services agencies contacted through e-mail, telephone and announcements. Other groups such as employers, public works engineers, planners, and pedestrian advocates were invited and kept informed through the process. Whatcom Council of Governments hosted the meetings in Bellingham and encouraged participation via conference telephone for those wishing to participate remotely.

Human service agencies' staff recognized that better coordination of transportation would result in greater efficiency in allocation of their own agencies' resources and also could result in cost savings for jurisdictions.

### **Vision of Coordinated Transportation:**

EACH stakeholders agreed on the following vision statement for the work of the group:

"A barrier-free transportation system that helps Whatcom County's special needs populations to carry out daily trips in a convenient and cost effective way."

The EACH Stakeholders agreed to define special needs populations according to Revised Code of Washington 47.06b: "Those people, including their attendants, who because of physical or mental disability, income status, or age, are unable to transport themselves or purchase transportation."

## **Mission of Coordinated Transportation:**

"To coordinate services, resources, and investments to transform Whatcom's transportation system into one that serves everyone well."

## **Goals of Coordinated Transportation:**

The group agreed on the following goals, listed in priority order:

1. All social service organizations and their participants understand and benefit from a simple and effective system of coordinated transportation.
2. Public investments favor projects and services that improve transportation conditions for people of all ability levels.
3. The transportation system is safe, accessible and comfortable for children and other special needs travelers.
4. Balance comfort, environmental-friendliness, and existing resources so that everyone has a safe, accessible way to meet daily service or transportation needs.

## **Initial Objectives for Coordinated Transportation:**

EACH stakeholders came to consensus that the first tasks to address the top priority goal include three equally important and mutually interconnected objectives. While the stakeholders agreed that all three must happen concurrently, they agreed on the following priority order for the initial objectives:

1. Increase connectivity by reducing gaps in the public transportation system.
2. Increase awareness of existing services and of the coordination work of the EACH stakeholder group.
3. Reduce the complexity of trip arrangements and of eligibility requirements for services.

Potential actions associated with these objectives are described in greater detail below:

### ***1. Increase connectivity:***

- Identify the highest priority "spokes" to connect; inform WTA board what frequency would be needed.
  - Areas to study: Everson to Sumas; Sumas to Kendall; Birch Bay to Blaine; Lynden to Sumas; Lynden to Blaine; Ferndale to Lummi Nation
- Evaluate feasibility of changing the school bus system to a WTA system to eliminate duplication of facilities and services while increasing cost-effectiveness.
- Develop innovative solutions to serve areas where bus service is economically impractical using methods such as:
  - Engage private sector transportation providers in bridging gaps in the public transportation system where this would improve cost effectiveness and efficiency
  - Establish a "sub" base for taxi or other private shuttle service in Everson or Deming area

- Design and implement an innovative pilot project transportation arrangement to provide trips during nights, weekends, and holidays and to places where WTA service is not cost-effective to offer
  - Expand the on-line Ride-Match service for trips other than work commutes
  - Contract with individuals in remote cities to transport their “neighbors” to services (i.e., expand on existing programs providing gas vouchers)
  - Study feasibility of contracting with school buses and their drivers (outside of school service times) to transport special needs clients during the mid-day period. (A program of this sort in Mason County resulted in increased income for low-income drivers and increased cost-effective use of vehicles, benefiting schools.)
- Reduce car trips through Transportation Demand Management and other support services such as:
    - Provide services nearer to the client rather than requiring the client to travel large distances
    - Resolve conflicting issues between land use policies (designed to prevent sprawl and protect farmland) and human services transportation (designed to serve remote residences equitably)
    - Coordinate with Transportation Demand Management programs to encourage ride-sharing
    - Congregate human services in centralized offices accessible by multiple transportation modes
    - Provide additional public transportation service to outlying areas currently not served, where compatible with growth management goals

## *2. Increase awareness:*

- Increase public and agency awareness of transportation services available and how to use them through methods such as:
  - Fund a “travel trainer” position or hot-line (WTA has plans to implement this in 2007; also adding an on-line trip planner on internet site)
  - Establish a volunteer-staffed hotline for peer training on bus or other transportation options (peers can be seniors, college students, other demographic groups)
  - Conduct community group presentations, outreach booths at Farmers’ Markets, etc., around the county to inform public about transportation services and options
  - Expand outreach to employers to facilitate carpooling to neighboring employers
- Increase awareness among agencies and providers of the EACH planning effort and how they can benefit and participate by such means as:
  - Work with the school district transportation managers to find ways to better coordinate
  - Create maps of transportation services and gaps for each target population
  - Create an inventory and matrix of groups who should be involved in coordinated transportation planning and increase outreach to and involvement of special needs travelers and groups not currently represented in the EACH Stakeholder Group.

- Find funding for on-going facilitation of a coordinated human services transportation planning group at WCOG or WTA
  - Coordinate the update of the 2007 Whatcom Transportation Plan with the EACH action plan and strategies

*3. Increase convenience, simplicity:*

- Improve the convenience of trip arrangements (e.g., number of bus transfers)
- Simplify the eligibility process and help everyone understand it
  - Connect rural residents to the “spokes” of fixed route service
  - Connect school students with after-school activities such as Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs, YMCA, child care centers, etc.



## Special Needs Transportation Populations

Populations to be served by Coordinated Transportation cannot be easily described by categories. Some special needs travelers fit more than one category. The following are some characteristics of populations that benefit from coordinated transportation options:

### Elders/Seniors

People who are over 65 years of age and who do not have access to other transportation may qualify for WTA's Specialized Transportation services. Specialized Transportation allows care givers to accompany the special needs traveler. Advanced age does not, in and of itself, constitute a qualification for Specialized service but does qualify for reduced fare rates on the bus system. Depending on physical abilities, elderly people may choose to limit driving at night or on high speed roadways or in poor weather.

Some human services can be provided in the person's home rather than requiring the elderly person to travel. A balance should be struck between reducing trips for elderly residents and ensuring that they have access to social interaction and outside activity.

### People with Disabilities

People with disabilities that affect their ability to navigate the bus system on their own are eligible for Specialized Transportation service. Many types of disabilities do not pose a barrier to use of the regular fixed-route bus service or public trails and sidewalks. Some people with disabilities require training in the types of services available and how to use them. People who have sustained a long-term or permanent injury may need transportation assistance to reach vocational training and rehabilitation locations. Specialized Transportation services include the care givers who accompany the special needs traveler.

### Rural Residents

Rural areas are characterized by low density populations where it is usually not cost effective to offer frequent regular bus service. Residents in these areas benefit from Flex routes and other assistance to transport them from home to the nearest regular bus route. Rural residents without disabilities may benefit from trails or sidewalks to walk or bicycle to the nearest bus route where distances are low. Ridematch or carpool programs may be cost effective ways to assist rural residents.

### Low Income Residents

Many of the services for low income residents require transportation, often to multiple sites:

- Head start – education for young children
- Medicaid – medical and dental care
- Childcare – for parents with daytime commitments
- Counseling – treatment and recovery programs
- Job search assistance or training
- Energy assistance

Childcare responsibilities can complicate transportation decisions. When it is not possible for the parent to bring children along, the cost of paying for a sitter becomes part of the transportation equation. A trip that takes a longer time increases the cost of childcare. Multiple bus transfers can be physically taxing when traveling with supplies, children, and strollers.

### **School Children**

Pre-school, elementary school and middle school students represent a large population of travelers with special needs. School bus service provides some assistance for school children during regular school sessions. These students often need access to the school grounds during hours other than regular classes in order to take advantage of after school and extra-curricular activities. Coordinated transportation planning should include provision for school bus service as well as safe routes to walk or bike within one mile of each school.

### **Car-free Residents**

Residents who choose not to own cars or whose ability to drive a car has been curtailed for legal or health reasons. This population group is growing due to the high cost of petroleum and the increase in programs that encourage non-car transportation. These residents benefit from coordinated transportation options. Ride-share and ride-match programs, trails, and sidewalks can provide connectivity to bus routes and destinations.

Residents with special needs live throughout Whatcom County often in dispersed locations, not in clusters. School children, elderly non-drivers, and job-seekers are some examples of people whose homes could be far from service providers but who need access to school, medical appointments, or employment training. Transportation assistance to and from dispersed rural areas may require site-specific solutions, but some overall policies that coordinate transportation planning generally will help special needs populations along with all residents.

The problem of the "last two blocks" is illustrative: a person with limited mobility who is physically able to walk or wheel herself to a bus stop two blocks away from her house may be prevented from doing so by the absence of a trail or sidewalk. While not all special needs transportation barriers can be solved by trails or sidewalks, many can be addressed in this way. School children, college students, and low income populations are examples of special needs groups who might utilize trails and sidewalks, thereby potentially saving the cost of bus or van services.

Low income residents sometimes walk or bicycle because it can be less expensive. But low income people are more likely not to have health insurance or other resources. They must be more vigilant about safety because they are less able to bear the triple burden for injury: income-loss, cost of treatment, and recovery. Where roads have no sidewalks, shoulders, or trails, a low-income person will be less willing to take the risk of walking or biking because of the exposure to high speed motor vehicles. The cost of protective equipment (lights, reflective clothing, helmets, secure storage, etc.) can be a barrier.

## Existing Transportation Services

Several types of transportation services are already provided to serve all residents of Whatcom County. In addition, some services specifically assist special needs populations:

*Whatcom Transportation Authority* (WTA) is the County's public transportation provider, operating a variety of bus and van services.

Fixed route bus service: WTA operates 36 routes served by large, conventional buses, serving regular stops on a regular, published schedule. These routes serve specific corridors and stops and do not deviate from those.

Specialized bus service: Smaller van-type buses offer door-to-door service for people who qualify through an eligibility process. The service is available within a ¼ mile area of the fixed route corridors. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) provides for specialized transportation service within this type of ¼ mile corridor.

Flex routes: Within a certain zone (published in the WTA route guide), a fixed-route bus can deviate (on request) to pick up or drop off passengers. This service is offered on the longer rural routes such as those that serve Kendall and Birch Bay. When no one has pre-requested a deviation to the route, the bus travels as a Fixed Route bus.

Safety Net Service: In areas of the County not served by other WTA services, the Safety Net offers a minimum service on designated days of the week. The service is available to all residents by calling and requesting a ride, but it is only available on assigned days of the week for each area. While the pick up and drop-off is door-to-door, timing may be problematic, requiring a "window" of up to two hours within which the ride could arrive.

Van-pool Service: For groups coming from and going to a similar destination, Van Pools offer a subscription service using volunteer drivers. WTA supplies and maintains the van. The service is self-sustaining with the cost paid by the subscribing users. The program is popular and in the past some requests for Van Pools have been un-filled because of the small number of vans available.

Community Use Van: A WTA-supplied and maintained van allocated to a community or group for use in areas beyond the fixed route service. These vans can act as collectors to bring riders to fixed route stations or other destinations not served by the WTA. Currently the following areas operate Community Use Vans:

- Pt. Roberts (driven by volunteers)
- Lake Whatcom Treatment Center (driven by employees of the center)
- Lummi Nation (driven by employees of the Tribe) as part of a *beta* test ending in December 2006

County Connector Bus: Pilot project fixed-route bus between Skagit and Whatcom Counties. Service is provided through a partnership between the two agencies and is dependent on funding from a state grant. If the grant is not continued, local revenues would not be sufficient for the service (despite its success) to continue.

*Private services:*

Airporter Shuttle/BellAir Charters: Daily scheduled bus service connecting to SeaTac Airport and intermediate points. Charter and contracted services are also provided by special arrangement. Within Whatcom County, the Shuttle offers service to the Ski area on a seasonal basis. Recent new services include a Thanksgiving Shuttle service from Western Washington University to the Bellevue area in King County and back.

Taxi Service: Individual car and van service customized for each trip; some social services provide taxi vouchers or arrange taxi transportation for eligible medical patients where applicable public transportation services are not available.

Greyhound Bus: Regularly scheduled regional bus service connecting to major cities is provided by the Greyhound company. Until the 1970s, this type of carrier was required to serve cities within and between Counties.

Hesselgrave and other Private Charter Services: Several private corporations offer contracted service for events, charters or to serve client companies.

*Other services:*

School Bus Services: Each of Whatcom County's eight public school districts and the dozen private schools provide bus service to bring students to and from regularly scheduled classes. Some schools offer additional bus service to serve students participating in extra-curricular activities.

Event/Community Group bus or van service: Many places of worship and assisted living residences operate van or bus service to assist members to attend weekly services and events. Veterans groups offer shuttle service for hospital visits. Some of these van services are operated on a volunteer basis and others are operated by employee drivers. Some hotels and casinos operate charter or shuttle services.

Taxi Vouchers: DSHS has in the past provided a limited number of taxi vouchers in special cases to assist a person with a new job until she or he can make other arrangements. (*Post-meeting note:* Whatcom Yellow Cab serves a large volume of Medicaid taxi trips each day, receiving a list of trips from the hospital and other service providers the day before trips are scheduled. Northwest Regional Council has a good system in place to ensure that those who can use the bus do ride the bus, instead of taxis.)

Gasoline Vouchers: The Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) and the Northwest Regional Council Medicaid Services Coordinator provide a limited amount of vouchers to purchase automobile fuel. People can use these to reimburse colleagues with whom they carpool. (This service was more commonly used prior to the expansion of WTA service to Kendall and Lummi Nation areas).

Delivery Services: DSHS sends staff to remote site offices on a regular basis to serve residents who cannot access the Bellingham office. Some vendors offer delivery of materials or purchases for a fee, or if a minimum order value is reached.

RideMatch Service: Internet-based car-pool match service for commute trips. Individuals register and make contacts for sharing commute trips. Updates to the system in 2007 will enable people to ride-match for special event trips and other non-commute carpooling.

Amtrak: Regularly scheduled regional passenger rail service connecting cities in the state, nationally, and internationally.

Whatcom Smart Trips: Coordinated transportation is successful when community members are made aware of the variety of services available to them. SocialData research shows that as many as 30% of trips could have used public transportation but they were not aware of the options available to them. Special needs populations, along with the entire community, benefit from community-wide education programs and marketing to increase awareness of transportation options. Whatcom Smart Trips is a Transportation Demand Management program that accomplishes this education goal through marketing and promotion of walking, taking the bus, sharing a ride, and bicycling to reduce car trips. Participants benefit from discounts, prizes, reduced-rate bus passes, emergency ride home, and other incentives. Appendix 4 includes a description of the Whatcom Smart Trips program.

Additional transportation services and innovations operate in Whatcom County and these will be studied and referenced in future updates of this plan.



## Transportation Service Gaps

Public bus service in rural areas with low population density is not offered frequently enough to meet all the needs of special needs residents. From a practical standpoint, it is usually not cost effective for a public transit service to run frequent bus service where there are few riders. Safety Net and Specialized service can meet some of the needs in these areas but other innovations offer more promise for increasing connectivity while remaining cost effective. Innovations discussed include:

- Agencies could contract with ride providers in small towns to shuttle residents to near by towns (when bus service is not available)
- Agencies could contract with school bus drivers to provide mid day rides for special needs trips

Participating human service agencies provided data on trip origination and destination points for those utilizing agency services. The data was then compared with existing public bus fixed route service to determine on a general level where some gaps in service may exist. WTA provided data on the number of specialized transportation trips provided to senior and disabled persons during 2005 (see map 1 in Appendix). This information showed some additional concentrations of trip origin and destination points, however, a large number of trips are not concentrated in particular areas. Together with the social service data, the maps help indicate where the highest need for connecting services are.

Population growth data and Medicaid transportation trip data (depicted in Appendix 2 Map) suggest that the following locations to have the highest need for public bus connecting service:

Origin	Destination	Distance	Percent Population Growth 1990-2000	Existing Service
Blaine area	Lynden area	15 mi. (24 km)	Blaine +52%	Safety Net
Everson area	Sumas area	7 mi. (11 km)	Everson +37%	fixed route
Everson area	Lynden area	6 mi. (10 km)	Lynden +58%	Safety Net
Ferndale	Cherry Point	7 mi. (11 km)	Ferndale +62%	Safety Net
Ferndale	Lynden	8 mi. (13 km)		Fixed Route (indirect)
Glacier area	Sumas area	20 mi. (32 km)	Sumas +29%	Safety Net
Lummi Nation	Casino	3 mi. (5 km)	Lummi +33%	Community Use Van
Lummi Nation	Ferndale	5 mi (9 km)		Safety Net
Lummi Nation	Cherry Point	13 mi. (20 km)		Safety Net
Maple Falls/ Kendall area	Sumas area	12 mi. (19 km)	County +31%	Safety Net

*Population data from U.S. Census and Washington Office of Financial Management 1990 and 2000 reports.*

These origin-destination pairs are currently served only by bus routes that travel to and from the central hub of Bellingham. This “hub and spoke” design does not offer connection between the “spokes” but, with the high population growth rate in the small cities, such connections are becoming increasingly important. Will people ride the bus if service is

provided in the currently unserved areas? The example of the Lummi Nation Community Use Van pilot project demonstrates likely success as that project served over 1900 riders per month during the one-year test.

WTA's priority is to serve the most populous corridors by providing service along routes that radiate out from the highest population area. This system of "hub" and "spokes" is cost effective in serving the most passengers per mile of bus travel. Regular frequent service between "spokes," i.e., the rural towns and small cities in the table above, is not cost effective because the population density is low. The County Comprehensive Plan policies emphasize maintaining low population in the agricultural and forestry areas. To be most cost effective, Whatcom County should consider other approaches than fixed route bus service for providing special needs transportation to these areas.

## Transportation Needs

To serve the employment access and urgent medical and human service needs with an effective coordinated transportation system, the EACH stakeholders identified the following gaps:

- Night and weekend public transportation service – throughout the County
- Connecting the "spokes" – between small cities and rural residential centers
- Rural service more than the designated two Safety Net days per week
- Bus Connections across the Canadian border
- Sidewalks and trails in rural areas
- Employee and visitor transportation to Mt. Baker Ski Area and National Forest

Duplications of service that were identified include the following:

- School bus service
- Taxi service when policies prevent combining trips paid for by different agencies
- Excess expense for Medicaid taxi service in rural areas
- Volunteer vans for community groups such as places of worship, veterans groups, group homes, or charities
- Private shuttle services for recreation sites such as casinos or resorts

## Common Origination Points

In cities or towns where there are higher general residential densities, EACH stakeholders identified clusters of housing where special needs populations constitute a higher percentage than average. In those locations, coordinated transportation may result in solutions that serve more people for a lower cost per traveler. Below are some of the areas or towns where EACH stakeholders identified potential clusters of residences using special needs transportation:

*Paradise Lakes and Peaceful Valley Residential Area*, located two miles north of Kendall Elementary School on the Kendall-Sumas Road, state route 547. Paradise Lakes is home to about 4,000 residents, of whom about 80% meet the definition of special needs residents for income or age reasons. Paradise Lakes is an unincorporated residential area in a part of the county zoned for forestry. Locally available services in Paradise Lakes are limited to regular daily bus service to Bellingham. The two mile distance from Paradise Lakes to the elementary school represents a barrier for school and playground access for children and other special needs travelers. A small grocery market is located next to the school. The City of Sumas is about 8 miles northwest of Paradise Lakes and is the closest employment and service center. There is no regular bus service between Paradise Lakes and Sumas.

*Lummi Nation*, located 8 miles west of Bellingham and 6 miles south of Ferndale is home to 4,600 tribal members and approximately 1,000 non-tribal residents. Facilities and employers on the Lummi Nation include the Silver Reef Casino, Northwest Indian College, the Lummi Nation School, elder housing, farms, and tribal government offices. A regular daily bus route serves travelers on the western part of the reservation to get to Bellingham. A pilot-project Community Use Van serves additional routes including the Silver Reef Casino, a major employment center. There are limited medical, dental, and social services on the reservation. Residents of Lummi Nation travel to Ferndale for many services, but public bus service does not connect directly to Ferndale. Travelers wishing to go to Ferndale from the reservation by public bus are routed through Bellingham resulting in a 15 mile trip, for a six mile journey.

*Everson* is an incorporated city located 20 miles northeast of Bellingham and has a population of 2,135. It is the employment and service center for the surrounding rural unincorporated area of Whatcom County including several small towns and villages further east in areas zoned for forestry. There are medical and dental offices, a library, elementary school, day care centers, and full-service grocery stores. Rural residents and visitors from Sumas, Maple Falls, and Glacier access services in Everson. One regular daily bus route serves travelers going to Sumas and Bellingham.

*Lynden* is an incorporated city located 15 miles north of Bellingham and has a population of approximately 10,000. It is a commercial and service center for a large farming area in unincorporated northwestern Whatcom County. One regular daily bus route serves travelers going to Bellingham and the same route provides a circulator route

within Lynden. Access to Lynden's medical, dental, educational and employment services is geographically closer than Bellingham for residents in the rural areas and small cities to the north and east of Lynden.

*Ferndale* is an incorporated city located 7 miles northwest of Bellingham and has a population of 9,750. It is the second largest city in Whatcom County and is an employment, commerce, and service center for the area. Two regular daily bus routes serve travelers going to Bellingham or Blaine, and one of the routes offers a local circulator route. Ferndale is the residence for many employees of the Cherry Point Industrial area located 10 miles west of the city. Human services available in Ferndale include retirement and assisted living housing, a Senior Activity Center, and several schools and childcare facilities.

*Blaine* is an incorporated city located at the northwest corner of Whatcom County at the border with Canada and it has a population of 4,420. The Blaine school district serves students from Birch Bay, an unincorporated area 5 miles south of the city with a rapidly growing population of more than 4,000. There are retirement and assisted living housing units in Blaine and Birch Bay. One regular daily bus route serves travelers to Bellingham.

*Maple Falls* and *Glacier* are unincorporated villages located in eastern Whatcom County within 10 miles of the National Forest boundary. The year-around combined population of these two villages is estimated to be fewer than 400, and recreational visitors represent a seasonal population increase of up to 4,000. The Mt. Baker School District serves students living in these villages. The closest social services are in Sumas or Everson, 20 or 30 miles west. Safety Net bus service is available one day per week by reservation.

*Bellingham Retirement Homes* Bellingham is the largest city in Whatcom County with a population of 73,460. It is the largest employment center for the County and provides a large variety of human services for residents throughout the county, including a large regional hospital, university, and community college. The Bellingham Food Bank is an example of services offered in Bellingham that are not available in other parts of Whatcom County. Retirement homes and assisted living centers are clustered in the following areas:

- Fairhaven Parkway
- Cordata area
- Birchwood area

More than 30 regular daily bus routes serve Bellingham area along with daily passenger rail, airline flights, regional Airporter shuttle service, regional and local ferries, and taxi service.

## Common Destinations

Residents with special needs travel to the same spectrum of sites that the general population visits: employment sites, childcare facilities, schools, medical services, commercial areas, recreation areas and more. Some special needs residents travel more frequently to sites that offer specific types of services:

- Vocational training
- Medical and rehabilitation centers
- Senior and assisted living activity centers
- Residential shelters
- Human services appointments (e.g., DSHS, Case Managers, etc.)

The majority of these sites are clustered in the Bellingham area. For special needs residents in the small cities and rural areas, transportation to Bellingham is not cost effective. People traveling to work during late night hours or on weekends have few transportation options available.

According to data from the Opportunity Council, all Whatcom's providers of mental health services receiving federal funding are located in Bellingham, as are 75% of the substance abuse care providers. Of the remaining 25%, one substance abuse care provider is located in each of Everson, Sedro Woolley, Lynden, and two are located in Ferndale. About 70% of the total number of persons with developmental disabilities in Whatcom County live in Bellingham and Ferndale.

*Triage Center:* A Triage Center is being established in the Irongate Industrial area which will offer emergency assistance and assessment during night or weekend hours specifically for behavioral health and substance abuse issues. The goal of the Center is to reduce reliance on emergency room visits: emergency room visits are costly and visits to the emergency room have increased for certain populations because there was no other option available. The urgent nature of emergency situations dictates that access to the Triage Center would not generally be by public bus. However, persons treated and discharged from the Triage Center are likely to benefit from public bus service. The Irongate Industrial area is not served by frequent bus service and the level of bus service that is offered is not consistent with the needs of the population being served by the Triage Center.

*Adult Family and Assisted Living Homes:* Adult family homes serve a wide variety of special needs populations. When these homes are established outside the transit service corridor where the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) provides access, transportation becomes problematic and costs increase. Strategies to encourage these residential services to locate along the transit corridors would reduce specialized transportation costs. Historically, the homes operated vans to transport residents but increased expense of vehicle operation and maintenance has generally curtailed this service. The Community Use Van (CUV) service offered by WTA is a model that might have relevance for these homes. The WTA board may limit the CUV program due to the high cost to WTA per passenger for the non-treatment center programs.

*Connect Costs of Housing, Human Services and Transportation:* Coordinated transportation should address the economic imbalance that creates an encouragement for social service recipients to choose inexpensive housing in remote locations. When special needs residents move to rural areas, their lower housing cost shifts significant transportation costs for human services onto agencies or the public. Cost of delivering social services to remote locations is higher, as is the cost of offering transit service to low-density areas.

## Stakeholder Recommendations for Action

The EACH Stakeholders agreed that improvements to coordinated transportation must concurrently emphasize new services, better awareness and reduced complexity: these are inextricably linked and cannot be prioritized in a linear fashion. With that in mind, the group agreed on following priority for actions or projects were considered to fill the gaps in the existing transportation system and to reduce the duplication of service or increase cost efficiency:

### I. Increase Connectivity:

1. Engage school districts to pursue a dialogue with WTA to determine opportunities to leverage resources for greater efficiency and cost effectiveness. Discussion may include ideas such as replacing some school bus routes with WTA service.
2. Add tribal fixed route service and on-demand service on and off the tribal reservations and lands and improve Community Use Van signage and facilities. Investigate the needs for coordinated transportation services for the Nooksack Tribe.
3. Develop transportation services to connect residents of rural areas to their neighboring areas (e.g., Kendall to Sumas and Lummi Nation to Ferndale). Evaluate innovations such as volunteer-driven vans, contracted shuttle drivers, or enhanced ride-match/ride-share programs.
4. Work with private businesses such as Yellow Cab to evaluate establishment of taxi sub-base operations in rural locations. Discuss ideas such as contracting with individuals in Everson as a sub-base for taxi or ride-provider services.
5. Work with organizations which operate shuttle vans (e.g., churches, retirement homes, etc.) to determine whether contracted service could fill transportation gaps for special needs travelers in rural areas.
6. Address the lack of bus shelters at fixed-route stops by such measures as:
  - inventorying existing bus shelter facilities,
  - establishing funding for systematic construction of additional shelters as part of annual transportation program,
  - changing development standards to require construction of bus shelters and pull-outs for developments over a threshold size.
7. Expand the on-line Ride Match system to serve single and occasional trips and publicize this additional service.
8. Address the lack of shared-ride or public transportation service for low-income seasonal employees at the Mt. Baker Ski Area and the National Forest.
9. Inventory safe walking and bicycling facilities (sidewalks, crosswalks, trails, etc.) within one mile of each elementary and middle school in Whatcom County and establish a strategy for addressing missing links.

### II. Increasing Awareness:

10. Travel trainers – to assist special needs travelers with eligibility requirements for specialized or Para-transit service.

11. Travel trainer volunteer coordinator – to coordinate peer to peer instruction or hotline to teach people how to use the bus and increase awareness of the range of services available to special needs groups and the general public.

### III. Increasing Coordination:

12. Increase outreach to and involvement of special needs groups in the on going EACH and CTAG planning
13. Expand planning for Coordinated Human Services Transportation in the update of the *Whatcom Transportation Plan 2007*
14. Promote ridesharing through incentives such as gas vouchers and the Whatcom Smart Trips Transportation Demand Management program
15. Evaluate transportation projects for human services criteria in ranking projects for annual Transportation Improvement Program funds
16. Increase the number and type of human services available in small cities (Everson, Sumas) closer to rural populations
17. Encourage public agencies to hold meetings in places served by public bus and to include instructions for access to offices and meeting sites by bus, bike, walking, or sharing a ride. Use innovative methods of reaching special needs groups such as interviewing those at locations where such populations congregate (e.g., Opportunity Council waiting room, SeaMar Health waiting room, etc.)
18. Research the feasibility of assisting people with re-instatement of drivers' licenses in cases where court-ordered requirements have been met

## Coordinated Transportation Projects Priorities

Criteria for priority of action plan was based on the priority goals following:

1. Increase connectivity by reducing gaps in the public transportation system.
2. Increase awareness of existing services and of the coordination work of the EACH stakeholder group.
3. Reduce the complexity of trip arrangements and of eligibility requirements for services.

Projects addressing these goals were ranked according to the following criteria:

1. Population served
2. Ability of the project to leverage existing resources
3. Short timeline for implementation
4. Measurability of results

The solutions were ranked in the following order:

Project	Geographic area	Mode
1. <u>Purchase Additional Vehicles</u> : Provide permanent fixed route transit service with bus shelters and amenities on and around the Lummi Reservation	Lummi Nation and surrounding area	Bus
2. <u>Operation of Lummi Nation Service</u> : Fund operation, maintenance and administration of fixed route transit service on and around the Lummi Reservation	Lummi Nation and surrounding area	Bus
3. <u>Coordinated Transportation</u> : incorporate the EACH goals into the update of the Regional Transportation Planning Organization Transportation Plan for 2007; support an on-going EACH stakeholder group as part of Community Transportation Advisory Group (CTAG) to ensure implementation of the plan goals. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involve the full spectrum of stakeholders in this on-going EACH group including planners, providers of care, and advocates for special needs populations.</li> <li>• Integrate human services goals and objectives into the transportation planning system by having the EACH work-group advise to the RTPO Policy Board</li> </ul>	Whatcom County	N/A

Project	Geographic area	Mode
4. <u>Travel trainers</u> : fund a full-time person through WTA to assist special needs travelers to understand the range of transportation options available to them, to complete the required application processes, and train them to use the systems.	Whatcom County	N/A
5. <u>Bus buddies</u> : fund a coordinator to recruit, train, and support a volunteer peer educator system for a telephone "hot line" and in-person assistance understanding how to ride the bus.	Whatcom County	N/A
6. <u>Contract Ride Providers</u> : recruit, train, and contract with on-call ride providers in rural areas to provide shuttle service between locations not served by bus.	Everson/Sumas area	Van, bus, passenger car, bike
7. <u>School Transportation</u> : Research the current status of coordination between major transportation providers such as school districts, WTA, and private providers and request their input on recommended steps for improvement and greater cost effectiveness.	Whatcom County	Bus (other modes possible, or TDM)

## Coordination for the Future

Whatcom Council of Governments will be updating the *Whatcom Transportation Plan* in 2007 to conform to new federal guidelines. The *Whatcom Transportation Plan* identifies the combined Metropolitan and Regional Transportation Planning Organization goals, policies, and projects for Whatcom County. It describes the projects for each jurisdiction and includes the priority project list for funding. The process of updating the plan allows an opportunity to incorporate the recommendations and priorities of Employment Access and Coordinated Human Services Transportation.

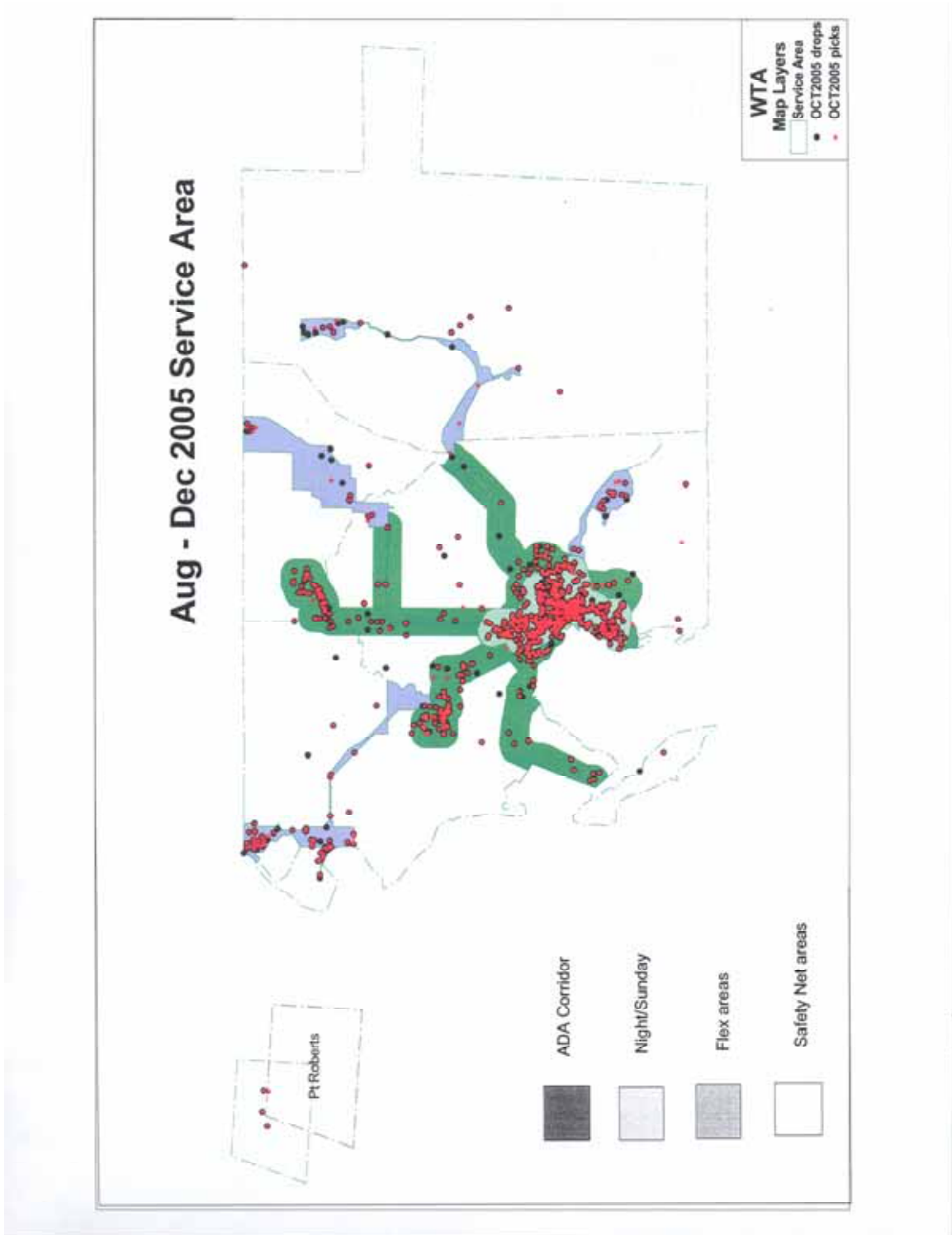
WCOG facilitates the Community Transportation Advisory Group (CTAG) composed of community members who provide input about ways the transportation system can better serve residents and business in Whatcom County. The CTAG sub-committee for human services will work toward incorporating EACH priorities into the regional and metropolitan plans, and that these priorities are acted upon. Potential methods for improving coordination related to special needs transportation may include:

- Increase the number of CTAG members representing human services agencies and special needs travelers.
- Recommending to the RTPO Policy Board that scoring criteria for projects in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) to give increased weight to projects that serve special needs travelers.
- Expanding the regional on-line ride match system to serve more types of trips than daily commutes.
- Expand the half-time WTA travel trainer position to full-time and add volunteer hotline coordinator duties.
- Add an on-line trip planner interactive service to the WTA website
- Engage a broader spectrum of human services representatives in the transportation planning process.
- Learn about transportation needs by talking directly with the people who are using or are expected to benefit from the service and use their advice to design the solutions that will work for them.



Appendix 1:

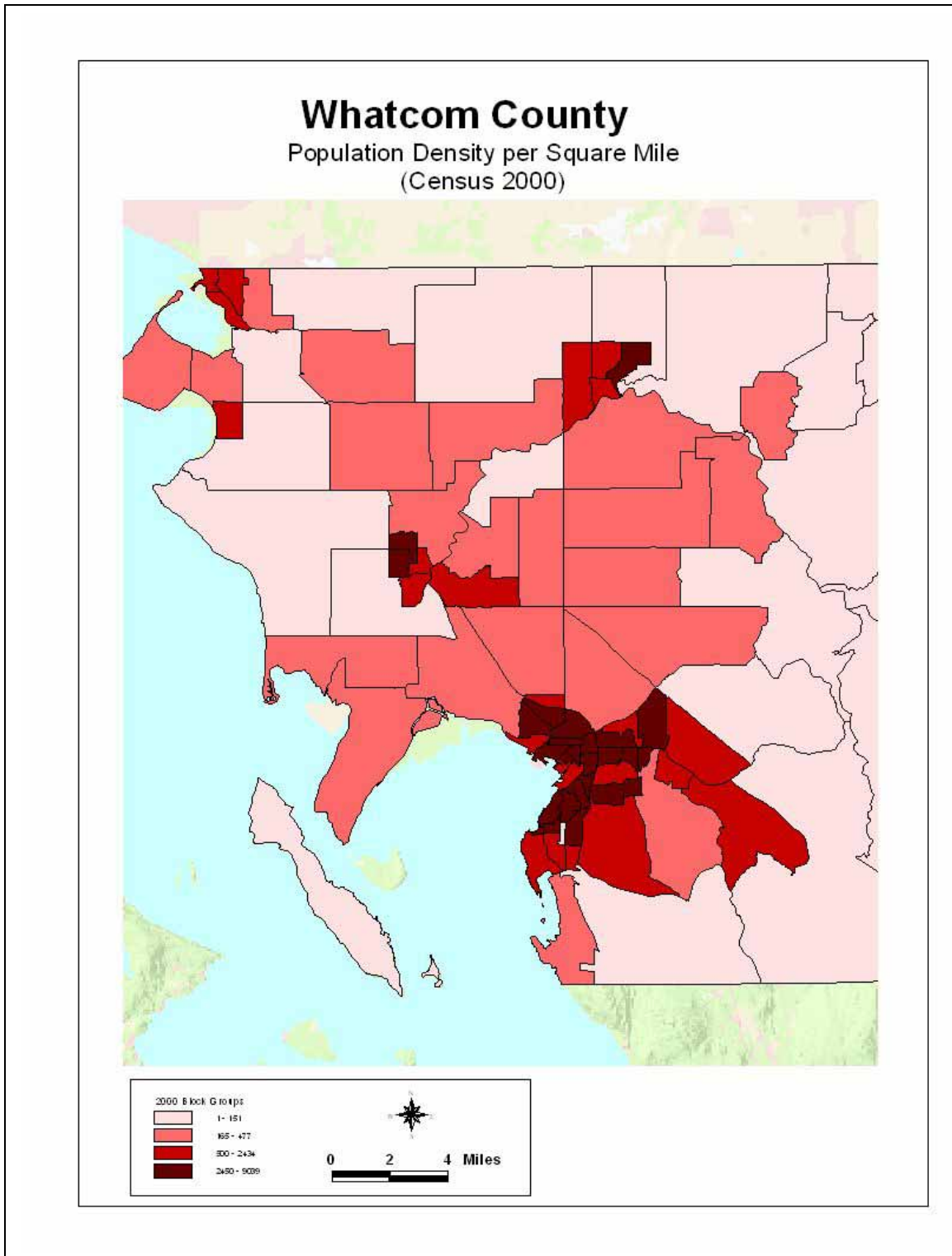
Map of Specialized and Paratransit Service provided by Whatcom Transportation Authority, 2005





Appendix 3:

Whatcom Population Densities Map



## Appendix 4:

### Whatcom Smart Trips Program Summary

Whatcom Smart Trips is a program that markets sustainable transportation choices to the entire community. It is supported by the City of Bellingham, Whatcom Transportation Authority, Whatcom County, Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG) and Washington State Department of Transportation. Whatcom Smart Trips is an outgrowth of our community's experience with the worksite-based Commute Trip Reduction program (CTR), which has reduced the percentage of single-occupant vehicle trips to CTR worksites from 78.08% to 73.52%, and a residential-based education and assistance program that was piloted in Bellingham in 2004, which resulted in an overall reduction in drive-alone trips of 8%. In combining these two approaches we maintain the value of employer investments in worksite programs, while we create new trip reduction opportunities by engaging more people in the effort. Many community members have an interest in reducing their vehicle trips, but the work trip is not necessarily the easiest trip for them to make on foot, by bicycle or on the bus. The new program encourages them to choose where they want to begin.

Whatcom Smart Trips includes the following list of educational, assistance and incentive programs. Except where noted, Whatcom Smart Trips programs are available to everyone age 18 or older and traveling to destinations in Whatcom County.

- **Whatcom Smart Trips Website** – allows adults living or working in Whatcom County to record the walking, cycling, transit and ridesharing trips that they make and track the vehicle miles not driven and pollution prevented at [www.WhatcomSmartTrips.org](http://www.WhatcomSmartTrips.org)
- **Smart Trips Incentives** – include, discount cards, gift certificates, cash prizes and recognition for Smart Trips participants as they reach certain milestones in the number of smart trips made
- **Emergency Ride Home** – provides limited, free taxi service to bus riders and Smart Trips participants who experience an emergency or illness at work and need to get home quickly
- **Employer Assistance** – provides assistance to employers who implement voluntary and/or CTR-required worksite trip reduction programs
- **Group Bus Pass Sales** – will provide discounted bus passes to individuals in groups where large percentages of the individuals will purchase bus passes (The current demonstration project provides free passes to employees and residents of downtown Bellingham and Fairhaven.)
- **School Smart Trips** – This program is still being developed. It is expected to include educational and incentive programs at elementary schools and may involve high school student leaders.
- **Bicycle Smart Trips** – provides educational opportunities for children and adults who want to learn how to ride bicycles as transportation

- **Neighborhood Smart Trips** – will provide home-based education and assistance to all interested individuals in Bellingham households. State and/or federal funding is being sought for this program.
- **Smart Trips Public Awareness Campaign** – includes advertising and public presentations to make the community aware of all elements of the Smart Trips program

Appendix 5:

Stakeholder Meeting Summaries for Employment Access and Coordinated Human Services  
Transportation (EACH) Plan Preparation, 2006

(see separate document)