

WOW Transportation Focus Group

Volume 1, Issue 8

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Congestion is the Problem

Traffic **congestion has increased dramatically** in the Puget Sound Region in the last several years. This is an obvious truth to anyone who drives a car – and that’s most of us. This is not inevitable. It is the direct result of the **choices our leaders have made**.

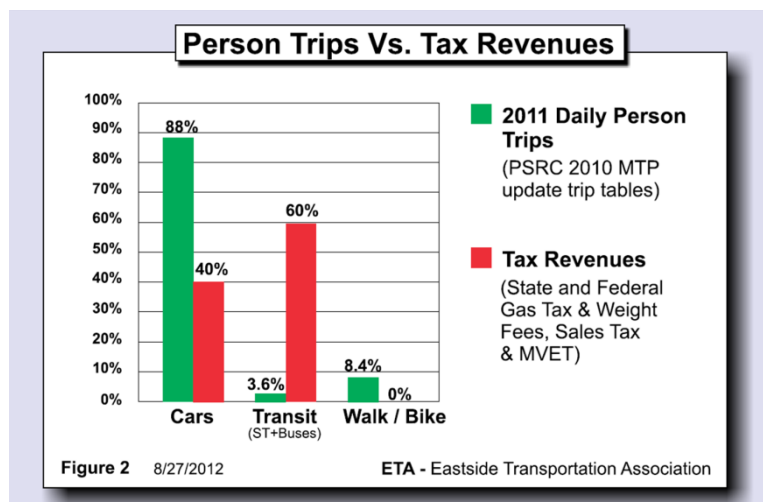
The rail transit lobby loves to claim that “**We cannot build our way out of congestion**”. You hear that at almost any public discussion on transportation. **Nonsense!** It is a choice the region has made. Here is some data on the results of those choices.

SOME SOURCE DATA

The Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) is starting to keep track of the congestion growth. In September, 2015 PSRC published **Stuck in Traffic: Fall Edition** ([click here](#)). A couple of tidbits: From chart 3, **Delay increased by 20%** in 2015 while traffic volume increased by only 1%. Hours of delay on the regional freeway system has increased by 95% since 2010.

The **population and jobs** in the non-Seattle urban area of King County have grown substantially more than in Seattle. Seattle has 662,400 of King County’s 2,052, 800 people. That means that the non-Seattle and rural areas of King County have more than 2/3 of the population. Seattle is growing, but the rest of King County has grown by more people. Same with jobs. Job growth is a scatter diagram around the county. Roads serve virtually all travel in King County. When we under-invest in roads, we under-invest in our local economy. PSRC’s Stuck in Traffic data highlights our under-investment, particularly in the Puget Sound Region.

Somewhere **just under 90% of all regional daily travel is done in cars and small trucks**, with about 3.6% in rail and bus transit, about 8% by walking and way under 1% on bikes. See ETA’s Person Trips Vs Tax Revenues chart in [The War on Cars](#). When you consider that all of the bus trips are on roadways, a very large portion of the walking trips are on sidewalks adjacent to roadways and most bike trips are on roadways, over 99% of our region’s person trips are on the roads.



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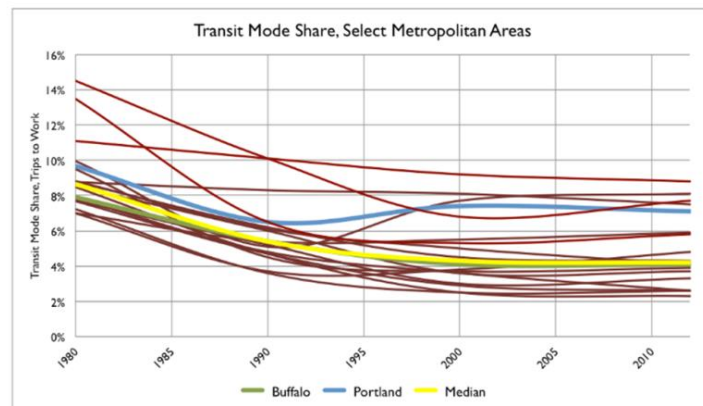
WSDOT publishes an annual **Congestion Report**. The 2015 report is found at [here](#). The Congestion Report identifies that 90% of the congestion in the entire state occurs in the King and Snohomish Counties. It is loaded with data of existing conditions on the State Highways.

Inrix, the Kirkland based leader in world-wide mega-data on traffic identifies the Seattle area as the seventh most congested region in the nation ([Inrix](#)). We are better than Los Angeles but worse than Houston and Chicago. The Seattle metropolitan area ranks about 20th in regional population in the United States.

While the congestion on our roads is increasing dramatically before our eyes, we do things like Managed Express Toll Lanes on **I-405**, propose **\$27 billion light rail** train concepts to increase rail transit ridership from ¼ to ½ percent and spend \$12 billion on our system to **reduce travel lanes from 20 to 18** (combination of I-90, SR 520 and the SR 99 Tunnel – see ETA's [The War on Cars](#)).

In the Seattle area we have decided to under fund our road system to enhance the potential for transit ridership over the last three decades. We have poured resources into transit while seeing the portion of the region's daily person trips carried by transit reduced from over 6% in the 1980's to under 4% today. Yes, the transit ridership has gone up, but the region has grown a lot and the portion of trips by transit is down.

Seattle is not alone. Yonah Freemark [reports](#) “...while light rail may appear to make the public transportation system more appealing to the average rider, the construction of such a system will not automatically result in increased transit use. The data from 30 years' experience with the mode in the United States make that very clear”. This chart



shows the multi-year transit results in metropolitan areas that constructed light rail systems in the 1980's. Transit ridership share is down in all of these metro areas.

We can reduce congestion if we decide to. That is a **decision** we get to make. Today, our leadership is taking us in the wrong direction. The results are obvious in the daily commute trip delay increases. We can do better.