Bottlenecks

Bottlenecks in transportation planning and development are a major cause of traffic delays. When increased traffic volumes combine with narrow roadways, ramp and highway merges, or awkward intersections, a bottleneck forms. The second Tacoma Narrows Bridge is an example of how fixing these areas can relieve congestion and improve mobility. The following list includes 114 bottlenecks defined in the 2007-2026 Washington Transportation Plan and other notable traffic chokepoints.

68. I-5 NB Off/On Ramp Terminal at Tumwater Boulevard
69. Pacific Avenue Interchange NB off ramp terminal
70. SB SR-167 at exit for 277th Street
71. SR-512 at Canyon Road Interchange
72. SR-512 to SR-7 (Pacific Ave) Interchange
73. SR-512 at Canyon Road Interchange
74. SR-512 to SR-7 (Pacific Ave) Interchange
75. SR-512 at Canyon Road Interchange
76. SR 512 at SR 7 (Pacific Ave) Interchange
77. US 101/SR 8 Interchange - WB Ramp (Decreasing)
78. SR 512 at SR 7 (Pacific Ave) Interchange
79. SR-512 to SR-7 (Pacific Ave) Interchange
80. SR 14 intersections with SR 500 and 2nd
81. SR 18 at SR 167 Interchange
82. Ramp from SR 500 WB to I-205 SB
83. SR 509 at I-705
84. SR 18 at SR 167 Interchange
85. SR 18 at SR 167 Interchange
86. Ramp from SR 500 WB to I-205 SB
87. From Talley Way to I-5
88. SR 18 at SR 167 Interchange
89. SR 18 at SR 167 Interchange
90. I-5 SB off ramp to N 2nd Avenue and US 101 off ramp to N 2nd
91. Intersection of SR 3 and SR 300
92. Intersection of SR 3 and SR 106
93. Intersection of SR 3 and SR 9
94. SR 500 to Padden Pkwy
95. Intersection of SR 3 and SR 106
96. SR 14 from I-205 to 164th Ave
97. Intersection of SR 19 and SR 116
98. SR 522 to I-405
99. SR 303/Riddell Road to McWilliams Road
100. I-5 between US 101 and Henderson St. exit
101. I-5 between US 101 and Henderson St. exit
102. I-5 between Trosper Road Interchange and Thurston/Pierce Co. Line
103. Miller Bay to Kingston Ferry
104. US 2/East Wenatchee - Cascade Ave Interchange
105. Seattle, WA 98124-3643
106. US 2/East Wenatchee - Cascade Ave Interchange
107. SR 28/Junction US 2/97 to 9th Street - Stage 7
108. SR 28/Junction US 2/97 to 9th Street - Stage 6
109. SR 28/Junction US 2/97 to 9th Street - Stage 5
110. SR 28/Junction US 2/97 to 9th Street - Stage 4
111. SR 28/Junction US 2/97 to 9th Street - Stage 3
112. US 2/East Wenatchee - Cascade Ave Interchange
113. SR 28/Junction US 2/97 to 9th Street - Stage 2
114. SR 28/Junction US 2/97 to 9th Street - Stage 1

The Center for Transportation at Washington Policy Center researches and analyzes the best practices for relieving traffic congestion by recognizing a vision of a system based on freedom of movement. It provides policymakers, citizens and the media with access to current research on transportation issues through in-depth policy briefs, regular updates, issue forums and legislative testimony. It has been featured in numerous news outlets around the state and across the country, including The Wall Street Journal, Bloomberg News, and CNN.

The poll results were taken from Washington Policy Center’s recent statewide poll asking voters about the importance of traffic relief across Washington State. Voters continue to show strong support for making traffic relief a high priority. Two-thirds of respondents feel the state’s role in relieving traffic congestion is important, but also believe the state is performing poorly at actually doing anything about it. The poll was conducted by Moove Information as a telephone survey to 500 voters across Washington State, on January 14-15, 2009. The sampling error is plus or minus 4% at the 95% confidence level.

To learn more about the developing trends in transportation policy and congestion relief, visit us online at:

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- washingtonpolicyblog.org

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Five Principles of Responsible Transportation Policy

1. Tie spending to performance measures, like traffic relief and economic development

Traffic relief is the most basic goal in any transportation policy, yet it does not exist as a priority in Washington State.

In all cases, mobility should mean traffic relief, but instead state officials define it as a strategy to move people, rather than to improve traffic flow. This means spending shifts from actually fixing congestion to providing alternatives to congestion. This strategy is more expensive, less efficient and ironically, will only lead to greater congestion.

According to the federal Highway Administration, private passenger vehicles represent over 85% of all trips and transportation in the Seattle area. This means all other modes including transit, walking, bicycling and telecommuting serve only 15% of travelers.

Adopting a policy that disproportionately ties spending to only 15% of the workforce will always lead to greater congestion, because the system that supports the remaining 85% is left to languish.

In business, measuring performance is a way of life. It is viewed as an indispensable tool that shapes decisions on resource allocation. In the public sector, however, performance measures are more often than not an inconvenience. This is especially true in transportation policy.

2. Respect people’s freedom of mobility

Government policies in transportation should be responsive to the market and improve the freedom of citizens to drive their choice. Over-restricting transportation policy, not only is a violation of people’s liberty in favor of a socialist beneﬁt whose supposedly, a greater collective good is created. These measures always fail because of what Milton Friedman called, “one of the strongest and most effective market forces in society,” freedom. Economics tells us what they behave is for their own lives.

Instead, proponents of social change should work in the marketplace of ideas to persuade others to share their vision and work towards it. They should not use the leverage of government to force their ideas. Social change is a collective process. If that is needed, once reform is broadly supported by the public, Policymakers should respect people’s choices and allow for a greater freedom of their mobility by actively working to reduce traffic congestion.

3. Deploy resources based on market demand

Transportation resources should be distributed based on market demand rather than the current system of transportation infrastructure that is somehow meant to attract demand.

In economics, supply is a function of demand. This means a willingness to use a service must exist before a supply of that service is created. Boeing executives do not make 300 airplanes knowing they will only sell 100. Suppliers will not produce a disproportionate amount of labor in low demand sectors, where the willingness to use the service does not justify the spending.

European transit systems provide a good contrasting example of how these economic concepts apply. In Switzerland, transit is successful, not because of the amount of service or infrastructure, but because the country has certain market based principles that drive transit use.

In the United States, the necessary market to support transit has not yet existed. The demand for transit is dependent on the freedom to choose. Policymakers should respect the freedom of transit users and allow for a greater freedom of their mobility by actively reducing traffic congestion.

4. Improve freight mobility

Freight mobility plays a significant role in transportation policy but ironically, the state’s investment in transportation is an obstacle for improving the movement of goods.

The freight industry pays about 25% of the revenue the state receives from fuel taxes, vehicle registration and weight fees in Washington. Yet, very little goes to pay for freight-specific infrastructure. The industry is forced to rely on projects that prioritize other transportation areas. The theory is, “what’s good for one is good for all.”

The problem is that spending is based on other agendas, rather than congestion relief, and not surprisingly, freight mobility suffers. According to the Federal Highway Administration, it costs the freight industry $32 for every hour of traffic delay. In 2004, that amounted to $7.8 billion nationally. That means the cost of getting goods to market is nearly $18 billion directly attributed to traffic congestion.

Policymakers must acknowledge that congestion relief is possible and look for cost-effective solutions that maximize border to border delay relief.

Policymakers should:

- Create a freight investment account to fund freight specific projects by reallocating existing revenues
- Increase heavy rail capacity to allow medium and long range freight more choice to shift from road to rail
- Create freight-only lanes/roads to support local freight distribution

5. Utilize public/private partnerships

Using the Public/Private Partnership (PPP) concept, policymakers can find effective ways to fund new projects, and to maintain current transportation infrastructure.

Relative to the rest of the United States, Washington has been slow to fully embrace the PPP strategy. These partnerships can take many forms and, according to the National Council for Public-Private Partnerships, there are generally about a dozen types. They range from easy to private to mostly public and several types incorporate a balance of both characteristics.

There are many benefits associated with a PPP. They include leveraging private dollars for public use, shifting risk to taxpayers in the private sector, and lowering overall project costs.

Other factors like public oversight, asset ownership, long term maintenance, liability and labor, which PPPs are a better fit. In Washington, there have been few real PPPs and prevented partnerships from forming. Yet, other states have reformed these problems through legislation, public sector participation and public/private partnerships.

Policymakers should:

- Create a (PPP) concept, policymakers can find effective ways to fund new projects, and to maintain current transportation infrastructure.

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Don't agree with Mr. Jones or Mr. Smith? To understand how people feel about government’s role in transportation, respondents were asked to consider the following scenarios:

Mr. Jones: Better state government. Transportation decisions should be made based on economic and demographic factors. Public/Private Partnerships have a proven ability to provide good value for the Washington tax payer. Investing in transportation infrastructure is an effective way to spur economic development.

Mr. Smith: Free market. The role of the government in infrastructure investments should be minimal. Boeing executives do not develop infrastructure investments. Government spending is a waste of taxpayer dollars.

Policymakers should:

- Create a freight investment account to fund freight specific projects by reallocating existing revenues
- Increase heavy rail capacity to allow medium and long range freight more choice to shift from road to rail
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How would you rate state government’s performance on relieving traffic congestion?

According to the 2009 Washington Policy Center Traffic Congestion Poll, 16% of respondents stated they are “very satisfied” with state government’s performance on relieving traffic congestion. An additional 27% said they “somewhat satisfied.” A total of 28% rate state government’s performance on relieving traffic congestion as “excellent/good.”

Washington Policy Center encourages five principles of responsible transportation policy to help policymakers in returning to a system that improves people’s freedom of movement.

TOTAL excellent/good 28%
TOTAL not so good/66%
TOTAL very poor 6%

Source: 2009 Washington Policy Center Traffic Congestion Poll

Do you agree more with Mr. Jones or Mr. Smith?

Mr. Jones: 51%
Mr. Smith: 42%