



Policy Brief: Building Vibrant Communities

King County is one of the most strikingly beautiful places in the world, with rugged mountains, lakes and rivers, and an abundance of natural resources. The region was founded by, and continues to attract, independent-minded people with an entrepreneurial spirit. For almost three decades, King County has been a national leader in sustainable growth policy. Since 1990, we have successfully accommodated 500,000 more people and created thousands of new jobs. The vast majority of new growth is occurring in urban areas where people can take advantage of an increasingly connected regional transportation system, with quick access to goods and services. We have done much to protect our environment, our rural areas and natural resource lands.

The challenges we face in the coming decades will require a greater sense of urgency, creativity and commitment. By the year 2040, more than 5 million people will be living in the Puget Sound region – a 30 percent increase from today. This population increase will occur largely in cities, and will require significant new housing, transportation and other urban infrastructure. Two-thirds of the development on the ground in 2050 – houses, apartments, office buildings and other structures – will be built between 2007 and 2050. The high capacity transit systems that will move people are not yet complete. Current levels of investment are not adequate to maintain and preserve our existing roadway infrastructure.

Our recent investments in high capacity transit, and the investments we will make in the near future, present a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to transform our built environment in a way that will keep our region globally competitive, address climate change, increase equity and opportunity, and make us healthier and happier.

The Opportunity

No other aspect of human experience has a greater impact on people's overall quality of life than the communities they live in. The way we design and build our neighborhoods

can make us healthier, more likely to walk or bike, and more likely to know our neighbors and feel a sense of connection to them. Or, they can lead to us spending more time in cars, feeling more isolated, and with less time to spend with our families. Mixed-use communities that are compact, connected, and walkable increase mobility, create opportunities for employment, and provide quick access to goods and services. They also create a sense of community, which enhances safety. Residents with access to trails, bike corridors, pedestrian pathways, and frequent transit service enjoy greater

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mobility and better overall health. The use of green building and low-impact development techniques creates healthy spaces, protects our environment, and reduces energy use and greenhouse gas emissions. Concentrating growth and development in urban areas preserves rural and resource

lands, which sustain us with local food, clean air and water, and give us a place to recreate and connect with nature. Preserving our historic buildings, landmarks and scenic byways adds to the legacy of our cultural heritage and contributes to our sense of regional identity. Together, these strategies will ensure that our neighborhoods and communities are vibrant, sustainable and resilient.

Advancing a Regional Agenda for Mobility and Sustainability

In coordination with the King County Council and with other regional leaders, King County Executive Dow Constantine will work in his second term to advance an integrated land use and transportation agenda that will lead to increased mobility, decreased climate impacts, better public health outcomes, and improved access to opportunity for all residents.

At the regional level, Executive Constantine will represent King County on the governing board of the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) as it implements the regional growth strategy and transportation plan for the four-county region (King, Pierce, Snohomish and Kitsap counties). In 2014, the PSRC will update the regional transportation plan and advance land use strategies that complement and support it. In another key regional leadership role, the Executive will chair the Sound Transit Board as it considers expansion of the current system in the update of its Long Range Plan. The Sound Transit Board will identify new station locations for Sound Transit 2 that will influence

the potential for transit-oriented development and connections to the regional bus system.

At the countywide level, Executive Constantine will chair the Growth Management Planning Council (GMPC), working with the 39 cities and special purpose districts to update the countywide growth plan. In 2014, the GMPC will develop countywide greenhouse gas reduction targets, recommend new tools and strategies for affordable housing, and will work with school districts to plan for the future educational needs of our children. The Executive has recommended that the County Council send to voters a plan to preserve current levels of Metro Transit service, which is fundamental to our economy and to our global competitiveness. And while preservation of the current system is critical, it is not enough to transition the region from an auto-oriented culture to one where most county residents have access to a 30-minute commute. Doing so will require investments that go well beyond our current commitments. Therefore, the Executive will also work to expand transit service to address the hundreds of thousands of hours of unmet service need.

At the local government level, the Executive will begin development of the 2016 update to the King County Comprehensive Plan, which governs development in urban unincorporated areas that will eventually be annexed by cities, and in rural areas that will remain under the County's jurisdiction. The Executive will work with cities to ensure the seamless governance transition of the few remaining urban unincorporated areas, and to secure the regional commitments necessary to continue protecting rural areas and supporting natural resource-based economies. The Executive will also forge new agreements with cities to preserve farm and forest land by transferring development from rural areas to urban centers. The Executive will undertake land use planning that is supportive of rural landscapes and lifestyles, and will work to preserve and maintain the County's rural road network to maintain basic access for rural residents, to keep our agricultural and forestry industries moving, and preserve access to the 26,000 acre King County Park System. Finally, he will continue King County's national leadership in green building and low-impact development.

New Initiatives and Next Steps

Confronting climate change and building equity are top priorities for Executive Constantine in his second term. The transportation and land use strategies and actions below are foundational to addressing these generational challenges. For more information on climate change, you can read the [confronting climate change infographic and policy brief](#), or read the County's [Equity and Social Justice Annual Report](#).

Increasing Mobility

Secure Stable Funding to Preserve and Enhance Metro Transit Service:

The Executive's top transportation priority is securing stable funding for Metro Transit to avoid cuts that will harm our economy and disproportionately impact low-income communities. He will also pursue opportunities to expand the system to address 500,000 underfunded service hours and will lead a regional discussion on system-wide tolling to replace outmoded revenue sources. Along with another planned fare increase, the Executive will implement a low income fare program for those under 200 percent of the federal policy level.

Maintain the Road Network that Connects Cities and Supports Businesses:

In his second term, the Executive will lay the groundwork for a solution to fund King County Roads, either through state legislative action or a countywide funding source. King County maintains the roads outside of cities that support more than 1 million trips each day providing access to school and work, moving farm to market, providing routes for freight and businesses, and allowing access to the 26,000 acre King County park system. About half of the trips on high volume roads originate in cities and other counties. A combination of annexations, lower property valuations and a decline in gas tax revenue has decreased by one-third the funds available for King County's 1500 miles of roads and 180 bridges. The amount of funding available for the county road system in 2014 will be \$85 million, while the annual investment necessary to maintain the existing road system is about \$200 million.

Expand the Regional High Capacity Transit System: The Executive will preside over the Sound Transit Board for the next two years as it begins building Sound Transit 2, updates the Long Range Plan and determines whether to seek a Sound Transit 3 package in 2016 or 2020. Sound Transit 2 is the 2008 voter-approved package that adds regional bus and commuter rail system improvements along with 36 additional miles of light rail to form a 55-mile regional system. The Long Range Plan will determine which projects might be eligible for a Sound Transit 3 package.

Enhance the Multi-Modal Transportation Network: The Executive will seek to consolidate the Ferry District into King County government and pass stable funding for ferry operations. He will also seek to connect and enhance the regional trail network, and better integrate it with the rest of the transportation network.

Creating Healthy, Equitable and Vibrant Communities

The complementary strategies below address affordable housing, urban mobility, education and governance. Together they will help to build healthy, equitable and vibrant communities for all county residents.

Provide Access to Affordable Housing Choices: Housing prices in the Puget Sound region continue to rise, impacting families, workers and our economy. To address this, the Executive will lead the GMPC as it provides guidance to jurisdictions updating their comprehensive plans, developing tools, strategies and commitments that will result in affordable housing choices for all county residents. He will also work at the Puget Sound Regional Council to develop a regional Transit Oriented Development fund to leverage private investment and increase the construction of affordable housing.

Growing Transit Communities: The Executive will promote region-wide adoption of the Puget Sound Regional Council's [Growing Transit Communities](#) compact and implementation strategies, which will focus housing, jobs and services in urban centers and transit communities.

Transition Urban Unincorporated Areas to Cities: In the interest of providing efficient and cost effective service delivery, under state law cities are to provide most urban services and counties are to provide regional and rural services. The Executive will work with cities and seek state assistance to transition remaining urban unincorporated areas to city governance and ensure that all residents have access to urban services.

Strengthen Green Building Standards and Support Private Sector

Innovation: The built environment is a leading contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. To combat this, the Executive will continue King County's leadership on [green building](#) and low-impact development. He will require all government construction and major renovation projects to strive to achieve the top national green construction rating, and will support private sector innovation with incentives and technical assistance.

Preserve Farmland and Forestland, Transfer Development to Cities: The Executive will seek new agreements with cities under the regional [Transfer of Development Rights](#) program, which moves development from rural areas into urban centers, preserves agricultural and forest lands, and provides needed infrastructure in urban communities.

Work with School Districts to Site Schools in the Hearts of our

Communities: The location of our schools contributes to the livability, sustainability and overall health of neighborhoods and communities. [School siting](#) decisions can encourage physical activity, reduce environmental impacts on air, water and land, and address equity concerns. The Executive will coordinate with cities and school districts on long range capital planning to better provide for the educational needs of the region and to ensure educational excellence for our children.

Connect the Regional Trail and Open Space System: In addition to parks and ball fields, the 26,000-acre [King County Parks system](#) includes lush forests, quiet meadows, regional trails and hiking trails. To increase mobility and access and improve urban ecology, the Executive will work with cities and regional partners to connect and expand our system of trails and open spaces, especially in areas that are currently underserved.

Preserve Historic Buildings, Landmarks and Scenic Byways: Historic buildings and landmarks serve as important community touchstones — tangible icons of the present generation’s connection to the past. The Executive will preserve this connection through implementation of the recently updated [Historic Preservation Strategic Plan](#) (2013-2020).

Conclusion

King County has worked collaboratively for three decades to build a solid framework for growth management planning. The challenges we face in the future will require strong leadership, creative thinking and a cohesive regional strategy.

During his second term, the Executive will work at the regional, county and local levels and in partnership with local governments, businesses, and residents to leverage our collective investments to the benefit of all.