

# King County Bridges and Roads Task Force

## Final Report and Recommendations to the King County Executive and Council

January 20, 2016



**King County**

January 20, 2016

**Dear King County Executive Dow Constantine and King County Council,**

Our King County road network is at a critical juncture. The King County Bridges and Roads Task Force (Task Force) was created to identify policy and fiscal strategies to sustainably maintain and preserve the unincorporated network.

With this letter, the Task Force transmits its final report and recommendations for sustainably maintaining and preserving the system of bridges and roads in unincorporated King County. The critical issues considered by the Task Force, primarily concerning the significant gap between basic operations, maintenance needs and available funding, made this a complex yet vital undertaking. The Task Force is pleased to present to you these recommendations.

The Task Force has worked diligently since August 2015 to craft these recommendations. In arriving at these recommendations, the Task Force reviewed and considered significant information and diverse perspectives. King County staff made a number of presentations, an outside consultant reported on their review of agency assumptions, public comments were received and the group participated in substantial policy discussions. We ultimately reached agreement on potential solutions and recommendations that we hope, if implemented, can help address the county's deteriorating bridge and road network that supports all King County residents and the region.

The Task Force would be happy to serve as a resource as the Executive Office and Council consider these recommendations and stands ready to assist in their implementation. The first step toward implementation was the last Task Force meeting held on January 20, 2016, but the Task Force will look to the Executive Office and Council for further direction beyond that last meeting.

Task Force members have appreciated this opportunity to serve King County and look forward to having these recommendations incorporated into future planning.

Sincerely,

King County Bridges and Roads Task Force members

*(signatures on reverse)*



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**Van Anderson**  
King County Boundary  
Review Board

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**John Bloomer**  
Enumclaw Fire Department  
& King County Fire District #28

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**Josh Brown**  
Puget Sound Regional Council

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**Peter Eberle**  
Four Creeks  
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WA State Legislature  
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**Bob Harrison**  
City of Issaquah

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King County Agricultural Commission

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**Amy Ockerlander**  
City of Duvall

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**Ron Paananen**  
Parsons Brinckerhoff

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**Blake Trask**  
Washington Bikes

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**Bryce Yadon**  
Futurewise

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## Acknowledgements

The Task Force would like to acknowledge the following organizations and individuals for their contributions to the work of the Task Force:

- Dow Constantine, King County Executive
- Kathy Lambert, King County Councilmember
- The King County Council
- Harold Taniguchi, Director of King County Department of Transportation
- Dwight Dively, King County Budget Director
- King County staff, in particular Brenda Bauer, Jay Osborne, Susan West, Chris Arkills, John Resha, Stephanie Pure, and Wesley Edwards
- Michael Hodgins, BERK Consulting
- Triangle Associates

## Task Force Recommendations

The Bridges and Roads Task Force charge:

*Recommend financially sustainable and equitable strategies to deliver an unincorporated road system that supports people's transportation needs, local and regional economic development and quality of life.*

### Task Force Decision from January 20, 2016 Task Force Meeting

The Task Force, at its January 20, 2016 meeting, approved by consensus this Final Report and Recommendations with the following decision:

*The King County Bridges & Roads Task Force gives its final approval of the Task Force Recommendations Report – inclusive of high and low impact recommendations.*

### Introduction

The development of recommendations occurred in multiple phases and through five meetings. Ideas for recommendations proposed by the Task Force were primarily based on the initial background information provided by King County and the individual experience of Task Force members. A few initial recommendations also originated out of assessment interviews held early in the Task Force process by Triangle Associates – a neutral third party facilitator that also facilitated each Task Force meeting. The Task Force developed recommendations in the following phases:

**Background Information:** Task Force members received detailed factual information at their first two meetings about the causes and size of the current bridges and roads funding gap, actions the county has taken to address the funding gap, current available revenues and expenditures, and funding projection assumptions. The Task Force also had opportunities to ask questions and request additional information from the County during these meetings.

**Initial Recommendations Development and Review:** Fifteen Task Force members proposed a combined 134 initial recommendations (noting that additional recommendations were added later for a total of 152). One member proposed one recommendation, one proposed 39 recommendations while most proposed a few recommendations each. A complete list of all recommendations proposed and considered by the Task Force is found in *Appendix A*.

**Guiding Principles:** The Task Force was asked to keep the following principles in mind for recommendations review.

- *Consider the following categories for recommendations: Efficiencies; Infrastructure; Revenues and funding; and Outreach.*
- *Consider keeping final Task Force recommendations to a small number.*
- *Look for recommendations that are “big ideas or levers” that will make a substantive difference in addressing the funding gap. Remember that projected revenues are about \$100 million while needs are \$350 million or more.*
- *Consider recommendations that the Task Force believes can be implemented.*

**Refinement of Recommendations:** Initially, Triangle Associates worked with King County Road Services Division (Road Services) staff to sort recommendations according to which agency would control implementation. From the initial 134 recommendations, the Task Force, through breakout and large group discussions, followed an iterative process of combining, re-categorizing, or removing recommendations based on their impacts and relevance. The Task Force also asked for and reviewed additional information about specific recommendations. Some recommendations were identified within the authority of Road Services, and those were sorted into a separate list for action by Road Services. The Task Force developed a short-list of recommended tools and actions that were beyond the current authority of Road Services, requiring some action or authority from the state legislature or an agency other than Road Services.

**Consensus on Final Recommendations:** After developing a concise list of high impact recommendations and refining the wording of each, the Task Force, at its November 12, 2015 meeting, voted to approve recommendations, shown in the next section of this report, for King County's consideration.

## **Task Force Findings**

### **Factual Findings**

King County's road network is the responsibility of a number of agencies, and it supports the county's role as an economic engine of the state. King County has 29 percent of the state's population and 40 percent of the jobs in Washington State. The county has a population of about two million people, including approximately 250,000 residents that live outside of cities in what is referred to as the unincorporated area. There are about 3,700 miles of bridges and roads outside of cities, and of those, roughly 900 miles are state highways managed by the state, around 1,300 miles are privately owned, and about 1,500 miles are county owned and managed. To put that in context, the distance, as the crow flies, between Canada and Mexico is 1,200 miles. The county's responsibility includes 181 bridges, 5.7 million feet of drainage ditch, 2.9 million feet of drainage pipe, 114 miles of guardrail, 44,000 traffic control signs, 80 traffic signals and 55 cameras.

King County estimated that to manage the existing infrastructure at its' optimal life cycle cost and address certain mobility and capacity needs would require about \$350 million dollars annually. Road Services asked an outside consultant, BERK Consulting, to evaluate their methodology for estimating costs and assumptions underlying annual maintenance and preservation costs for the system. Noting that the estimates were based on 2012 data, and including updated information on the decline of the system, BERK Consulting concluded that the county's estimates of need were low (see *Appendix B*). Presently, the county has about \$100 million annually in revenue for the care of county bridges and roads; enough funding to address immediate safety issues, clean water requirements, and a modest amount of maintenance and preservation activities. At this level of funding, the county estimates that the system will continue to deteriorate and that, in the next 25 years, an estimated 35 bridges could be closed as they become unsafe, and about 72 miles of roadway restricted or closed – based on known condition assessments.

The Task Force recognizes that, through King County's implementation of the state Growth Management Act (GMA) designed to avoid sprawl, increased density and commercial activity have been largely confined to cities. There are now 39 cities in King County and growth is largely confined in their boundaries. This leaves a small rural unincorporated population of 250,000, residing largely on lower value properties and without business activity that raises revenue. Since King County is a dense urban county, county roads are carrying about one million trips per day – connecting cities and all county residents to destinations. Half of the trips on the high volume county roads come from cities and other counties. Even other counties are heavily dependent upon King County bridges and roads; about 40 percent of Snohomish County workers commute to jobs in King County, and about 28 percent commute from Pierce County. Yet the responsibility for funding the county road system depends primarily on property tax revenue from the remaining rural populace.

The county has made a number of drastic and significant steps to address the decline in revenues from annexations, the recession, lower revenue collection, and restrictions on increased tax collections. Efforts included reducing about 45 percent of the staff, consolidating facilities, decreasing costs, leveraging technology, implementing process improvements, partnering with other agencies, and efforts to reduce road inventory.

#### **Task Force Statements of Understanding**

Understanding that Road Services has taken drastic and significant steps in attempting to address the bridges and roads financial shortfall, it is obvious that the financial situation is now at a point where significant changes are needed in revenue generation. While the Task Force identified some efficiency and infrastructure recommendations, major additional revenue tools are required to address the magnitude of the challenge.

The Task Force additionally acknowledges that the revenue generating tools available to local governments in Washington State are significantly outdated. Washington State's tax structure was established in the 1930s and is not adequate for local governments in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy.

In addition, the Task Force understands that a King County Economic Development Task Force, established in the early 1990s to provide a detailed fiscal analysis of Countywide planning policies following passage of the GMA, foresaw the current funding crisis that exists today for unincorporated King County bridges and roads. The current King County Bridges and Roads Task Force hopes its recommendations ensure that another 25 years do not pass before the current bridges and roads funding situation is addressed.

The Task Force proposes that the King County Executive and Council consider six "High Impact" recommendations including one recommendation for study and two for outreach, and that the county continue to evaluate and pursue several "Low Impact" Task Force recommendations that won't bridge the significant gap in funding but that the Task Force believes are worth implementation consideration.

## **Task Force Recommendations**

The Task Force agreed on the following high and low impact recommendations which address revenue, infrastructure, and areas of further study, efficiencies, and outreach.

### **HIGH IMPACT RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following long-term recommendations were identified by the Task Force, at its November 12, 2015 meeting, as those most likely to substantively and most effectively impact the financial gap for maintenance and operation of county bridges and roads.

#### ***Revenue***

- A new county-wide revenue tool is needed that is tied to inflation, sustainable, long-term, provides a benefit to cities and the county, and is not regressive.
- The Task Force encourages the county, stakeholders, and the legislature to continue to work together to identify the specific tool or tools that meet the principles outlined in the first bullet.

#### Possible Revenue Sources

- A county-wide tax to be spent on city and county roads. For example, expanding the existing road fund property tax so that it is tied to inflation and not limited to the current one percent annual limit.
- An excise tax that is designed to fairly assess the value of vehicles and better addresses equity issues. For example, a Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (MVET) where a portion of the funds is dedicated to county road services.

#### ***Infrastructure***

- Incorporate county roads that are orphaned, islands of roads within a city or cities, and Potential Annexation Areas (PAAs) within the growth boundaries of cities into those jurisdictions. This may require additional authority from the state legislature and support for recipient cities.

#### ***Further Study***

- Further study options for a future tax or fee based on various road pricing options including vehicle miles travelled (VMT) congestion pricing and/or tolling. This would directly tax utilization and addresses taxes declining because of fuel efficiency gains and reduced fuel consumption.

#### ***Outreach***

- Enhance public outreach efforts to increase awareness about issues currently facing Road Services. Stakeholders to include elected bodies, other agencies, the media, and the public.
- Task Force members are invited to serve as ambassadors during implementation of these recommendations.

The Task Force recognizes that the most successful approach may involve using multiple revenue tools and efficiencies with some additional resources dedicated to city transportation needs. Current county taxing authority is insufficient to address the significant gap for county roads, and state legislative action is necessary.

The Task Force believes it is important for recommendations to benefit both city streets and county roads. Therefore, the Task Force recommends that the county partner with cities on a formula of revenue increases, changes in management of urban infrastructure, and to recommend to the legislature a formula that will support a vibrant economy and keep King County communities connected.

### **LOW IMPACT RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Task Force includes the following “Low Impact” recommendations recognizing they will not make a substantial difference in closing the funding gap but which the Task Force believe make sense to consider with the thought that every effort, especially when looked at as a whole, can potentially improve the bridges and roads financial situation.

#### ***Revenue***

- Use more federal funds to support existing county infrastructure and the transportation system.
- Build city support for sustainable county roads funding. Collaborate with other jurisdictions – including cities and counties.
- Change the bonding formula so annexing cities have to pay outstanding debt left to County.
- Consider use of sin taxes to fund bridges and roads.
- Consider use of Real Estate Excise Tax (REET) revenue as a funding source for bridges and roads.
- Consider expanding the business and commercial areas in urban unincorporated King County that are within the Urban Growth Area (UGA).

#### ***Infrastructure***

- Examine less restrictive policies for road vacations so that the county does not have to charge fair-market value and can instead look at other public benefits for said road vacations.

#### ***Efficiencies***

- Increase the amount of work that county crews can perform “in-house” without having to go to bid with contractors where it saves dollars and time.
- Update outdated state statutes for local roads, including at least the county road engineer laws, to reflect current day technology and practices.

#### ***Outreach***

- There is a need for the County to increase transparency around how roads funding is used for the Sheriff’s Office.

## **Next Steps**

The Task Force recommends that the King County Executive and Council strongly consider each recommendation and maintain regular communication with Task Force members about any questions or additional input needed on specific recommendations. Task Force members will be open to possible one-on-one meetings or calls with Council or Executive staff. The final Task Force meeting focused on an implementation strategy for the recommendations – with a particular focus on recommendations that need action by the state legislature. Additionally, through early 2016, Task Force members are encouraged to leverage their own networks, group memberships, and other connections to inform others and spread the word about the current bridges and roads funding gap in King County and how the proposed recommendations would address this gap.

# Task Force Overview and Background Information

## Background

King County maintains about 1,500 miles of roads and 181 bridges. The King County road system supports more than one million trips every day including people traveling to work, school, and recreation; businesses and farmers delivering goods and services; and emergency responders reaching people in distress. People from all parts of the county, and neighboring counties, use these bridges and roads. About half the trips on the high-volume roads originate not only in cities but in other counties.

The system for funding this essential network has not been revisited in nearly 30 years, and it no longer works. Nearly three decades of annexations, lower property values, declines in gas tax revenues, and the effects of voter initiatives have led to the chronic underfunding of today where it is now predicted that some portions may have to be closed as safety hazards. Beyond the lack of an adequate tax base and sufficient revenue tools, King County also has to deal with the aging of infrastructure and an expansive and challenging geography in the unincorporated area.

## The Bridges and Roads Task Force

Beginning in August 12, 2015, a Task Force of 21 regional leaders and community members began to meet to explore solutions for maintaining and preserving the aging bridge and road system in unincorporated King County. Task Force membership included business owners, community group leaders, representatives from agriculture and recreation organizations, road experts, and public policy leaders. Along with providing vital opportunities for people in King County communities, and those who use the roads, to be part of the solution, the formation of the Task Force was also intended to:

- Connect communities;
- Build partnerships; and
- Encourage public stewardship of King County assets.

## Task Force Charge

*Recommend financially sustainable and equitable strategies to deliver an unincorporated road system that supports people's transportation needs, local and regional economic development and quality of life.*

The current chronic underfunding of King County bridges and roads is unsustainable and the Task Force was intended to identify regional solutions to get King County roads back on track. The Task Force provided a constituency, momentum, leadership, and policy recommendations, both for the short and long term, to support regional leaders in addressing this challenge. The Task Force brought key stakeholders together to find sustainable solutions to connect communities and help keep the county moving.

## The Task Force Process

### Appointing the Task Force

The Task Force was appointed by staff from the King County Executive Office, King County Council, and Road Services in July and early August 2015. Task Force members were chosen based on their broad range of perspectives and interests as well as experience related to bridges and roads use, planning, financing, and/or design and construction.

### Task Force Structure and Roles

The Task Force is comprised of representatives from the public, private, and non-profit sectors as well as incorporated and unincorporated King County. Task Force members work in and run local businesses, lead community organizations and advocacy groups, represent King County residents in local and state elected office, represent union members, serve in local emergency management, and have experience from previous positions relevant to local bridges and roads funding. The names and affiliations of all Task Force members are shown below.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
Van Anderson	King County Boundary Review Board
John Bloomer	Enumclaw Fire Department/King County Fire District #28
Josh Brown	Puget Sound Regional Council
Peter Eberle	Four Creeks Unincorporated Area Council
Joe Fain	Washington State Legislature — 47 <sup>th</sup> Legislative District
Ashley Glennon	Fall City Community Association
Michael Gonzales	Teamsters Local 174
Bob Harrison	City of Issaquah
George Irwin	King County Agricultural Commission
Janet Keller	Keller Dairy
Duana Koloušková	Transportation Concurrency Expert Review Panel
Andra Kranzler	Skyway Solutions
Matt Larson	City of Snoqualmie
Hank Lipe	Vashon Island Fire & Rescue
Ceci Mena	Professional & Technical Employees Local 17
Louise Miller	Former King County Councilmember and State Representative
Luis Moscoso	Washington State Legislative — 1 <sup>st</sup> Legislative District
Amy Ockerlander	City of Duvall
Ron Paananen	Parsons Brinckerhoff
Blake Trask	Washington Bikes
Noah Ullman	Executive Assistant to Senator Fain (proxy)
Bryce Yadon	Futurewise

## Meeting Structure and Process

The Task Force met six times from August to November 2015.

1. **Meeting #1:** The August 12, 2015 Task Force meeting included introductions of Task Force members, establishment of a process for Task Force's effort, and hearing Task Force member perspectives on hopes and desired outcomes for the process. It also included Road Services presentations which introduced the Task Force to the size and causes of large funding gaps for King County bridges and roads and likely consequences of leaving this gap unaddressed.
2. **Meeting #2:** The September 16, 2015 Task Force meeting included a presentation by BERK Consulting on its independent review of Road Services budget projections, presentations by King County on past and current Road Services revenue sources and actions the County has taken to address its current budget shortfall, and an opportunity for Task Force members to ask questions about Road Services revenue sources and finances.
3. **Meeting #3:** The October 14, 2015 Task Force meeting included breakout group discussions to refine and identify questions about an initial list of 134 recommendations.
4. **Meeting #4:** The October 28, 2015 Task Force meeting included a report-out by King County topic experts to address answers to questions raised about an initial short-list of recommendations and to narrow down the short-list to a small number of high-impact recommendations.
5. **Meeting #5:** The November 12, 2015 Task Force meeting included selecting and editing of final high and low impact recommendations and approving this recommendations report for review.
6. **Meeting #6:** The January 20, 2016 Task Force meeting focused on final approval of the Task Force Recommendations Report, signing of the recommendations, and detailed discussion of an implementation strategy for the recommendations. King County Executive Dow Constantine and Councilmember Kathy Lambert were in attendance to receive these recommendations.

All meetings were facilitated by a neutral third party, Triangle Associates, hired by Road Services.

## Task Force Operating Protocols and Decision-Making: A Consensus Approach

The Task Force agreed to and followed a set of simple operating protocols, typical for a group with this size and duration, which outlined responsibilities of King County, the Task Force, and the neutral facilitator for this process as well as other internal working protocols necessary for the group to function. The operating protocols outlined a consensus decision making process for acceptance of Task Force products and the final recommendations. The operating protocols specified that acceptance of final recommendations could be made with at least 70 percent of Task Force members present. Detailed Task Force Operating Protocols, including more information about the consensus decision making process the Task Force followed, are found in *Appendix G*.

## Public Process

All Task Force meetings were open to the public, and a public comment period was included at the end of each meeting. Public attendees also had access to hardcopy comment forms and a computer to electronically record comments at each meeting. Comments were additionally received by email throughout the process. Verbal public comments given at the meetings are captured in each meeting

summary and other comments are shown in *Appendix E*. All written materials (agendas, meeting summaries, and other information) were made publically available on the Task Force web page found here: <http://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/transportation/roads/roads-task-force.aspx>

### **Information Considered by the Task Force**

As Task Force members studied the issues, they considered a range of data and information. The majority of this information was provided by Road Services. It included the following documents, reports and policy frameworks, many of which are included in the appendices to this Report.

- Answers to Task Force questions from each Task Force meeting
- Presentations from topic experts at Task Force meetings
- The Strategic Plan for Road Services
- The 2015-2016 Road Services Line of Business Plan

Task Force members additionally learned a substantial amount from interactions and discussions with other Task Force members and from public comments provided at or between meetings.

## Appendices

- A. Master list of all recommendations considered by the Task Force
- B. Presentations given at Task Force meetings
- C. Short-list of recommendations considered by the Task Force
- D. Answers to questions posed by Task Force members
- E. Public comments provided during the Task Force process
- F. Task Force meeting summaries
- G. Task Force operating protocols
- H. Assessment interview presentation
- I. Strategic Plan for Road Services
- J. Road Services 2015-2016 Line of Business Plan

All appendices can be downloaded from the “Final Report” tab of the Task Force web page at <http://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/transportation/roads/roads-task-force.aspx>.