

# Regional Transportation System Initiative

## Final Report



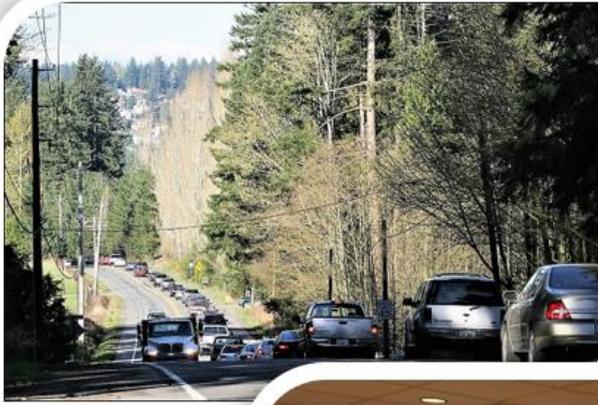
**King County**

May 11, 2018



SOUND CITIES ASSOCIATION

38 Cities. A Million People. One Voice.



## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	2
Executive Summary.....	3
RTSI Network.....	4
RTSI Network Costs and Need .....	5
Revenue Options .....	6
Conclusions .....	8
RTSI Background .....	9
Appendix .....	13

## Acknowledgements

The Sound Cities Association and King County Road Services Division would like to acknowledge the following organizations and individuals for their contributions to the work of the RTSI:

- **Puget Sound Regional Council:**
  - Ben Bakkenta, Senior Program Manager
  - Craig Helmann, Senior Program Manager
  - Pavithra Parthasarathi, Principal Planner
  - Gary Simonson, Associate Planner
- **Sound Cities Association:**
  - Deanna Dawson, Executive Director
  - Brian Parry, Senior Policy Analyst
- **King County Department of Transportation:**
  - Harold Taniguchi, Director
  - Chris Arkills, Government Relations Officer
  - Brenda Bauer, Road Services Division Director
  - Ruth Harvey, Road Services Division Strategic Business Operations Section Manager
  - Jay Osborne, Road Services Deputy Division Director
  - Susan Oxholm, Grants Administrator
  - Susan West, Strategic Communications Specialist
- **King County Executive Office:**
  - Diane Carlson
- **All city staff and elected officials who participated in RTSI, particularly city co-chairs of each Elected Officials Committee meeting, including:**
  - Mayor Nancy Backus, City of Auburn
  - Mayor David Baker, City of Kenmore
- **Triangle Associates (RTSI facilitation and communications consultant):**
  - Bob Wheeler, Senior Facilitator
  - Evan Lewis, Associate

## Executive Summary

The regional network of major and minor arterials, and other connecting roads in King County, is at a critical juncture with aging infrastructure, declining revenues, and an expanding economy. This network supports millions of trips each day for people traveling to work, school, and recreational activities. Regional roads are relied on by businesses and farmers to deliver goods and services, first responders to deliver life-saving aid, and utilities to deliver critical infrastructure. While large volumes of traffic are generated from within King County, substantial volumes of traffic also come from neighboring counties. Regional roads are essential for communities to function. However, with historic levels of growth – more than 83,000 people moved to this region last year – congestion and wear and tear on regional roads is increasingly a serious problem.

Cost is a major challenge in addressing needs of the regional road network. The system for funding regional roads has not been visited in nearly 30 years, and it no longer works. State laws and regulations control local revenue approaches for funding transportation needs, and local agencies do not currently have the authority to raise sufficient resources for the regional road network. New ideas are needed for sustainably maintaining and preserving the critical regional network of bridges and roads.

### **Regional Transportation System Initiative (RTSI)**

RTSI was convened in 2017 for jurisdictions to share challenges and partnering opportunities to solve problems on the regional road network. King County, Sound Cities Association, and Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) invited all agencies with roads in the County to discuss declining funding and the long-term regional road network needs.

A Technical Committee of public works directors, engineers, transportation planners, and city managers met throughout 2017 to identify key roads that connect communities, quantify the revenue shortfall for maintaining these roads and accommodating increased traffic, and identify potential revenue sources. An Elected Officials Committee, comprised of mayors and councilmembers from most cities in King County, reviewed and approved the work of the Technical Committee. The Puget Sound Regional Council provided critical data and information used by both committees. All RTSI committee meeting materials are found on the RTSI website at: [www.regionaltransportationsystem.org](http://www.regionaltransportationsystem.org).

Through the RTSI, King County, jurisdictions in King County, and the Puget Sound Regional Council accomplished the following:

- 1) Defined the regional road network in King County
- 2) Identified costs and the unmet financial needs for roads on the regional network
- 3) Considered and discussed several revenue options and other ideas for addressing regional road network needs

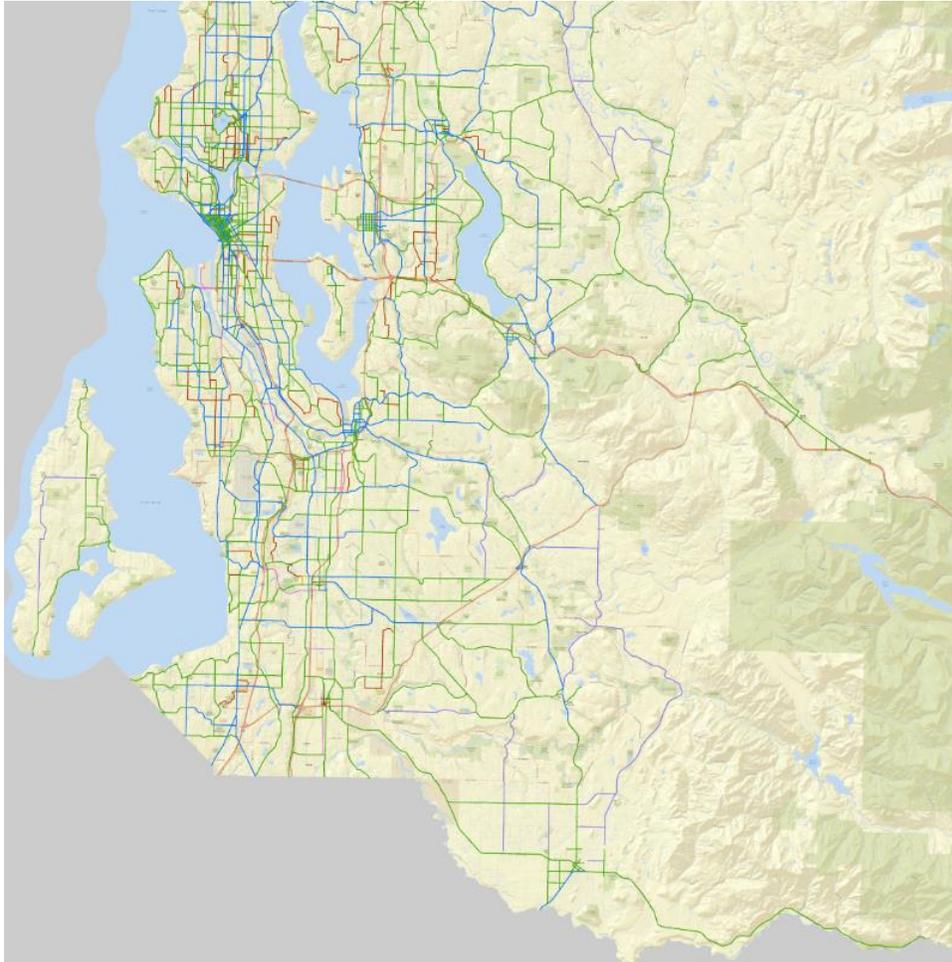
Going forward, local agencies have committed to working together to find solutions for the large, long-term unmet needs for the regional road network.

The information from this collaboration will be valuable for participating agencies and for the Washington State Legislature's consideration of next steps for the critical unfunded needs on local roads.

## RTSI Network

The RTSI Technical Committee and PSRC developed the following map comprising all roads on the RTSI network. This map was approved by the RTSI Elected Officials Committee in June 2017.

**Figure 1: RTSI Regional Road Network Map**



### RTSI Regional Road Network Criteria

Through its first three meetings, the RTSI Technical Committee identified the following criteria for determining which roads to include on the RTSI network map:

- Federally-designated principal and minor arterials
- T1 & T2 freight route arterials
- Non-highway National Highway System segments
- Roadways that include current or planned Frequent Transit Service by any transit agency (15 minute or better service for at least 12 hours per day)
- King County-designated principal and minor arterials

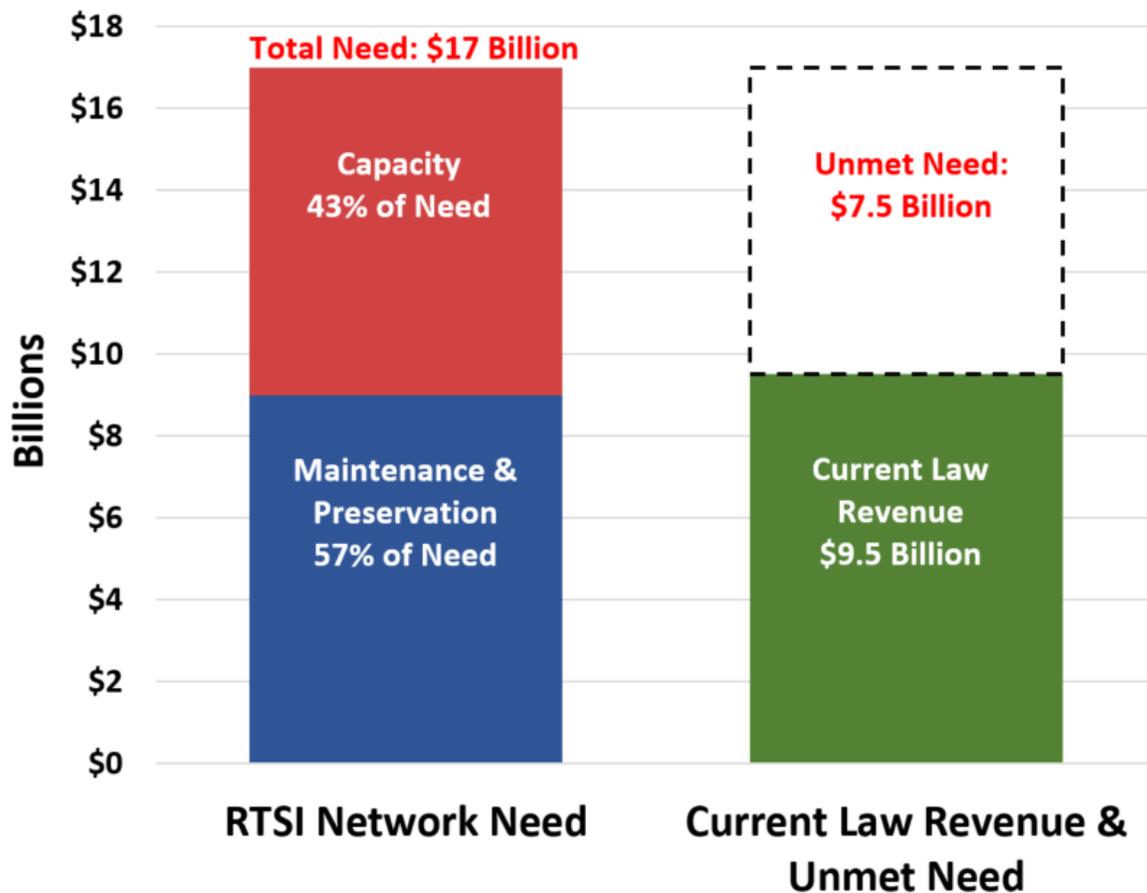
## RTSI Network Costs and Need

PSRC calculated a detailed estimate of the costs and unmet need for the RTSI network. PSRC estimates were for maintenance and preservation (M&P) and capacity projects through 2040. Capacity cost estimates were derived from the Transportation 2040 Regional Capacity Project List and the Local Projects Database (based on local comprehensive plans). Maintenance and preservation cost estimates came from individual jurisdictions and include pavement, structures, and other features such as stormwater infrastructure and street lighting.

### Summary of RTSI Network Costs and Need Estimate

- \$17 billion in estimated maintenance, preservation, and capacity needs, through 2040, for city and county-maintained roads.
- Approximately 57% of city and county regional road needs are projected to be met by current law revenues.
- An estimated \$7-8 billion in unmet revenue needs for city and county-maintained roads, based on current revenue sources.

Figure 2: RTSI Network Estimated Need and Unmet Need Based on Current Law Revenue through 2040



## Revenue Options

Implementation of various revenue sources, including new taxes and fees, could be used to fund the RTSI network unmet need. These options were originally identified in the draft Regional Transportation Plan’s financial strategy and presented to the RTSI Technical Committee and Elected Officials Committee. Some may require changes or approval by the State Legislature. Revenue options reviewed and considered by the RTSI Technical Committee and Elected Officials Committee included:

- Increasing the local option fuel tax
- Indexing the fuel tax to inflation
- Implementing a carbon tax on motor fuels
- Increasing the sales tax on motor fuels
- Raising parking fees/taxes
- Raising transportation impact fees
- Lifting the County road levy
- Increasing the street maintenance utility/transportation utility fee
- Putting a road usage charge in place
- Increasing vehicle license fees

**Table 1: Strengths and Weaknesses of Some Potential Revenue Options Considered through RTSI**

Revenue Options	Strengths	Weaknesses
Index Fuel Tax to Inflation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accounts for inflation and helps address the issue of declining purchasing power of the gas tax</li> <li>• If directed to local needs, would help address state/local fuel tax revenue imbalance</li> <li>• Low costs to administer/collect since the fuel tax is an established revenue source</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires Legislative action and direction to program towards local needs</li> <li>• Political challenges</li> <li>• Potential revenue might be impacted by changes in vehicle fleet (example: electrification of fleet)</li> </ul>
Carbon tax on motor fuels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tied to policy objectives (e.g. greenhouse gas reduction, nexus with system use, etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires Legislative action and direction to program towards local needs</li> <li>• High costs to administer/collect this new revenue source</li> <li>• Potential revenue might be impacted by changes in vehicle fleet (example: electrification of fleet)</li> </ul>
Raising parking fees/taxes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be tied to policy objectives (e.g. greenhouse gas reduction, nexus with system use, system management, etc.)</li> <li>• Low cost to administer/collect</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only available where market-based pricing is implemented</li> <li>• Resistance to priced parking</li> <li>• (Long-term) Uncertainty due to impacts of emerging technologies (example: autonomous vehicles) on parking and associated revenue</li> </ul>

Revenue Options	Strengths	Weaknesses
Transportation Impact Fees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allows jurisdictions to mitigate impacts while supporting growth (“growth pays for growth”)</li> <li>• Restricted to capital facilities</li> <li>• Cannot fund transportation operations &amp; maintenance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation (rates and approaches) varies across local jurisdictions</li> <li>• Significant upfront work needed to establish and assess impact fees and ensure consistency</li> <li>• Not necessarily a stable source of revenue; dependent on growth/economic climate</li> </ul>
Lifting the County road levy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allows revenues to grow more consistently with costs</li> <li>• Low-cost of collection</li> <li>• Frees resources to be allocated to other jurisdiction needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires Legislative action to lift levy lid</li> <li>• Potential voter opposition and property tax fatigue</li> </ul>
Street utility charge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revenue indirectly tied to system use</li> <li>• Revenues typically used to address street maintenance and operations</li> <li>• Can be tied to policy objectives (e.g. system management, greenhouse gas reductions, equity, etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal issues related to constitutionality</li> <li>• Not a true “utility” since it is based on estimates of trips; question of “fairness”</li> <li>• High costs to collect/administer; might be easier to pursue user fees such as road usage charges</li> </ul>
Increase Vehicle License Fees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cities and counties have existing authorization to form TBDs and fund transportation improvements, usually through vehicle license fees and/or voter approved sales tax</li> <li>• Flexible revenue source; allows cities/counties to work independently or cooperatively</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be difficult to implement and there is limited revenue potential</li> </ul>

Revenue options were presented by PSRC, and a significant amount of background information on many revenue sources was used from PSRC’s work in updating the Regional Transportation Plan (formerly Transportation 2040). While these presented options sparked significant discussion, questions and ideas among elected officials, no consensus was identified around any one or set of revenue options. Additionally, through future discussions, cities and King County may want to consider revenue options beyond those listed here.

## Conclusions

The RTSI was a successful partnership between the Sound Cities Association, King County cities, the Puget Sound Regional Council, the Washington State Department of Transportation, and King County to identify the critical connecting roads that comprise the regional road network and identify unmet maintenance, operations, and capital needs. The agencies operating this critical transportation network collaborated to identify shared interests and concerns so that the County could speak with one voice.

Going forward, these agencies have committed to working together to find solutions for the regional road network by working on potential solutions with elected officials and representative agencies, including the Sound Cities Association and Puget Sound Regional Council. Specific opportunities to collaborate include the update to the Regional Transportation Plan (formerly Transportation 2040), and potentially joint projects – such as Intelligent Transportation System improvements – as grant opportunities arise. The information from this collaboration will be valuable for participating agencies and for the Washington State Legislature’s consideration of next steps for the critical unfunded needs on local roads.

## RTSI Background

### RTSI Structure

The RTSI took place from March 2017 through February 2018 and comprised the following groups:

- Technical Committee:** The Technical Committee was comprised of public works directors, engineers, transportation planners, and city managers who met throughout 2017 to identify key roads that connect communities, quantify the revenue shortfall for maintaining these roads and accommodating increased traffic, and identify potential revenue sources. It met seven times between March and November 2017.
- Elected Officials Committee:** The Elected Officials Committee was comprised of mayors and councilmembers from most cities in King County. It reviewed the work of the Technical Committee and made one mid-2017 request for additional Technical Committee work.
- Planning Core Team:** The Core Team was comprised of a small group of staff from the Sound Cities Association, King County Road Services Division and Executive Office, Puget Sound Regional Council, and a consultant hired to facilitate RTSI meetings and communications. The Core Team planned RTSI meeting agendas and moved the process forward.

### Participating Jurisdictions

The RTSI was open to King County departments, all 39 cities in King County, and the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT). In addition to King County and WSDOT, the following jurisdictions participated in RTSI meetings.

City of Algona	City of Issaquah	City of Redmond
City of Auburn	City of Kenmore	City of Renton
City of Bellevue	City of Kent	City of Sammamish
City of Black Diamond	City of Kirkland	City of SeaTac
City of Bothell	City of Lake Forest Park	City of Seattle
City of Burien	City of Maple Valley	City of Shoreline
City of Carnation	City of Medina	Town of Skykomish
City of Clyde Hill	City of Mercer Island	City of Snoqualmie
City of Covington	City of Milton	City of Tukwila
City of Des Moines	City of Newcastle	City of Woodinville
City of Duvall	City of Normandy Park	City of Yarrow Point
City of Enumclaw	City of North Bend	
City of Federal Way	City of Pacific	

## RTSI Technical Committee Interviews

From March through June 2017, a consultant hired to facilitate RTSI meetings and manage communications also held one-on-one interviews with most RTSI Technical Committee participants. Interviews addressed information used in the RTSI process, ideas for solving regional road network funding challenges, each jurisdiction's priorities for the regional transportation network, and definitions of success for the RTSI process. Results from these interviews were shared with King County, the Sound Cities Association, and PSRC during the early stages of the RTSI process to inform planning for this effort.

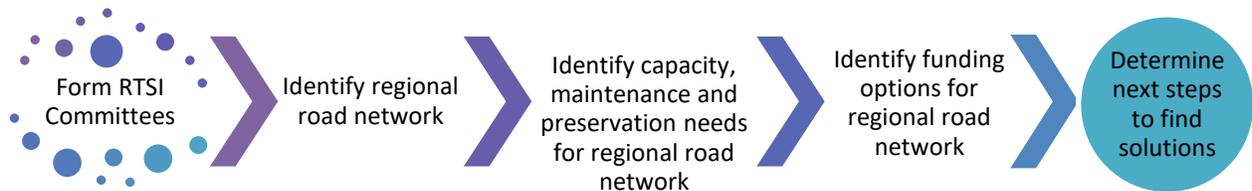
### Key RTSI Technical Committee interview themes

- **Project prioritization:** Many thought it is necessary to prioritize projects and identify specific areas where funding is needed prior to seeking funding from the State Legislature. However, many others felt only a roll-up of costs/needs for the RTSI network is necessary prior to a legislative-ask and that projects did not first have to be identified and prioritized.
- **New and sustainable funding sources:** Most felt that funding for the RTSI network should come from a sustainable and long-term source or that new tools for local jurisdictions to raise funding for the regional network should become available. Many also cautioned that new funding for the regional road network should not take away from other funding for municipal needs.
- **Needs of state highways:** Many noted the importance of state highways to the regional road network and the importance of involving WSDOT in any solution to addressing regional road network needs.
- **Impacts of regulations:** Many noted the impact of state or federal regulations that affect road costs; particularly environmental regulations and specifically those that address culverts and fish passages.
- **The jobs-housing imbalance and macro-scale land use planning issues:** Many noted that some congestion and mobility issues should be addressed through better land use planning.
- **Multi-modal transportation:** Some would like to see transit and bikes considered along with those of roads when thinking about regional road network needs, but many do not. Those who emphasized multi-modal transportation also desired expansion of mass transit and better connections/access to mass transit for areas not located near mass transit lines.
- **Maintenance and preservation:** There were significantly different views on maintenance and preservation (M&P), with some wanting M&P needs addressed through the RTSI and others desiring capacity needs be addressed first.
- **Cross-border issues:** Many jurisdictions, but particularly those located near the King County line, noted the need to coordinate with neighboring counties, and jurisdictions in those counties, when exploring regional road network solutions since so much traffic within King County comes from other counties.

## RTSI Process

The RTSI was jointly developed by the Sound Cities Association and King County. While it evolved over time, it followed the five steps shown in *Figure 3*.

**Figure 3: RTSI Process Steps**



## Technical Committee Meetings

The RTSI Technical Committee met seven times between March and November 2017.

- **Meeting #1 – March 3, 2017:** Participants became familiar with the RTSI purpose and process; received initial information from PSRC on the impacts of growth in King County on the regional road network; and met in breakout groups to identify specific known regional road network needs within four sub-areas of King County (the northeast, southeast, northwest, and southwest).
- **Meeting #2 – April 7, 2017:** Participants received a refined overview of the RTSI process; reviewed and provided feedback on a draft RTSI road network presented by PSRC; and brainstormed criteria on the types of roads that should be considered part of the regional road network.
- **Meeting #3 – May 5, 2017:** Following a series of smaller meetings in April and early May among four sub-areas of King County, sub-areas reported out on their specific priorities and RTSI network map segments discussed at sub-area meetings. Participants also identified and accepted a set of criteria for roads that should be considered part of the regional road network.
- **Meeting #4 – June 2, 2017:** Participants discussed and refined materials to be shared at the first RTSI Elected Officials Committee meeting on June 13.
- **Meeting #5 – July 14, 2017:** Participants reviewed themes from the June 13 RTSI Elected Officials Committee meeting and provided input on the approach to estimating regional road network needs.
- **Meeting #6 – September 8, 2017:** Participants reviewed and discussed an initial set of potential funding solutions for the regional road network.
- **Meeting #7 – November 3, 2017:** Participants heard a detailed report-out from PSRC on regional road needs and cost estimates and then discussed a refined list of potential revenue solutions to bring forward to elected officials.

#### **Elected Officials Committee Meetings:**

- **Meeting #1 – June 13, 2017:** Elected officials shared their ideas, concerns, and priorities for the regional road network, heard a presentation on the impacts of growth on our regional road network, accepted the regional road network map, and provided input on next steps for the RTSI. While much of the feedback and ideas from elected officials addressed specific needs for cars on our regional roads, elected officials also shared ideas about freight, transit, bicycles, mobility more broadly, and land use planning decisions.
- **Meeting #2 – February 2, 2018:** Elected officials heard a report-out on the RTSI network needs and potential revenue options to address those needs, and then shared next steps ideas.

#### **Information Considered**

RTSI needs and costs estimates data came from individual jurisdictions. Capacity needs were calculated from the PSRC Local Projects Database (based on local comprehensive plans) and the Regional Transportation Plan Regional Capacity Project List. Maintenance and preservation costs included estimates from each jurisdiction for pavement, structures, ITS, stormwater, street lighting, and other miscellaneous categories.

## Appendix

All RTSI materials are found on the RTSI web page at [www.regionaltransportationsystem.org](http://www.regionaltransportationsystem.org). Most materials are specifically found on the Meeting Resources page of the RTSI website:

<https://www.regionaltransportationsystem.org/resources/> including:

- Meeting agendas
- Meeting summaries
- Meeting presentations
- The Technical Committee operating protocols
- Regional road network maps and supporting data

The website also includes RTSI points of contact.