

ISSUE PAPER: TRANSPORTATION

Position statement

The League of Women Voters of the United States and of Washington have several policy statements related to transportation. Read together, they support a balanced, appropriately funded, multi-modal transportation system with sufficient capacity to maintain the system. Additionally, the League has a multitude of environmental protection and climate change positions that support reduction in use of single occupancy vehicles, increased use of electric vehicles, and increased opportunity to reduce travel, such as through telecommuting. The League also has positions that support redevelopment of the electrical grid, which could affect transportation.

Summary of Issues for the 2019 Legislative Session

In 2015, the Legislature adopted a sixteen-year transportation funding package. The package included an increase in the gas tax and assumed funding for completion of several key construction projects needed for cargo distribution to ports but did not contemplate additional new road construction. Instead, it prioritized road preservation and maintenance and multi-modal transportation enhancements. Among the unresolved issues were how to address anticipated reductions in gas purchases as a result of increased use of electric vehicles.

This year, the Department of Transportation issued a draft 2040 transportation plan. Although it has not been finalized, that plan focuses on new issues, such as the need for redistributing economic growth through supplemental broadband access in rural areas, repair of 600 bridges that have been identified as substandard, development of a seismic lifeline route to address potential earthquake damage, misalignment between buckets of existing revenues and their earmarked uses compared to what needs to be funded, and other related issues. The new plan contains proposed policies that support the goals adopted over a decade ago in new ways. These include economic vitality; system preservation; safety; mobility, particularly focusing on multimodal travel; and health and environment, focusing on clean energy and reduced use of vehicles.

A particularly problematic issue remaining from prior years is how to handle the Columbia River crossing, for which improvements are badly needed to support interstate commerce and to address the lack of earthquake protection on the current cross-Columbia structures.

A newer issue is how to address the constraints on Sea-Tac Airport, which will soon reach capacity. An airport planning process is contemplated to begin in 2019.

Additionally, a ferry system study is underway by the Washington State Department of Transportation and may generate new issues.

Legislation will be forthcoming on all of these topics. The League will support transportation proposals that enhance safety and environmental protection, including assuring that water quality protection measures are part of each project; address climate change needs and reduce CO2 emissions; enhance use of transit and light rail; and further reduce single occupancy vehicle use.

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