



Washington State Association of Counties

POLICY STATEMENT

The following policies are adopted by the membership of the Washington State Association of Counties (WSAC) to guide the actions and decisions of the Legislative Steering Committee and the staff of the Association in all legislative matters.*

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
General Government.....	6
Unfunded Mandates	6
Local Fiscal Data	6
Accountability.....	6
Pension and Labor	7
Local Government Partnerships	7
Budget, Finance & Taxes.....	8
Law and Justice	9
Human Services & Housing	11
Human Services	11
Housing.....	13
Public Health	14
Environment, Land Use & Resources	15
Land Use Planning	15
Columbia River	17
Water	17
Forest Resources	19
Puget Sound Partnership	19
Stormwater.....	20
Climate Change	21
Energy	23
Salmonid Recovery	24
Public Lands	25
Transportation & Public Works.....	26
Transportation	26
Public Works.....	27
Economic Development.....	28
Emergency Management	29

Introduction

Counties currently have three distinct roles: They are agents of the state on the local level; they are regional governments and providers of regional services on a countywide basis; and they are local governments and providers of municipal services in unincorporated areas. County government is the government closest to the people. County elected officials serve the whole county and are directly accountable for policy and operations to the electorate and public.

Constitutionally created as “agents of the state,” counties are responsible for coordination and delivery of many shared state-county services. Counties must be equal partners with the state to determine the services offered and method of delivery to ensure that we are seamless, cost-effective, and responsive to our joint constituents.

In order to be responsive government to the people, counties support the principle of local control. Counties will strongly resist policies that ignore the reality of statewide differences or erode local determination. Each county is unique and this diversity requires a flexible approach to statewide policymaking. Local control recognizes that individual counties should be free to adopt various operating and policy alternatives that may not be acceptable to other counties.

Local control also embodies the principle that the people should determine its forms of government. Therefore, counties believe that any change in a citizen’s form of government must be adopted by public vote. Additionally, policy, taxing, and regulatory authority should not be given to persons who are not directly accountable to the people through election.

Counties need flexibility to best determine acceptable taxing and spending levels for their communities. To that end:

- Counties support the expansion of local options and state sharing of revenue to diversify our tax and revenue structure.
- Counties will resist dedicated funding and state required maintenance of effort requirements.
- Counties will oppose the imposition of new or expanded services without sufficient funding sources.

Counties also recognize the similarities we share. In areas of mutual concern, counties will resist efforts that impose responsibilities or distribute funding based on individual characteristics of counties. State funding should ensure equal access to basic county services such as public safety, law and justice, public health, human services, and other activities in which counties are “agents of the state” (property tax assessment and collection, elections, treasury services) without regard to size, location, or local taxing capacity.

Conversely, in areas that impact individual or few counties, we defer to those affected counties to respond unless the issue may set a precedent for other counties or our collective involvement is approved by the Legislative Steering Committee

The Washington State Association of Counties (WSAC) represents elected county commissioners, council members and executives from all of Washington's 39 counties. WSAC works with statewide elected officials and members of the Legislature to promote positions that help counties serve their citizens. These overarching principles guide WSAC's actions as it advocates for the common good of counties with the Legislature and statewide elected and appointed officials. The following Policy Statement recognizes the ongoing multiple governance roles of counties, as well as the variety of goals and strategies among counties, while promoting fiscal and political structures that will strengthen all counties' abilities to best serve the public interest.

General Government

Unfunded Mandates

In adopting Initiative 601, Washington voters required the Legislature to provide adequate funding to local governments when it mandates new or expanded local responsibilities. The state has an obligation to keep local responsibilities within existing revenue sources or to provide additional funding or funding authority when it imposes new mandates.

WSAC Policy:

Counties will seek appropriate funding for all legislative and agency mandates on local governments. Counties will resist new or expanded local responsibilities that are not fully funded and do not include ongoing funding for increases in costs or caseloads.

Local Fiscal Data

Providing legislators and state agencies with reliable, trustworthy fiscal data on county costs is critical in the legislative and policy making process.

WSAC Policy:

Counties will be accurate and reliable sources of data. County officials will actively assist in the development of trustworthy data for the Legislature and state agencies, whether it is on an individual basis, through WSAC, or in the local fiscal note process.

Accountability

As much as fifty percent of introduced legislation affects county government. Ambiguous legislative intent or inadequately stated outcomes or expectations can make implementation on the local level time-consuming, expensive, and sometimes divisive and can lead to expensive litigation to defend the policy.

WSAC Policy:

Counties will seek clear statements of legislative intent and inclusion of expected outcomes, including performance measures, in legislation wherever appropriate. However, WSAC will

also act to ensure that the cost of accountability does not exceed the intended benefits of an appropriation.

Pension and Labor

Unemployment, workers compensation, minimum wage, prevailing wage, pension plans and labor relations are all policies adopted by the state that have a direct impact on county personnel costs, which can comprise up to eighty percent of county budgets. Many times, these same policies are not imposed upon the state because the state has neither the time nor the resources to meet them

All public employees are required to belong to one of the state pension plans. The state sets the rate of contributions and level of benefits.

WSAC Policy:

While the state sets most labor policy and all pension policy for counties, counties will continue to work toward legislation that will minimize fiscal impacts on limited local resources and provide maximum flexibility to direct the workforce. The state should not mandate any stricter labor standards for local government than it does for the state. Pension funding should not exceed the level needed to meet pension obligations.

Local Government Partnerships

As provided in the Washington State Constitution, counties are the agents of the state on the local level and provide many services on behalf of the state, including Superior Court, elections, property tax assessment and collection, public health, and human services. Counties provide these services to residents of cities and towns as well as the unincorporated areas.

There are more than 300 general-purpose local governments in Washington State, including counties, cities and towns. WSAC and the Association of Washington Cities (AWC) represent elected officials in county and city legislative and executive branches respectively. Separately elected county officials, i.e., assessor, auditor, clerk, prosecutor, sheriff, and treasurer are

represented by the Washington Association of County Officials (WACO). Although the three Associations must represent their members on individual issues, those members ultimately report to a joint constituency, the public. The public interest must come first.

WSAC Policy:

The state, counties and cities must collaborate to ensure a seamless, efficient and cost-effective service delivery system for our joint constituents. WSAC will work in partnership with AWC and WACO on legislative issues to ensure that the public interest comes first.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Budget, Finance & Taxes

The county current expense fund (general fund) is stressed in most counties by the increasing demands of the criminal justice system. Statewide, criminal justice costs account for seventy-one percent of county current expense expenditures. Other county departments funded by current expense, such as parks and human services, have experienced significant cuts or are having trouble maintaining services.

The county current expense revenue base is highly dependent upon property and sales taxes; these sources represent eighty-seven percent of our general fund revenue. Property tax growth is limited annual increases of one percent, well below historic rates of inflation. In some counties, sales tax revenues have declined because of poor economic conditions, annexations and incorporations, loss of sales tax equalization, or land acquisition by the state and federal government. Moreover, the Growth Management Act has shifted tax and financial resources from counties to cities by directing growth and economic development to urban areas.

Counties collect only fifteen percent of basic and optional sales tax revenue in incorporated areas, yet retain responsibility for countywide services in those areas, such as public safety, law and justice, public health, human services, and other activities in which counties are “agents of the state” (property tax assessment and collection, elections, treasury services).

In addition, all counties lost critical revenues from the elimination of the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax, first by the voters, and subsequently by the Legislature. The replacement funding provided by the Legislature is nearly eliminated.

The Legislature to date has not seriously addressed the ongoing erosion of county finances.

WSAC Policy:

Over the long term the county financial structure must meet the needs of modern county governments. Whether it takes place in the context of changes produced by the Growth Management Act or in another forum, examination of county finances must include the financing of regional services and the effect on the county tax base of annexations and incorporations, growth management mandates that limit the uses of rural and natural resource lands, loss of sales tax equalization, reduction of county revenue capacity by ballot measure or legislation, and private land acquisition by the state and federal government. Counties will resist any attempts by the Legislature to define them only in terms of the unincorporated area, rural or urban, small or large, for funding formula or taxing authority purposes. Counties will work to ensure all legislative mandates are accompanied by appropriate funding. Counties will continue to seek full replacement funding for the MVET revenues previously provided for support of law and justice, public health, and basic county services.

Counties must maintain their current sources of revenue, and therefore, will advocate that tax exemptions be limited only to the state's share of revenue.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Law and Justice

County governments provide staffing and facilities for the majority of the state's civil and criminal trial court system. Counties are spending, on average, seventy-one percent of general fund dollars on law and justice programs and services:

- Public safety within the unincorporated area,
- Superior, district and juvenile courts, (including judge and personnel salaries/benefits and facilities)
- Providing cities with regional criminal justice services that are too expensive for each small city to duplicate,
- Prosecution, public defense, and ancillary services (interpreters, parents representation, etc),
- Jails and juvenile detention facilities,
- Inmate health services, including mental health, chemical dependency, and smoking cessation services,
- Probation, diversion, and community services,
- E-911 and emergency management, and
- Medical examiner or coroner.

Counties believe the purpose of the criminal justice system is to minimize the cumulative personal, social, and economic impacts of crime on society. For that reason, counties take their criminal justice responsibilities very seriously. Over many years, as state funding has declined, counties have instituted numerous efficiencies and, where authorized by statute, developed innovative law and justice programs. However, in spite of efforts to be more efficient and accessible, counties lack adequate funding for mandatory criminal justice services.

WSAC Policy:

Counties will work to gain adequate funding for all essential law and justice services, and to remove unnecessary or overly burdensome state requirements on the law and justice system. As subdivisions of the state, counties believe the state must take a greater role in funding state-mandated law and justice activities that are administered at the county level, including all costs associated with the arrest, prosecution, defense, and detention of persons charged with felony crimes. Counties believe the state also should assist in funding discretionary court services, such as drug and mental health courts that reduce impacts to state prisons and juvenile institutions and other costly state programs.

Additionally, counties support state “extraordinary fund” assistance for counties with disproportionate high costs. Counties further support state assistance in purchasing and distributing medications to inmates, and preparing pre-release documentation to ensure inmates continue to receive needed medications and care following release from jail.

Counties support full state funding for administering the costs associated with mandated laws such as “Becca” and the Hope Act for serving at-risk youth, including providing necessary county-administered human services. Counties support the increase in flexibility of state and federal juvenile justice funds through consolidation of funds and continued use of block grant approaches. Counties support a flexibility and blend of early intervention and prevention, supervision, and treatment services in the law and justice system in order to meet local needs.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Human Services & Housing

Human Services

Counties are responsible for providing a variety of human services:

- Mental health services;
- Local programs for persons with developmental disabilities,
- Planning and management of chemical dependency treatment and prevention programs, and
- Other state mandated or locally determined human services priorities.

Counties believe that human services are best provided at the local level. Many clients who use human services use more than one service. Too often, service delivery systems are highly specialized into discrete disorders, needs, rules and regulations that present complex challenges for local delivery systems.

WSAC Policy:

State government must break down barriers to providing services to multi-need individuals and families. The state must remove programmatic, administrative, and regulatory barriers to local government. Local service providers must be allowed to work collaboratively to design and implement comprehensive service packages that meet all the challenges of serving the multi-needs client. Counties also support adequate funding to meet the complex needs of individuals and families with both multiple medical diagnoses and economic challenges.

Counties support full state funding of all mental health services the state requires counties to provide, as well as for any additional state mandates and shifts in priority populations. In addition, counties advocate sound policy decisions regarding the provision of appropriate care to the mentally ill based upon the best judgment of county mental health professionals and administrators.

Counties support adequate state funding for the continuation and expansion of community programs for persons with developmental disabilities, including special services and employment programs, to reduce institutionalization.

Counties support adequate funding for drug and alcohol services for low-income persons, which will reduce the cost to local communities from untreated drug and alcohol abuse and dependence.

Human services funding must be as flexible as possible. Counties oppose any reduction in funding for human services programs unless the reduction is achieved through administrative efficiencies that provide the same or a higher level of service.

Counties only support the continued reduction of inpatient resources at the state level if the necessary resources are provided up-front to increase local residential capacity and provide programs to appropriately serve those persons.

Housing

Counties provide and support housing needs in a variety of ways. Counties have a direct and indirect impact on housing availability, location and cost because of our role in land-use and development regulations. Housing is also a required element of growth management plans.

In addition, some counties manage or assist in low-income housing programs. They may directly administer a residential program for those with special needs. They may run local housing authorities, which manage federally subsidized programs such as Section 8. Counties have the responsibility to develop ten year plans to end homelessness.

Dramatic increases in housing costs in Washington State are creating unmanageable pressure on existing private market affordable and workforce housing resources.

WSAC Policy:

Counties support the elimination of duplicative planning and regulatory burdens that impact housing affordability and support the reduction of other regulatory requirements that significantly impact housing affordability without a commensurate benefit for the environment or the general welfare of our communities.

Counties also support additional sources of revenue from both the state and federal level to assist in funding housing for low-income, workforce and other specific populations. Counties support the Legislature increasing the amount of funding dedicated to the Housing Trust Fund for the needs of special populations, the elderly, those with low incomes, and workforce housing. They support increased administrative flexibility in developing housing programs and the reduction of any state organizational barriers such as multiple licensing requirements and overlapping directives. The state should enact additional protective measures to preserve housing options for low-income and workforce groups as the continued displacement of these groups directly threatens the housing of thousands of members of our communities. Increasing

the state's supply of rental housing should be considered an equal strategy with homeownership for increasing the state's housing supply.

Counties also support innovative approaches to help with affordable housing. Those approaches should include the reuse of existing homes and residential materials, sweat equity programs, green building, and energy efficiency investments.

Public Health

County public health jurisdictions have protected the health of Washington State residents since before statehood. Public health professionals are on the front line in defending against threats to public health – communicable diseases, chronic illness, harmful environmental exposures, and man-made or natural disasters. Other public health responsibilities include assuring safe food and water, management of hazardous, solid waste, and safe sewage treatment.

The Public Health system has new demands imposed by emerging diseases and threats (bioterrorism, West Nile Virus, etc.), while at the same time maintaining ongoing response to the "old" diseases (tuberculosis, measles, etc.). Public health is also expected to increase its capacity to respond effectively to threats of bioterrorism and natural disasters because these events are local events first that can rapidly spread beyond jurisdictional boundaries.

The complexity and severity of today's public health threats requires a strong public health system that is accountable, accessible, and adequately funded. Without adequate and sustainable funding for local public health, our residents will be at risk of imminent harm. Local government has historically stepped up to the challenge of supporting local public health. While the state has contributed some support, the counties' ability to support public health has been dangerously eroded as a result of limited revenue and decreasing federal and state support.

WSAC Policy:

Additional resources are needed at every level to address public health issues, including the integration and coordination of multi-county efforts. WSAC supports maximizing the flexibility of existing sources of funding and enhancement of both efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery. Finally, WSAC supports the authority of local boards of health to set countywide public health policy, enact and enforce local public health regulations, and prevent and control the spread of disease.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Environment, Land Use & Resources

Land Use Planning

All thirty-nine counties in Washington State are required to comply with some aspect of the Growth Management Act (GMA), and twenty-nine are required or have elected to prepare and implement comprehensive plans and development regulations. Counties have spent significant local resources, not only on the preparation and implementation of comprehensive plans, but also on the defense of their legislative decisions after appeals to the Growth Management Hearings Boards (Hearing Boards) and the courts. Conflicting state and federal regulatory and environmental programs have made the task of implementing the GMA more costly than expected.

The effects of GMA implementation are beginning to be analyzed and documented. Complex issues, such as the Act's impact on affordable housing, the provision of urban services and infrastructure concurrent with growth, the siting of essential public facilities, and the direction of new urban growth into designated urban growth areas need to be taken into consideration when changes in GMA are being debated.

WSAC Policy:

Counties oppose state pre-emption of local land use policies and plans as determined by local planning processes and as adopted by county legislative authorities. The Washington State Supreme Court has recognized, and the Legislature and Hearing Boards must affirm, that

deference is owed to county legislative bodies as it adopts county comprehensive plans and implementing development regulations. That deference should be extended to determining when a plan and development regulations should be updated. Control and accountability for local Comprehensive Land Use Planning must remain with local legislative bodies.

Counties support sound comprehensive planning as a primary responsibility of local government because, done well, it protects the environment while it promotes a strong economy. The state has as much interest in promoting this positive outcome, and therefore, must provide ongoing and adequate funding for planning, updates, implementation, compliance, and evaluation activities. Additionally, the Legislature must repeal specific GMA requirements when funding is eliminated. Counties will not support any additional GMA requirements without ongoing and adequate funding.

The state, with counties and other interested parties, must review the GMA and other environmental statutes with a goal of meeting the underlying objectives of the different statutes while eliminating duplication of planning and regulatory burdens on both county government and citizens. It also is essential to begin an on-going process of monitoring the impacts of the GMA and related state statutes prior to the enactment of any additional planning, development or environmental law or regulation.

The state must make every effort to resolve disputes through alternative dispute resolution and by providing incentives to reach its goals. Legal challenges to local action should be used only as a last resort. The Legislature should act to ensure that Hearing Boards and the courts defer to local county comprehensive plans and implementing regulations, as well as, fund county costs in defending legal challenges.

Regarding annexations and incorporations, counties will work to support policies to ensure they do not continue to be burdened with the cost or debt of capital infrastructure, facilities or other real property following the revenue loss brought about by the annexation or incorporation of an area.

Columbia River

In 2006, the state legislature established the Columbia River Basin Water Supply Development Program (Program). The Program established has a bonding capacity of up to \$200 million to implement projects aimed at increasing water supply in the Columbia River basin. Eastern Washington counties have been participants in the Program, with four seats on Ecology's Policy Advisory Group (PAG) made up of various stakeholders.

Calendar year 2008 saw the completion of the first grant round under the Program.

Approximately \$46.4 million is being authorized for projects evaluated during the grant round, ranging from coordinated conservation projects among irrigation districts to a pilot aquifer storage project by the city of Kennewick.

WSAC Policy:

Counties support the Program because increasing water supply in eastern Washington is critical to the area's human, industrial, agricultural needs. Counties also support the Program because it provides a forum for diverse interests to discuss water supply development, regardless of differences in perspective. Counties believe the program is making incremental progress in an area of great need, particularly in making decisions and moving toward improving water supplies in Eastern Washington. Counties will closely monitor and provide input on the Department of Ecology's re-structuring of the Program and its creation of the Ecology Office of Columbia River.

Water

Counties have a unique perspective on water resources due to their broad authority and responsibilities in watershed planning, land use, health and sanitation, transportation, and parks and recreation. Counties are engaged in nearly every aspect of water resource management, with the key exception of water rights issuance. Even in the water rights arena, however, county decisions on public health, land use and economic development are greatly affected by the decisions of state regulators and water users. Local watershed planning may be

an appropriate framework to coordinate these various local efforts, but has yet to demonstrate it will be effective in achieving intended results.

WSAC Policy:

Counties support changes in state law and budgeting for efficient water rights administration, consistent with collaborative, locally based watershed planning. Water law, financial resources, and administration must be flexible enough to recognize regional differences in water sources, water uses, and demands. A “one-size fits all” approach is not appropriate. Legislative solutions must address both urban and rural water needs by providing adequate resources, establishing priorities, and resolving conflicting roles and responsibilities. Rural areas need to continue to have the right to use exempt wells for their water supply.

The Legislature must act to ensure that water supply decisions are made. Whether made through a regional planning process or by the state, these decisions must be timely, consistent and supportive of growth management planning, sustainability, and economic development

Careful adjustments to water policy through fiscal incentives and policy directives are needed to increase water availability using conservation, storage, water reuse and other water management tools to provide for population growth, economic growth, power generation and adequate in-stream flows for fish, wildlife and recreation. Counties believe it is critical to maintain and enhance water storage for human, industrial and agricultural needs, and instream uses. Disincentives to conservation should be eliminated so that conserved water can be used in other ways.

New state funding is needed to support county responsibilities for safe drinking water supply, storm-water management, flood damage reduction plans, and watershed planning and implementation. Though salmon recovery has been an important focus, these core county responsibilities should not be overlooked given their direct connection to salmon recovery efforts.

Forest Resources

At least thirty-one counties receive revenue from timber receipts generated on state or federal lands. However, all counties have an interest in the management of those lands in terms of how management practices impact listings of threatened and endangered species. Policies developed by the federal and state governments on multiple uses of these lands have an important effect on county land-use and economic development policies.

WSAC Policy:

Counties must continue to be given a voice in management decisions on federal and state lands, particularly when those decisions impact county land use and environmental policies, as well as, county revenues and socio-economic conditions. Counties also will advocate for changes in state and federal law that provide for sustainable management of forest resources while maximizing benefits to the state and local economy.

In addition to compensating counties when takings or purchases occur, counties should also be compensated for the reduced productive use of the land due to restrictive regulations from threatened or endangered species policies.

Puget Sound Partnership

The 2007 Legislature created a new state agency called the Puget Sound Partnership (Partnership) to develop a strategy to bring a new focus to Puget Sound restoration. The Partnership is governed by a Leadership Council, which is charged with creating an Action Agenda to: 1) identify and assign priorities to actions needed to get to a healthy Puget Sound by 2020; 2) name those responsible for the actions; and 3) identify funding. The Partnership has established the Ecosystem Coordination Board (ECB), whose main role is to advise the Leadership Council in carrying out its responsibilities. Counties have seven of the twenty-seven seats on the ECB.

WSAC Policy:

Counties support efforts to clean and restore Puget Sound, and have already taken many steps on their own to that end. By the nature of their statutory responsibilities, counties will play a major role in implementing the Action Agenda. Counties want to ensure the Action Agendas recognizes and supports county current activities, as well as these future needs:

- The Action Agenda must be coordinated with other state mandates, such as updating Shoreline Master Programs, Growth Management Act comprehensive plans and development regulations, and NPDES Phase I and II permits, to be effective.
- Ongoing and significant financial and technical support from the state will be necessary to implement the Action Agenda.

Stormwater

Control and treatment of stormwater is an issue of increasing concern for counties. One of the challenges with stormwater is that successful management entails actions at both the basin level and the site specific level. This includes retrofitting existing facilities (e.g. roads) and managing land use development.

Some counties are affected by Ecology's issuance of National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Phase I and II permits. NPDES Phase I permits cover stormwater discharges from certain industries, construction sites involving more five or more acres, and municipalities with a population of more than 100,000. NPDES Phase II regulations expand the requirement for stormwater permits to all municipalities located in urbanized areas and to construction sites between one and five acres. The NPDES Phase II regulation also requires an evaluation of cities outside of urbanized areas that have a population over 10,000, to determine if a permit is necessary for some or all of these cities. Two separate NPDES Phase II general permits cover eastern and western Washington communities.

The permits, issued under Ecology's Clean Water Act authority, require jurisdictions to adopt a stormwater management program to reduce the discharge of pollutants, protect water quality, and meet the requirements of the Clean Water Act. The permits require counties to develop stormwater management programs that must include adoption of new ordinances to control

stormwater runoff, public involvement, public education, a program to detect and eliminate illicit discharges, and other requirements.

WSAC Policy:

Counties support improving stormwater controls to protect water quality and aquatic resources. However, federal and state requirements must recognize that success depends on implementing these controls in a rational and sustainable manner. Stormwater regulations should be coordinated with other water quality efforts, such as the Puget Sound Partnership. Counties should be given the flexibility to determine what actions are the most cost effective to achieve stormwater management goals. Counties believe that the state must share in the cost of implementing new stormwater regulations and programs. If funding is not forthcoming, liability for counties under the new permit requirements should be proportionally reduced.

Climate Change

Washington's counties are prepared to meet the challenges posed by the potential impacts from climate change. Counties have initiated actions to reduce the effect of their own business operations and practices on green house gas emissions. Some counties are initiating programs to analyze their planning and environmental review processes to ensure safe, sustainable, and vibrant communities. WSAC recognizes that:

- Washington's counties have diverse views on climate change and have differing abilities/resources to respond to potential impacts of climate change;
- Several counties in Washington State are national leaders on climate change issues;
- Several counties are taking steps to integrate the reduction of greenhouse gasses into their land use planning and environmental review processes;
- All counties are taking relevant and measurable steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions caused by their organizational business practices;
- Existing elements of the Growth Management Act support processes to reduce and mitigate the increase in greenhouse gas emissions such as compact urban development, enhancing transportation options including non motorized transportation facilities, commute trip

reduction, transit oriented development, and protecting critical areas and natural resource lands from conversion.

WSAC Policy:

Counties will work proactively with the executive and legislative branch, and work groups created from these branches, to develop climate change policy and legislation.

Counties support legislation that encourages and allows counties to adopt policies and ordinances to reduce their organizational/business practices impact on greenhouse gas emissions. Additionally, we support legislation that encourages and allows counties to incorporate into plans, policies, regulations, and ordinances that reduce green house gas emissions associated with activities within the comprehensive planning and environmental review processes.

In lieu of mandated requirements, counties support the following efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions:

- Provide incentives and education to achieve goals;
- Provide performance outcomes and not prescriptive measures to follow;
- Create an optional climate change element in GMA. Do not make any climate change goal or element within the GMA subject to the appeals process;
- Recognizing emerging science and subjectivity of solutions,;
- Fund incentive grants for counties to integrate climate change into Comprehensive Plan and Development Regulations.
- Provide funding to counties for a set of pilot programs that will illustrate how counties propose to integrate climate change into Comprehensive Plan and Development Regulations.

Counties ask that the legislature consider incorporating climate change as an element within individual actions governed by SEPA environmental review and not within the Growth Management Act.

Any legislation that directs counties to address climate change and greenhouse gas emissions must come with adequate and ongoing state funding to support local processes to plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate the requirements.

Lastly, counties shall not be held responsible for emissions from activities governed by other governmental jurisdictions including, cities, ports, federal agencies including military and naval installations, state agencies and facilities including transportation facilities and ferries.

Energy

In November 2006, Washington's voters passed Initiative 937 which requires the state's major utilities (those utilities that serve over 25,000 customers) to gradually increase the amount of "renewable energy resources" in their electric supply to fifteen percent by 2020. Renewable energy resources include energy from solar, wind, tidal, ocean wave, geothermal, bio-energy, and landfill or sewage treatment sources. Renewable energy resources do not include hydropower. In addition, Initiative 937 requires electric utilities to make investments in energy efficiency and conservation programs to reduce energy consumption within their service territories, beginning in 2010.

Because of the demand for renewable energy resources by the public and Initiative 937, more energy projects are being developed. However, energy project siting is difficult at the state and local level. A wind, solar, landfill gas, wave or tidal, or biomass project developer of any size may choose to use the local land use process or the State Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council (EFSEC) decision making process to site such a facility. The use of the EFSEC process has been controversial in several counties.

WSAC Policy:

Counties support the use of renewable energy and cost-effective conservation efforts to meet our growing energy needs. Counties encourage the Legislature to fund research and development efforts for biomass, bio-fuels and methane gas generation. If the Legislature amends Initiative 937, counties support modest increases in hydropower eligibility tied to a stronger renewable energy resources target.

Counties are concerned about energy facility siting processes in relation to locally adopted land use plans as required under the Growth Management Act. Counties believe that the local land use decision making process should be the sole process for siting renewable energy projects.

Salmonid Recovery

Under the federal Endangered Species Act, sixteen species of salmon, steelhead and bull trout have been listed as threatened or endangered species affecting nearly every county in the state. Counties are committed to work collaboratively to protect and, where possible, restore salmon runs to de-list these threatened and endangered species. Many counties already have committed substantial staff and financial resources to salmon recovery efforts.

The state salmonid recovery strategy places much of the responsibility for habitat protection and restoration on counties and cities. It requires adoption and implementation of storm-water management programs and anticipates revision of critical area designations, shoreline management plans, and regulations using “best available science.” The strategy also directs counties to inventory and prioritize culvert replacement and stream bank restoration and embark on other projects to improve fish passage and ensure clean and usable habitat. It also commits the state to a number of actions without which achieving salmon recovery will become more difficult, and the burden on local governments heavier.

WSAC Policy:

A successful salmonid recovery strategy must be based upon partnership among the state, counties, cities, tribal governments and the federal government. The strategy must be based on achievable goals and clear and consistent guidance and support from state and federal agencies.

The strategy must include adequate funding for habitat protection and enhancement, an equal role for local government in shaping policy and funding priorities, and flexibility in addressing priorities consistent with financial resources. It also must recognize the political and constitutional limitations of regulatory approaches to salmonid recovery and must encourage more efficient use of our existing resources. Finally, the salmonid recovery strategy must address all limiting factors, not only habitat.

The strategy must minimize negative impacts on healthy agricultural and forest economies, preserve our hydropower resources, prevent excessive harvest of fish and allow for accommodation of projected population growth. To accomplish these goals there must be a new, statewide revenue source for salmon recovery, water quality and water supply projects, including new storage capacity. Counties also will need funding for additional staff for monitoring and enforcement of plans and regulations on salmon recovery. Finally, the state and the federal governments must meet their commitments as true and full partners in salmon recovery, and use their authority and financial resources to support local and regional efforts.

Public Lands

Of the state's 43.3 million upland acres, forty percent is owned by federal, state or local government and six percent is owned by Native Americans. State and federal forestland and parkland provide many benefits to the people of the state. In many rural counties, only a small amount of land available for private use and development because the area is dominated by public ownership. There is growing controversy over land purchase by state agencies for wildlife habitat and related purposes. In addition, some agencies fail to adequately maintain public land, resulting in negative impacts on neighbors from noxious weeds, fire and other public safety problems.

WSAC Policy:

Before acquiring new lands, especially for the purposes of habitat protection, the state should engage in a comprehensive analysis of all existing public lands and align its existing policies through capital facilities planning and proper land management. Counties should be

compensated for not only the purchase or taking of the land, but also for the ongoing loss of the tax base and revenue to the county.

The Legislature also should provide adequate funding to state agencies for long-term maintenance and proper management of state land for control of noxious weeds, fire and public safety.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Transportation & Public Works

Transportation

Transportation is, by definition, a multimodal statewide network provided by a number of essential partners: transit districts, cities, counties and the state of Washington. This transportation system is a primary element of safety, economic success and quality of life for Washington citizens. Adequate funding for all transportation modes, including roads, ferries and transit, is an ongoing issue of increasing importance to counties. Washington's transportation system has developed over many years under the direction of the Legislature through allocation of responsibilities and resources to meet ever-changing demands. Historically, resources have been inadequate to meet identified needs for virtually all modes.

WSAC Policy:

Counties are uniquely capable of providing various transportation services that support smaller cities and provide arterial connections that ignore municipal boundaries. Counties support preservation and maintenance of all modes of the existing transportation network, including equitable distribution of all transportation resources to avoid weakening of any portion of the system. Counties also support innovations to expand and improve transportation that will positively impact local economies and quality of life.

The economic vitality of the entire state – including the revenues necessary for county government -- depends upon our transportation system. Current transportation revenues are

not adequate to maintain a quality transportation system and make improvements needed to enhance safety, improve local freight mobility and relieve congestion. Counties support additional resources to address the long-term need to maintain, upgrade and expand the transportation system, including all transportation modes.

Counties will work to ensure when the Legislature appropriates the federal funds from the reauthorization of SAFETEA-LU and future congressional authorizations, that the flexible funds are continued to city and county transportation projects.

Public Works

Counties are responsible for funding, constructing, operating and maintaining a wide variety of public infrastructure projects and facilities, which are vital to the health, safety and welfare of county residents and the state as a whole. Included in this infrastructure are roads and streets; bridges; sewer, water and storm water facilities; parks; courthouses and other administrative facilities; public health clinics; Geographic Information Systems (GIS); dispatch and communication centers, and other technological improvements; behavioral health residential and treatment facilities; and jails and juvenile detention facilities.

Population growth, deteriorating and aging facilities, and emerging technologies are key factors contributing to a growing deficit in county infrastructure. Special levies and other traditional local funding sources have not been successful as funding tools for county infrastructure.

WSAC Policy:

Funding to meet the infrastructure requirements of Washington's businesses and residents is a shared responsibility of state and local government. State and local policymakers must come together to find funding solutions to help pay the costs of environmental protection and maintenance of the state's quality of life as it faces the pressures of rapid growth. At the same time, county and city comprehensive plans and capital facilities plans should be used by the state in establishing its priorities for use of infrastructure funds.

Counties support continued use of the state Public Works Trust Fund revolving loan program for local roads, streets, bridges, water systems, sewer systems and storm water facilities.

Counties also support expanded use of the loan fund for county courthouse facilities, including adult or juvenile detention facilities. In addition, counties support state grant assistance for the construction and maintenance of county law and justice facilities.

Counties also support the expansion of alternative public works methods such as day labor and design-build to reduce the cost of infrastructure construction.

Economic Development

As regional governments, all counties play a major role in local economic development efforts by providing membership and public funds for economic development councils. In addition, counties have positions on the Public Works Board, Community Economic Revitalization Board, the Washington Economic Revitalization Team, and local Workforce Investment Boards, all of which direct public funds toward economic development in local communities.

In recent years legislation has directed counties to play a vital role in community economic development by providing additional sales tax authority for rural counties. The legislature has also asked the state's universities and colleges to create technologies and services that can be deployed by new businesses. Partnerships with the state's research universities, Extension programs and other colleges are encouraged for creation of new 'cutting-edge' enterprises.

WSAC Policy:

Counties, in consultation with cities, ports and other local governments, will provide leadership in local economic development efforts. The state must set policies that will enable local communities, whether rural or urban, to compete for new businesses and retain existing businesses.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Emergency Management

In addition to general public safety responsibilities, counties have specific statutory duties to provide emergency management, both individually and in partnership with state and federal agencies. Inter-county and intra-county mutual aid agreements also are becoming more prevalent and are increasingly important to ensure seamless services across jurisdictional lines. Counties engage in planning and preparedness activities, and often are the front line for response and recovery efforts. These functions traditionally have involved natural disasters, but more recently, the focus has broadened to include terrorist and biological attacks.

WSAC Policy:

Counties support local and regional mutual aid agreements, and supports continued partnerships with the state Emergency Management Division, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Office of Homeland Security, tribal governments, as well as other relevant agencies and private industry to ensure seamless responses to emergencies. Counties also strongly believe that addressing terrorism must not weaken counties' traditional emergency management focus on natural disasters. We enthusiastically support an "all-hazard" approach for emergency management planning, preparation, training, and mitigation activities.

In order to adequately respond to increasing emergency demands, counties must receive increased state and federal funding. A new stable revenue source that would bolster local emergency management programs statewide is needed. Counties do not support matching requirements to receive new funding. Rather, counties support flexibility in the receipt and use of state and federal funds, which will allow counties to better meet unique local needs and maximize the benefits of an all-hazard approach to emergency management.