

RVMPO Strategic Assessment Executive Summary



Background

The Rogue Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (RVMPO) - working with staff from the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) and the Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD) - conducted a strategic assessment of adopted local and regional land use and transportation plans. The assessment estimates the likely outcomes of adopted plans and current trends to the year 2038. The assessment estimates important outcomes of regional interest including mobility, livable communities, air quality, transportation costs, and public health, and assesses how close the region's existing plans come to meeting the state's greenhouse gas emissions reduction target. Overall, the assessment provides a picture of what the area may look like given plans, recent trends and information about future conditions.

This document summarizes the strategic assessment process and presents the key findings. The strategic assessment is intended to inform local officials and policy makers as they update land use and transportation plans, and to help evaluate whether to conduct additional analysis.

Changing Circumstances, New Challenges

While RVMPO's strategic assessment is funded through the state's interest and efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, it is intended to provide information about a range of other important regional issues. For example, the strategic assessment also evaluates household spending on transportation; mobility measures such as vehicle miles traveled and delay; and public health indicators, such as air quality, and trips made by walking and biking. This information, provided by the analysis, can help the region evaluate how well existing plans prepare the region and its residents for a changing future.

Assuring Adequate Transportation Funding

Over the last 10 years, state and federal transportation funding has been flat. Public support for increased fees or taxes is also uncertain; in short, there is a perfect storm of declining revenues and increasing costs, at the same time that plans call for more resources. Carefully integrating planning for land use with planning for streets and transit allows for land use patterns that make efficient use of existing investment in the transportation system and may help to make a business case that expanded transportation funding will generate a high return on investment.

Key Findings

The strategic assessment shows that by fully implementing local plans, the region can expect several positive outcomes, including modest progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. While the region is unlikely to meet the state GHG reduction target, the assessment shows that the policies and programs that work to reduce GHG emissions also positively impact other important regional outcomes. The assessment also shows that there are a number of strategies and actions that can help the region achieve its goals related to mobility, livable communities, air quality, transportation costs, public health, and greenhouse gas emissions.

Mobility: By 2038, regional population growth, coupled with expected growth in household income will increase the demand for automotive travel in the Rogue Valley. By implementing the current adopted plans, the region is likely to see a significant increase in traffic delay resulting from this population growth, even though vehicle miles traveled per capita increases only slightly. Sensitivity tests show that a combination of enhanced transit, intelligent transportation systems, and pricing policies are effective solutions to limit the increase in travel delay. However, implementing some of these actions may be challenging. For example, current and projected levels of transit investment are likely to result in a decrease in transit service miles per capita, rather than allowing for enhanced transit service.

Livable Communities: Considering land use, results from the strategic assessment demonstrate that providing more compact-livable communities with more housing units planned in mixed-use areas, will provide a richer mix of housing options and increase biking and walking, thus leading to overall public health improvements. Regional targets call for increased mixed-use development currently, and that while the region is making progress towards these goals, more work will be needed to encourage additional mixed-use development.

Household Travel Costs: Results show that household transportation operating costs are expected to decrease over time as more people switch over to newer, more fuel-efficient vehicles. However, these vehicles will be more expensive to purchase, which leads to an increase in ownership costs. For auto dependent households, keeping auto operating costs down with strategies such as shifting to new more fuel efficient vehicles or even slowing vehicle turnover will present challenges for low income households as ownership costs increase. Pricing strategies similarly increase the cost of transportation for households and impact those with limited incomes particularly hard. However, these strategies can improve affordability if they reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) or enable households to own one less automobile where affordable alternative modes (transit, bike, walk) are available. Retaining affordable housing in mixed-use areas that provide more affordable travel options can also help households retain accessibility. Promotion of car sharing programs can also increase the affordability of new more efficient vehicles, while mixed-use and transit-accessible housing continues to develop.

Environment: Air quality in the Rogue Valley is expected to improve as a result of implementing adopted plans, as well as federal and state-led actions on vehicles and fuels; both greenhouse gases and criteria air pollutants, such as carbon monoxide, particulate matter, ozone, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide and lead, are expected to decline. By implementing adopted plans alone, greenhouse gas emissions are expected to decrease 0.6% by 2038, but when considered in combination with state and federal improvements to vehicles and fuels, the overall per capita GHG reduction in the region is expected to be 64% from 2005 levels. In addition, criteria air pollutants emitted from light duty vehicles are expected to drop over 50% from 2010 levels, primarily as a result of cleaner vehicles.

Implementation of local plans combined with state-led (e.g. ambitious policies addressing pay-as-you-drive insurance, eco-driving, low-roll-resistant tires, or a carbon tax), result in a 16% GHG reduction by 2038. However, much more work will be needed at the state and local level to reach the 19% GHG reduction target for the region. While no one policy on its own meets the target, sensitivity testing results include over 200 scenarios (beyond state-led vehicle and fuel related strategies) that can help the region achieve 19% GHG reduction.

	Key Findings	Key Factors
Mobility	Traffic delay increases significantly, even though Vehicle Miles Traveled increases only slightly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population and income growth • Vehicle fuel efficiency -> low auto operating cost • Transit investment held to 2010 level (35% reduction in service miles per capita by 2038)
Household Travel Cost	Vehicle operating costs remain relatively constant although highly susceptible to future uncertainties.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shift to new vehicles - affordability issues • Fuel efficiency offset by fuel price increase • Uncertainty of future fuel price & Income growth • Low parking costs • Available transportation options
Livable Communities	The region makes progress creating compact livable communities with more residents in mixed-use areas and richer mix of housing options.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused growth in Activity Centers • Land use and housing plans/policies
Public Health	Public health improves with better air quality, safer vehicles, and increased use of active transportation options.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cleaner vehicles • Safer vehicles • Local efforts related to walking and bicycling • Walk to transit
Environment	Transportation energy use declines significantly. Greenhouse gases per capita decline, but much more work will be needed to reach the MPO target (19%).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vehicle fuel efficiency • Fuel price • Cleaner fuels • Increase in CNG-fueled vehicles • Shift away from household use of light trucks