



TAKING STOCK 2016

Regional and Local Perspectives on Local Plan Updates and
VISION 2040 Implementation



Puget Sound Regional Council

Final Report

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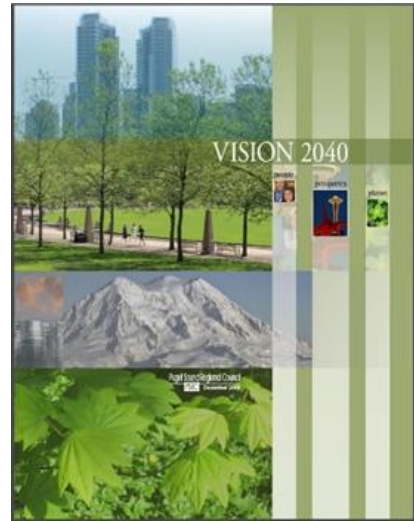
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Executive Summary

Taking Stock 2016 is an assessment of the collective efforts of the region's counties and cities to implement [VISION 2040](#), as viewed immediately following the 2015-2016 cycle of local comprehensive plan updates and looking ahead of the next update of VISION 2040. This report highlights key VISION 2040 strategies that are positively influencing local plans and shaping the region as well as strategies and tools that require more work and may need to be reinvigorated in the next update. The Taking Stock 2016 assessment aims to identify many of the successes and challenges encountered locally in implementing VISION 2040, as well as those encountered by PSRC in fulfilling its plan review and certification responsibilities. Adopted in 2008, VISION 2040 set a new course for planning in the region, including a quantitative Regional Growth Strategy and new and expanded Multicounty Planning Policies. As the first major round of local comprehensive planning completed under VISION 2040, the 2015-2016 updates represent progress in many areas and lessons for the region moving forward.



During fall 2016, PSRC staff summarized observations from review of 80 plan updates and solicited input from local jurisdictions and state agencies via an online survey, workshops held in each county, and a Working Group that guided the process and collaborated on this report. The following major themes emerged from this process as they related to key regional policy areas as well as reflections on the role of PSRC in supporting and reviewing local plans for regional certification.

Big Points: Plans and Policies

County and city plans are advancing regional goals and strategies. Overall, local plan updates support VISION 2040 and the Regional Growth Strategy, reflecting general consistency between regional and local policy direction.

Sufficient tools and resources for local planning are critical to make VISION 2040 a reality. Many jurisdictions lack the financial or staff capacity, or models of best practice, to enable them to address the full range of regional policies and actions.

Cities and counties are generally planning for growth consistent with the Regional Growth Strategy, but many face challenges in shifting from past trends. For the most part, local planning for countywide growth targets aligned well with the pattern of future housing and employment growth called for in VISION 2040. However, trends that pre-date VISION 2040, including faster growth in smaller cities and unincorporated areas, and lower rates of infill and redevelopment in a number of Metropolitan and Core cities, present local and regional challenges.

Cities are planning for vibrant centers with walkable compact development, but with uneven market activity so far. Most plans encourage growth within regional and local centers with supportive policies, targets, and prioritized investments, with a new focus on transit-oriented development. Many centers have attracted growth and investment, but others have not.

With housing costs climbing, housing affordability was an important and challenging policy area across the region. Many plans included robust housing needs analyses, new tools and commitments to explore housing strategies, however, regulatory tools and subsidies are insufficient to meet the growing need.

Local transportation plans integrate well with land use, but face financial and technical challenges. Local jurisdictions are planning for multiple modes of travel, integrating transportation with land use, and coordinating across agencies, but are continually challenged by the gap between infrastructure costs and available revenues.

Local plans address new topics, such as public health, social equity, and climate change, but more work and resources are needed. Many plans included innovative strategies on emerging policy areas not central to VISION today. Financial, educational, and technical resources, along with further policy guidance, would help cities and counties do more.

Big Points: PSRC Assistance and Plan Review

Updating local plans is a heavy lift and PSRC technical assistance has been essential. Many aspects of PSRC technical assistance, including outreach, data products, guidance documents, and online tools, have been valuable to counties and cities, and more is needed in advance of the next round of updates.

Regional review and certification met transportation funding timelines and enhanced the quality and completeness of local plans. PSRC completed certification review for 80 plan updates, on track to ensure local access to funding. Generally, PSRC comments and recommendations were considered helpful to local planning.

Plan review processes and criteria need to be clearer, more streamlined, and sensitive to local constraints. Providing greater clarity early in the planning process on certification criteria, particularly as they relate to regional, countywide, and local growth expectations, would help PSRC avoid the recent experience where conditional certifications related to Small Cities required a significant amount of board and regional and local staff time to resolve.



What Comes Next?

Taking Stock 2016 was timed to occur while the region’s experience with major plan updates and regional plan review was still fresh. Lessons learned point to potential next steps for PSRC over the next several years that may include new or revised policies or actions, programs and procedures, and prioritization of resources.

Taking Stock 2016 identified issues for further exploration as part of a VISION 2040 update. The Regional Growth Strategy, infrastructure needs, housing affordability, centers, and climate change are among the priority policy areas for the regional plan update. Taking Stock 2016 highlighted the importance of providing forums for regional conversations and set the stage for further research and data analysis to address issues raised by participants.

PSRC should refresh and enhance its technical assistance for local planning. The agency could explore ways to provide guidance and hands-on help for jurisdictions of all sizes throughout the region. Technical tools and guidance for complex or emerging policy areas, such as climate change and multimodal concurrency, have regionwide benefits.

Prior to the next major plan updates due starting in 2023, PSRC should address concerns about the plan review process. Improvements could include an updated Plan Review Manual, early outreach and coordination around updates to countywide planning policies and growth targets, and guidance and assistance to local governments around issues that led to conditional certification of recently updated plans. PSRC could also work with its members toward a more rational timeline for state, regional, and local planning under GMA.

Introduction

Taking Stock 2016 is an assessment of the implementation of VISION 2040 through updates to local comprehensive plans in 2015 and 2016 and their subsequent review and certification by the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC). The plans were developed in response to local needs and to further local goals. They were also the first round of major comprehensive plan updates adopted since the adoption of VISION 2040, and, as such, respond to a range of state and regional goals, policies, and requirements for local planning. The Taking Stock 2016 assessment aims to identify many of the successes and challenges encountered by counties and cities in implementing VISION 2040, as well as those encountered by PSRC in fulfilling its plan review responsibilities. Lessons learned from this exploration will be considered by PSRC’s boards as they carry out work plans for the next several years, including an expected update to VISION 2040.

Background

PSRC is the Metropolitan Planning Organization under federal law and Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) under state law for the central Puget Sound region which includes King, Kitsap, Pierce, and Snohomish counties. The region’s plans, including VISION 2040 and Transportation 2040, contribute to implementing the state Growth Management Act (GMA) by providing more detailed and regionally-specific guidance for countywide planning policies, county and city comprehensive plans, and provision of transportation and other key public services by a variety of agencies across the four counties.

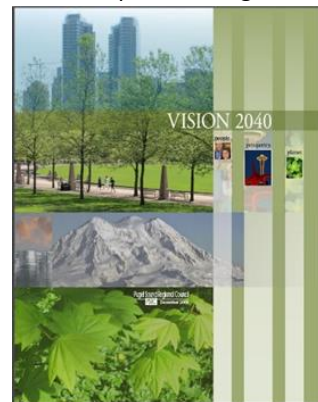
VISION 2040 is the region’s long-range strategy for sustainable development. VISION 2040 represents regional agreement on many complex issues, including environmental quality, urban and rural development, housing, economic development, transportation, and the siting of services. VISION 2040 includes a Regional Growth Strategy that is a framework policies, targets, and investments that shape the location of future growth within region. Transportation 2040 is the region’s functional plan that guides future transportation investments to support the Regional Growth Strategy.

GMA emphasizes intergovernmental coordination and consistency. To advance coordination between regional and local planning, the Act requires RTPOs to certify countywide planning policies and local comprehensive plans. To be the transportation provisions of those policies and plans must demonstrate that consistent with the regional transportation plan, with regionally established guidelines and policies (multicounty planning policies), and with GMA requirements for transportation planning (see RCW 47.80.023).

GMA requires local governments to complete major updates to their comprehensive plans every 8 years, with recent deadlines of June 2015 for jurisdictions in King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties and June 2016 for jurisdictions in Kitsap County.

PSRC engagement with local jurisdictions around comprehensive planning includes technical assistance, draft plan review, and formal certification. Anticipating a unique opportunity to learn from this process, PSRC adopted in its work program for FY 2015-2016 task 7b: an “Assessment of 2015/2016 Comprehensive Plan Updates,” which calls for PSRC to “work with local jurisdictions to identify and evaluate issues that arose during local plan development and adoption, consider different approaches to address those issues, and to identify areas where PSRC might refine VISION 2040 strategies and multicounty planning policies in a future VISION 2040 update.” Taking Stock 2016 carries out this task.

A Working Group of senior planning staff from a dozen jurisdictions of differing sizes, types, and locations throughout the region, guided the Taking Stock 2016 process. The group advised PSRC staff on scope, methods of gathering information,

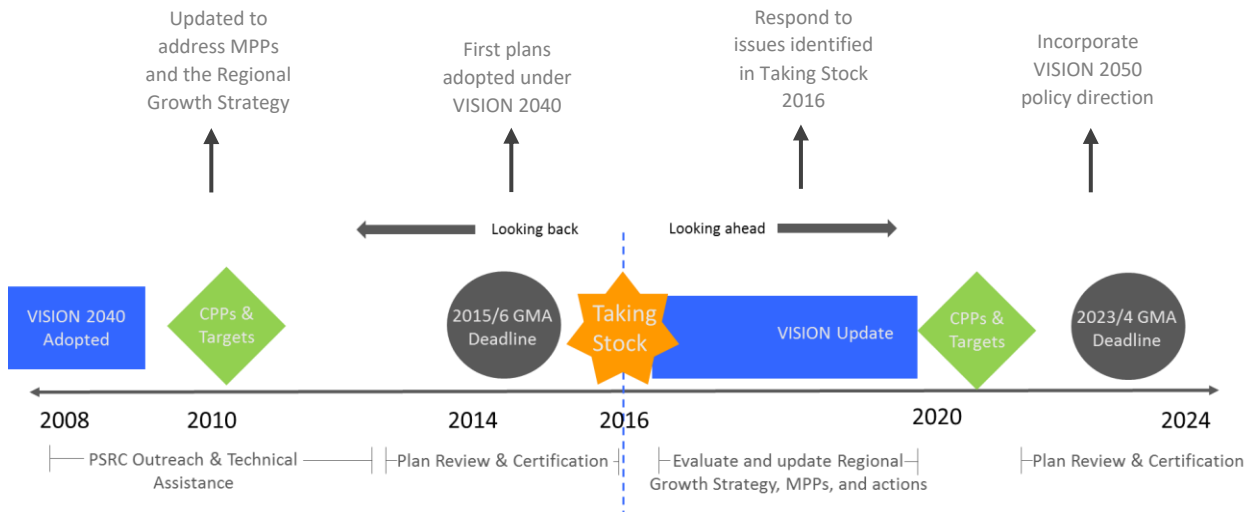


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and content of this report. Figure 1, below, places this project at a key transition point along a timeline for regional and local planning.

Figure 1: Regional planning timeline



Questions and Methods

Several key questions guided the Taking Stock 2016 process. They include the following:

- How and in what policy areas have local comprehensive plan updates been successful in implementing VISION 2040 and GMA?
- What aspects of VISION 2040 or GMA have been challenging to address, or to address fully, through local plan updates and why?
- What do counties and cities need (e.g., resources, technical assistance, regional coordination) to enable them to more fully and effectively plan and implement their plans?
- How did the PSRC plan review and certification process contribute to successful adoption of plans that do a good job of implementing VISION 2040? In what ways could the process be improved in the future?
- In considering the above questions, what lessons are there for a future VISION 2040 update?

PSRC staff sought answers to these questions through the following approaches:

- A brief online survey sent to all of the region’s 86 counties and cities
- Local jurisdiction staff participation in listening session style workshops in each county
- Interviews with state agency staff (Department of Commerce, Department of Transportation)
- Feedback from Working Group members
- Findings from PSRC’s certification review of local plans

The results, summarized in this report, thus represent a compendium of perspectives of staff who have had a “front row” seat to the comprehensive planning process through project management and direct engagement with PSRC through the review and certification process. The staff who participated represent a rich resource of experience and local knowledge.

While there are some limits to information gathered exclusively from a limited sample of individual perspectives, the findings generated through this process do highlight issues that are important locally, issues that would benefit from further data collection and analysis by PSRC in the future, with input from the public and a broader range of stakeholder

interests, as it develops more effective procedures to implement VISION 2040 and as the region collaborates around the project of updating VISION 2040.

The main report sections summarize the themes and observations that emerged from this research. The material is organized to address *policy* topics that relate to local implementation of the multicounty planning policies in VISION 2040 as well as *process* topics that relate to PSRC's engagement with local jurisdictions to support comprehensive planning that furthers VISION 2040 and regional review and certification of those plans. Finally, appendices provide more complete documentation of the Taking Stock 2016 Working Group, online survey, and workshops.

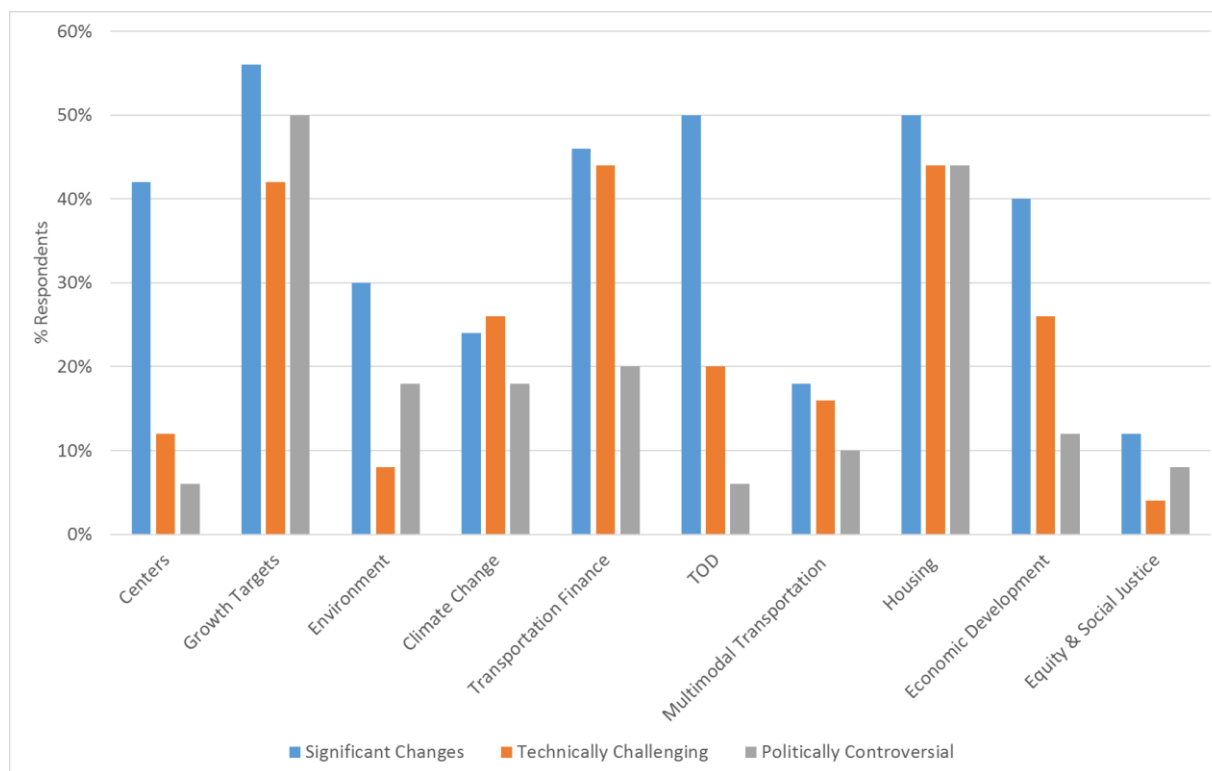
Implementing Regional Policy

The multicounty planning policies in VISION 2040 provide guidance for regional and local plans and actions. The policies are organized under six chapter headings corresponding to major policy areas--environment, development patterns, housing, economy, transportation, and public services—which were used as a framework for discussing regional and local policy issues through the Taking Stock 2016 process and summarizing the results in the following pages.

The online survey provided a high-level snapshot of local experience across a range of policy areas. With an overall response rate of greater than 50% (49 out of 86 jurisdictions), the survey results, while not completely representative of the experience of all jurisdictions, do represent the perspective of a large share of the region. Figure 2, below, summarizes those responses, highlighting several key findings, including:

- Forty percent or more of respondents identified *growth targets, centers, transportation finance, transit-oriented development, housing, or economic development* as areas where plan updates made **significant changes**.
- Policy areas that were identified by 40% or more of respondents as more **technically challenging** included *growth, transportation financing, and housing affordability*.
- While not shown in this graph, responses also indicated that **smaller jurisdictions** (Small and Larger cities in the Regional Growth Strategy) were more likely to cite technical challenges, particularly related to *growth targets, centers, and housing choice and affordability*. Transportation planning and financing was technically challenging to a broad range of types and sizes of jurisdictions.
- *Growth and housing* topped the list of policy areas about which respondents encountered the most local **political controversy** in developing their plan updates. Growth was more likely to be controversial in smaller jurisdictions, while housing affordability was associated with some controversy in a broad spectrum of communities.

Fig. 2: Survey Results - Policy Areas and Work Items



Development Patterns

The Development Patterns chapter of VISION 2040 addresses desired patterns of urban and rural land use, including maintenance of the “long-term stability” of the Urban Growth Area, focused growth in regionally designated and local centers, regional design principles, relationship between the built environment and health, and coordination of land use and transportation plans and investments.

Regional Growth Strategy

The Regional Growth Strategy in VISION 2040 is a centerpiece of the regional approach to planning for long-term population, housing, and employment growth. With the central Puget Sound region expected to grow to 5 million people and 3 million jobs by the year 2040, VISION 2040 builds upon the growth management framework in VISION 2020 with more prescriptive guidance on locations for future residential, commercial and industrial development. The strategy provides a quantitative framework for setting growth targets within each county, making investments in regional transportation and other infrastructure to support that pattern of growth, and adopting local plans that are consistent with that framework. With 15 years between the base year of 2000 and adoption of local plans under VISION 2040, a major challenge for the region is shifting some of the trends in growth during that period toward what is called for in VISION 2040.

Figure 3, below, shows the several place types (Regional Geographies) used in the growth strategy, including Metropolitan Cities, Core Cities, Larger Cities, Small Cities, Urban Unincorporated Areas, and Rural and Resource lands.

Fig. 3: Regional Geographies and Centers

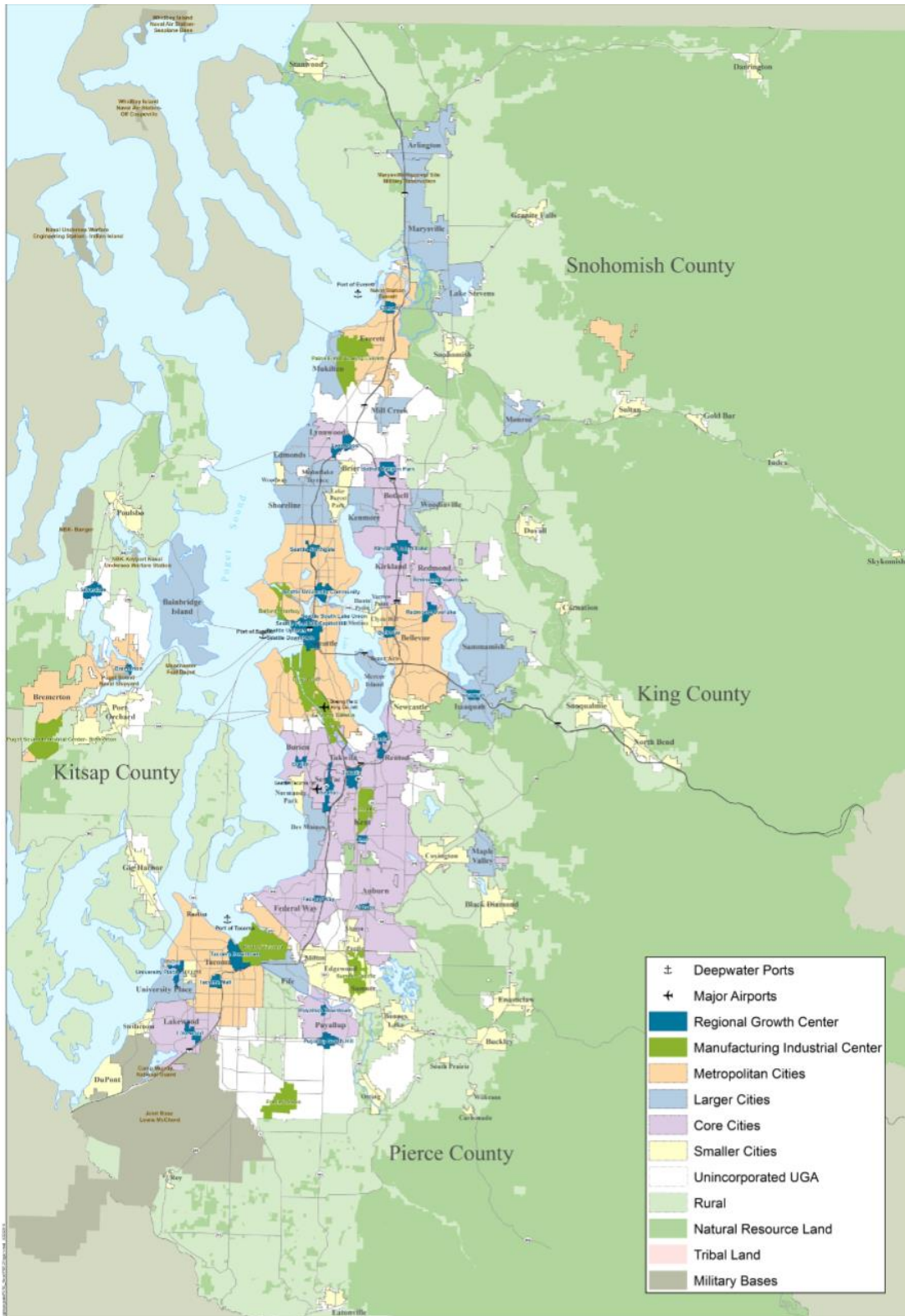
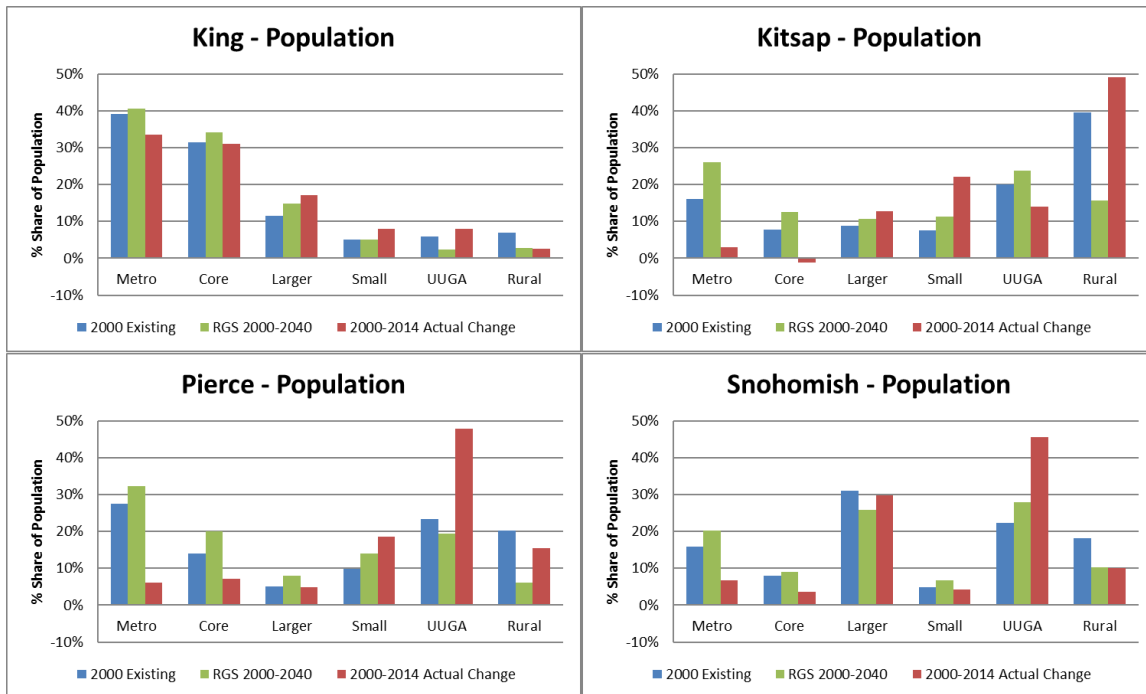


Figure 4 summarizes points of discussion at the Taking Stock 2016 workshops that relate to both successes and challenges in planning locally for the Regional Growth Strategy. Based on these observations, several preliminary options for PSRC follow-up are listed as well.

Fig. 4: Regional Growth Strategy Observations

Successes	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targets advance the growth strategy. Planned growth throughout the region, as reflected in countywide growth targets and in local comprehensive plans, generally reflects the Regional Growth Strategy. • Plans accommodate growth. Nearly all plans documented sufficient buildable land capacity to be able to accommodate adopted growth targets for housing and jobs. • Trends in line with RGS. Growth trends in many parts of the region, including Metropolitan and Core cities in King County, Rural areas in Snohomish County, and Larger Cities generally, show significant progress toward achieving the RGS. • Stable Urban Growth Areas. County plans and countywide planning policies include policies, criteria, and relevant data that has helped to support relatively stable urban growth area boundaries. • Rural to Urban Growth. Counties have adopted policies and actions to shift growth from rural to urban areas, including steps to mitigate the impact of development rights vested prior to the GMA and VISION 2040. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trends at odds with the growth strategy. Growth trends in some parts of the region do not align well with the Regional Growth Strategy (see figure 5). Some Small Cities as well as Urban Unincorporated areas, particularly in Pierce County, are growing much faster. At the same time, some Core and Larger cities, particularly in Pierce and Snohomish counties, are growing slower than the RGS. Jurisdictions have been challenged to adopt effective tools to shift these trends, plan for growth consistent with the RGS, while planning for infrastructure to serve actual growth levels that may occur during the 20-year period. • Growth in Small Cities. Several Small Cities are planning for significantly more growth than allocated per adopted growth targets. • Reaching limits to capacity. While sufficient, development capacity is tight in many jurisdictions, with little room for growth beyond this 20-year planning period. Meanwhile, some cities and unincorporated areas have zoned development capacity well above adopted growth targets.
Options for PSRC	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set ambitious, but realistic, guidance in an updated Regional Growth Strategy, and adopt policies and tools to make it a reality. PSRC can work closely with member jurisdictions to develop an updated strategy that is achievable over the long term, incorporating lessons learned from market trends experienced since 2000, building on the success of jurisdictions that are currently on track with the RGS, and providing better guidance on best practices and tools to shift growth trends further, where needed. A revised approach to Regional Geographies may be part of the update. • Support planning for capacity to accommodate growth in urban areas. The next update of VISION 2040 will likely extend the Regional Growth Strategy out to 2050. As buildable land capacity becomes tighter, reaching community agreement on targets and accommodating the planned growth may be difficult. PSRC can be supportive of this process with regional modeling and analysis, infrastructure investments that support targeted growth, and guidance for local governments on efficient land use practices. 	

Fig. 5: Growth patterns—baseline in 2000, RGS to 2040, and actual population growth 2000-2014—illustrate successes and challenges in working toward VISION 2040 goals in each county.



Source: Puget Sound Regional Council

Urban Unincorporated Areas

VISION 2040 calls for the annexation or incorporation of land within the Urban Growth Area. From 2000 to 2010 approximately 46,000 acres were annexed, and from 2010 to 2015 approximately 18,500 acres were annexed. Regionally, as of 2016, 89,111 acres of urban area is affiliated with cities for eventual annexation, 56,772 acres of land is unaffiliated. There are unannexed and unaffiliated urban areas in all four counties. The largest unaffiliated areas are in Pierce County, an issue which is being addressed by the county in response to the conditional certification of its comprehensive plan update. Southwest Snohomish County contains a large rapidly urbanizing unincorporated area, including future stations along the planned Link light rail. Kitsap County is working toward eventual incorporation of Silverdale, which is the only designated Regional Growth Center not currently within a city. Unincorporated urban areas in King County are primarily low-income and need services that would be better and more completely funded if these areas were in city jurisdiction. Annexation in this context is an issue of social equity.

Figure 6 summarizes points of discussion at the Taking Stock 2016 workshops that relate to both successes and challenges on these issues. Based on these observations, several preliminary options for PSRC follow-up are listed as well.

Fig. 6: Urban Unincorporated Areas Observations

Successes	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New outreach and collaboration. Counties report actively working with cities and unincorporated communities in promoting affiliation and annexation of urban unincorporated areas • Investments in new communities. Counties have taken steps to urbanize unincorporated areas with plans and capital investments, bolster viability of annexation or incorporation. • Supportive plans and policies. Cities have adopted plans that address future annexation areas. • Availability of the state sales tax credit intended to encourage the annexation of large (>10,000 population) unincorporated urban areas, for the time while it was available, was met with success in several locations within King and Snohomish Counties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited county resources to provide services to unincorporated areas. With declining tax bases, counties are challenged to provide urban services to meet the needs of unincorporated area residents and to improve the likelihood of future transition to municipal governance. • Barriers to cities annexing new areas. Many residents of unincorporated urban areas have opposed annexation to cities. Special purpose districts may oppose annexation due to conflicting priorities. Cities may not be able to annex areas due to the costs of bringing them up to urban standards and providing urban services, especially low-income areas with backlog of service needs. • Limited legal toolbox. Jurisdictions lack sufficient tools available to achieve annexation under state law.
Options for PSRC	

- **PSRC support for progress on annexations and incorporations.** PSRC can provide support for counties and cities toward successful joint planning that results in annexation of appropriate lands to cities, as well as foster the adoption of best practices among counties and cities, including toward resolution of the Pierce County conditional certification.
- **Collective voice on needed state actions.** PSRC can provide a forum for counties and cities to develop proposals for state legislation to enhance and increase the range of tools available to incentivize and complete annexations, including process reforms to facilitate annexations and financial mechanisms to allow local jurisdictions to meet the infrastructure and service needs of annexed areas.

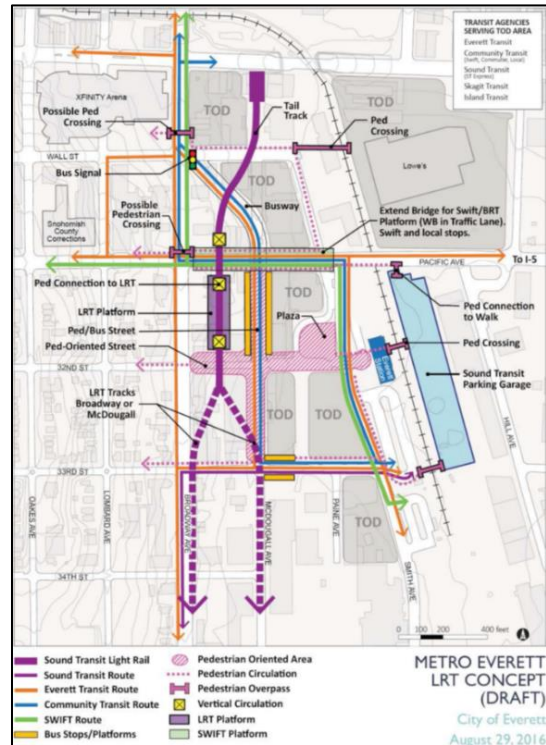
Centers and TOD

VISION 2040 is a centers-based strategy for accommodating growth and prioritizing investments in regional infrastructure. It formally designates regional growth centers as locations for intensive residential and commercial development that are planned to accommodate a significant share of the region's population and employment growth. Regional growth centers complemented by county and local designation of other smaller-scale centers of activity. PSRC also designates manufacturing/industrial centers as locations with more intensive employment for industrial and related economic activities.

PSRC is currently working on a Regional Centers Framework update, including an evaluation of the existing framework and recommendations to recognize regional and subregional centers using consistent designation criteria and procedures. If adopted, the new centers framework would inform future regional and local planning and investments. A project [background report](#) includes detailed information on existing conditions, trends, and local and regional policies.

Consistent with the regional centers approach, the [Growing Transit Communities Strategy](#) was developed by PSRC and a wide range of regional partners as an implementation plan to promote thriving and equitable transit communities in the central Puget Sound region and to provide tools and resources to implement adopted regional and local plans. The strategy contains numerous recommendations for local governments and other key players and underscores the importance of transit-oriented development to the region as it plans for growth around an expanding network of high-capacity transit.

Figure 7 summarizes points of discussion at the Taking Stock 2016 workshops that relate to both successes and challenges in planning for centers and transit-oriented development. Based on these observations, several preliminary options for PSRC follow-up are listed as well.



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Cities, such as Everett, are planning for future light rail stations.

Fig. 7: Observations on Centers and TOD Policies

Successes	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local plans focus on centers. Most comprehensive plans focus housing and job growth in regional and local centers. • Growth in centers. Many centers have attracted growth and investment since VISION 2040 was adopted. Some centers, including the downtowns of Seattle and Bellevue, have experienced rapid growth. • Local investment in centers. Generally, local jurisdictions have prioritized capital investments to centers to support development and multimodal mobility. • Growth targets and mode split goals. Most cities with regionally designated centers have adopted growth targets and mode split goals, as called for in VISION 2040. • TOD strategies in local plans. Transit-oriented development was a prominent feature of many plans, a focus for growth and public improvements around existing and planned light rail stations, commuter rail stations, and bus rapid transit corridors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not all centers are growing. Some regional and local centers have not yet attracted new development at a scale envisioned locally or in VISION 2040. • Limited infrastructure funding. Resources available to local governments are insufficient to meet infrastructure needs for centers. Not all plans made clear that capital investments would be prioritized to centers. • Realizing the goals of the GTC Strategy. With expansion of HCT investments in the region, there are unrealized opportunities to expand TOD planning, including transit-supportive densities and uses within walking distance of transit stations and equitable TOD that emphasizes affordable housing preservation and production. Local jurisdictions face barriers related to gaps in the current transit system and long-range timelines for expanding HCT.
Options for PSRC	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanded guidance for local planning for centers. Through ongoing work on the Regional Centers Framework update, PSRC has an opportunity to promote best practices and greater consistency across the region in subarea planning around both regional and local centers. • Promote wider implementation of the Growing Transit Communities Strategy. PSRC can continue to work toward wider and more complete implementation of the GTC Strategy, including encouraging additional local governments to sign the GTC compact. PSRC could support local implementation, especially around planned high-capacity transit stations, with technical assistance on station area planning, and by promoting coordination with transit agencies, and, where appropriate, applying regional or countywide designation for station areas. 	

Housing

VISION 2040 establishes as a goal that “the region will preserve, improve, and expand its housing stock to provide a range of affordable, healthy, and safe housing choices to every resident.” Local comprehensive plans are expected to address several aspects of housing and housing affordability. First, plans should promote increased housing production opportunities, including diverse types and styles for all income levels and demographic groups. The housing element should evaluate affordable housing needs, including an assessment of existing and future housing needs based on regional and local factors, including household income, demographics, special needs populations, and adequacy of existing housing stocks. Finally, local plans should address regional housing objectives in VISION 2040, including accommodating a fair of housing diversity and affordability, jobs-housing balance, housing in centers, and flexible standards and innovative techniques.

With recent trends showing steadily increasing home and rents across the region, housing was a major topic of discussion during the Taking Stock workshops. Figure 8 summarizes key points that relate to both successes and challenges in addressing housing regionally and locally. on these observations, several preliminary options for follow-up are listed as well.



Plaza Roberto Maestas, El Centro de la Raza, Seattle

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Fig. 8: Observations on Housing Policies

Successes	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing prioritized as critical issue. Communities expressed a higher level of interest in housing and housing affordability issues. • Robust housing analysis. Most plans included data-rich housing needs assessments that helped to inform policies and strategies. The use of common data and definitions, accompanied in some cases by staff support from subregional coalitions and other agencies (e.g., A Regional Coalition for Housing, Affordable Housing Alliance, health agencies, advocacy organizations) fostered greater coordination among jurisdictions. • Housing capacity met growth needs. Local plans provided sufficient capacity for overall targeted housing units needed over the 20-year planning period. • Planning for more diverse housing types. Many plans increased support for a greater diversity of housing types, including small-lot single-family, townhomes, senior housing, multifamily housing types, and innovative infill like accessory dwelling units and cottage housing. • Use of more affordable housing tools. Many jurisdictions have adopted new policies supporting new tools to encourage housing affordability, e.g., Multifamily Tax Exemption (MFTE), incentive and inclusionary zoning, streamlined regulations, surplus public lands. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local housing is impacted by larger forces. Housing is shaped by factors that are beyond local control, e.g., employment growth, wages, construction costs, financing, and funding from federal, state, and other programs for affordable housing. • Community opposition to affordable housing. Some residents continue to see density and subsidized housing as negatives for their communities. • Completeness of needs assessments. Future housing needs (# units, types, affordability levels), including the local share of countywide affordable housing needs, were not always clearly specified in the updated housing elements. • Plans may not match housing demand. Participants expressed varying perspectives on how well planned housing types met demand, with some focusing on limited supply to meet demand for single-family housing, some focusing on lack of housing diversity, especially alternatives to SF detached. • One size does not fit all. Guidance on affordable housing strategies and tools is seen by some as not differentiating among cities of different sizes and market conditions. • Limited funding for affordable housing. Available housing subsidies fall far short of the need. Local efforts to create housing are piecemeal; there is a need for more leveraged multijurisdictional efforts to finance affordable housing. • Displacement is a rising concern with few effective tools. Local governments have limited tools to preserve existing affordable housing that may be lost either to redevelopment or rising rents.

Options for PSRC

- **Promote collective action on affordable housing.** PSRC can continue to provide a forum for multijurisdictional efforts to create or leverage new resources for affordable housing. The Regional Equitable Development Initiative Fund, which grew out of the Growing Transit Communities work, and benefits from investments from Seattle, King County, and A Regional Coalition for Housing (ARCH), is a recent example.
- **Housing data, analysis, and information on best practices.** Building upon direction in Action H-1 in VISION 2040, PSRC can be a source of data and analysis on regional housing supply and demand that supports affordable housing plans at multiple levels of governance. Consistent with Action H-2, and using the existing Housing Innovations Program website as a starting point, PSRC could also play a more active role in supporting local housing strategies with information and models for best practices.
- **Consider the impacts of regional growth policies on housing.** As the region considers policy updates and extensions to the Regional Growth Strategy, PSRC should use its data and modeling tools to ensure a robust assessment of the impacts of various alternatives on housing affordability.

Transportation

PSRC review of local comprehensive plan updates focused on transportation-related provisions, which include requirements for the transportation element in the GMA, MPPs in the transportation chapter of VISION 2040, and conformance with Transportation 2040. Local comprehensive plans are expected to address a broad range of data and policies, including:

- Land use assumptions and forecasts
- Service and facility needs
- Financing and investments
- Intergovernmental coordination
- Demand management
- Pedestrian and bicycle planning
- Land uses adjacent to airports
- Maintenance, management, and safety
- Support for the Regional Growth Strategy
- Improved transportation options and mobility
- Linking land use and transportation

Given the complexity of transportation planning and its prominence in regional review of comprehensive plan updates, transportation was a major topic during the Taking Stock workshops. Figure 9 summarizes key points from those discussions, including both successes and challenges. Based on these observations, several preliminary options for PSRC follow-up are listed as well.



Fig. 9: Observations on Transportation

Successes	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved collaboration among cities, counties, and transit agencies. • Integration of land use and transit planning, especially around regional and local centers and corridors with high levels of transit service. • Greater focus on non-motorized transportation, including multimodal access to transit and promotion of active transportation and its health benefits. • Innovative approaches, such as Safe Routes to School and Complete Streets, addressed area-wide improvements that improved safety and pedestrian and bicycle travel options. • Multimodal level of service (LOS). Cities made an effort to define multimodal LOS and concurrency requirements consistent with direction in VISION 2040 to emphasize the movement of people and goods rather than vehicles alone. • Plans contained strong examples of multi-year transportation financing strategies that addressed 20-year improvements, anticipated revenues and costs, and a reassessment strategy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation funding falls short of needs. Many plans showed significant gaps between costs of needed improvements and anticipated revenues over the 20-year planning period. Growth is seen as outpacing revenues for both capacity and maintenance needs, especially for local arterials. • Gaps in the transportation system, particularly first and last mile connections to transit and non-motorized facilities, and areas of the region that lack good access to transit and non-motorized infrastructure. • Fully addressing multimodal LOS and concurrency management remains challenging for most jurisdictions and would benefit from more state and regional technical assistance. • Cross-border traffic impacts. Pass-through traffic is a challenge where transportation corridors link cities or extend across rural areas. • Multiyear financing plans vary in detail. Extending a rigorous financial analysis beyond the 6-year Capital Improvement Plan was technically challenging for many jurisdictions, seen by some as having limited utility, given uncertainties, in estimating costs and revenues for the 20-year plan. • Bicycle and pedestrian improvements were not always clearly indicated in 20-year project lists and financing plans. • Freight movement around ports and industrial areas poses unique challenges and funding needs.
Options for PSRC	

- **Provide leadership toward new and expanded funding tools for local infrastructure.** PSRC can play a supportive role in developing and assessing different funding methods as well as advocating for more funding to meet local infrastructure needs.
- **Continue to support local transportation planning through technical assistance.** PSRC can continue to provide technical assistance and disseminate best practices on needed topics, such as multimodal LOS and concurrency, transportation modeling, and transit-supportive planning.

Environment

Working toward a sustainable environment is a guiding framework for VISION 2040 that is implemented locally through a wide range of land use and environmental policies. In planning for growth targets that align with the Regional Growth Strategy, counties and cities contribute to regional environmental outcomes that include preservation of rural and resource lands, along with energy efficiency and reductions in vehicle miles traveled. Local comprehensive plans are also expected to address environmental stewardship such as conserving open spaces and critical habitat, promoting water quality, improving air quality consistent with federal and state law, and taking steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the future impacts of climate change.

Policies related to the environment did not receive as much attention through the PSRC plan review and certification process as other policy areas where there was a clearer nexus with transportation. PSRC provided comments related to a selected set of environmental topics, reflected in the table below. Figure 10 summarizes points of discussion at the Taking Stock 2016 workshops that relate to both successes and challenges in planning for a sustainable environment. Based on these observations, several preliminary options for PSRC follow-up are listed as well.

Fig. 10: Observations on Environmental Policy

Successes	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low Impact Development was successfully integrated into many plans. • Planning for open space. Plans advanced open space networks, trail systems, and environmentally sensitive areas protections. • Urban forests were a priority. Some plans included strong examples of policies on tree retention and urban tree canopy protection and enhancement. • Incorporation of climate change policies and actions as noted in table on page 21. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local opposition to low impact development in some communities due to cost concerns for both residents and developers. • Limited capacity on urban forestry. Cities would like to get more involved in urban forestry management, but lack the resources to move forward. • Difficulties coordinating with adjacent jurisdictions on critical areas and open space planning. • Some jurisdictions found it challenging to plan for and fund stream and shoreline restoration. • Some jurisdictions cited difficulty navigating overlapping federal and state environmental requirements. • Data gaps in environmental mapping available to local jurisdictions. • Environmental policies were somewhat silo'd within some comprehensive plans. The environment could be better integrated with economic development, health, land use, and other policy areas.

Options for PSRC

- **Make available additional technical assistance resources on the environment.** The Taking Stock 2016 process identified several environmental topics where additional technical assistance is desired, including urban forestry, low impact development, and climate change. PSRC can identify appropriate methods to provide guidance to local jurisdictions, such as partnerships with environmental agencies to provide peer networking opportunities, guidance papers, and web-based resources.
- **Address data gaps in Regional Open Space Conservation Plan.** The development of a newly grant-funded Regional Open Space Conservation Plan by PSRC is an opportunity to assemble and disseminate to local jurisdictions more complete regional environmental mapping and data, with a focus on areas outside the contiguous UGA, including value-added tools to evaluate and prioritize open space resources. In doing so, PSRC can facilitate coordination between counties and with cities that border them on critical areas and open space planning.



Rain garden (with balloons). City of Tacoma plan.

Public Services

VISION 2040 establishes a goal that “the region will support development with adequate public facilities and services in a coordinated, efficient, and cost-effective manner that supports local and regional growth planning objectives.” As with the environment, PSRC review of local comprehensive plan policies related to public services was limited to a select key issues. These included provisions related to energy efficiency and conservation, including promotion of renewable energy and alternative energy sources, planning for long-term water needs and conservation, and urban vs. rural service levels. Plans were also evaluated for including capital facilities investments and assumptions that supported the Regional Growth Strategy.

Figure 11 summarizes points of discussion at the Taking Stock 2016 workshops that relate to both successes and challenges in planning for public services. Based on these observations, several preliminary options for PSRC follow-up are listed as well.

Fig. 11: Observations on Public Services Policies

Successes	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional framework shaped local prioritization. VISION 2040 and the RGS provided a framework that helped counties and cities to prioritize capital facilities investments to planned growth areas. • Planning to fill gaps in urban sewer service. Plans generally addressed regional policy on the need to plan for urban development that can be served with sanitary sewers, or accommodate future infill upon attaining service. Un-sewered areas persist within UGAs, both cities and county jurisdiction. • Public service efficiency was stressed in many plans. Plans generally included provisions on efficiency of service delivery through existing actions and ongoing improvements. • Policies on water and energy conservation were strong in a number of plans, especially where guided by broader environmental goals related to climate change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital and operating costs may exceed limited revenue sources. Jurisdictions of all sizes are challenged to meet the service needs of a growing region, with declining state funding, limitations on property tax, and challenges of coordinating with multiple special districts. Small cities, in particular, struggle with long term costs of capital facilities maintenance – stormwater, small parks, open space tracts, local streets – and are looking at alternative models. • Small geographically isolated communities face challenges in tying into regional water and sewer systems. • Urban serving schools in rural area. Counties are considering approaches to meeting school siting needs within the UGA. State requirements on this topic are currently under consideration by the legislature.
Options for PSRC	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make available additional technical assistance resources on public services policies and tools. PSRC may consider providing additional technical assistance and disseminate best practices on public services topics, such as efficient development patterns, energy and water efficiency, and cost reduction strategies such as subregional facilities. 	

Economy

VISION 2040 establishes as an overarching goal that “the region will have a prospering and sustainable regional economy by supporting businesses and job creation, investing in all people, sustaining environmental quality, and creating great central places, diverse communities, and high quality of life.” Policies in the Economy chapter encourage regional and local policies and actions in the areas of business retention and recruitment, workforce housing, and equitable benefits of regional prosperity.

The Regional Economic Strategy, last updated by the Economic Development District board in 2012, addresses foundations of the regional economy, such as workforce development, infrastructure, and quality of life, and also promotes regional competitiveness in ten targeted industry clusters, such as information technology and maritime activities.

As with the environment and public services, PSRC review of the required economic development elements of local plans was limited. Figure 12 summarizes successes and challenges identified in the Taking Stock workshops. Based on these observations, several preliminary options for PSRC follow-up are listed as well.

Fig. 12: Observations on Economic Policies

Successes	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plans addressed the economy. Economic development was addressed in all plans and adopted elements were generally strong and well-tailored to the local context. • Importance of place-making. Economic objectives addressed in land use, capital facilities, and other elements focused on place-based economic development. • Collaboration around economic development. Plan updates were an opportunity for collaboration among departments, with other agencies, chambers of commerce, and major employers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uneven economic gains locally. Not all communities have benefited equally from increased regional prosperity and this was a major theme in feedback on this topic. • Jobs-housing mismatch. Most new jobs are located in Seattle and King County. More affordable housing opportunities are located outside of King County, where both regional and local goals call for increased employment. • Limited economic development toolbox. Local jurisdictions are affected by economic trends that are largely outside their control, and they report having limited incentives available to retain or attract employers.
Options for PSRC	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direction on economic development that supports the desired pattern of housing and jobs. The Regional Growth Strategy, which includes a future distribution of employment growth in the region and improvements to jobs-housing balance in each of the counties, could be better supported by policies and strategies to retain, grow, and attract new employers in all locations the region intends job gains to concentrate, including outside of King County and Seattle. 	

Emerging Topics: Healthy Communities, Climate Change, and Social Equity

VISION 2040 introduced several new areas for regional and local policy development and action. Three prominent new topics are planning for healthy communities, addressing climate change, and promoting social equity. Comments from local staff on these topics emphasized several common themes. First, there are fine examples of innovative work in all three areas. However, limited resources, technical challenges, and mixed community support have resulted in uneven levels of specificity in addressing these issues.

On health, VISION 2040 establishes as a goal that “the region’s communities will be planned and designed to promote physical, social, and mental wellbeing.” MPP-DP-43 through -47 provide direction for local plans to address improvements in active transportation, healthy building practices, and sustainable food systems, emphasizing coordination among jurisdictions and agencies. The GMA includes additional requirements related to active transportation. Figure 13, below, summarizes successes and challenges identified in the Taking Stock workshops related to healthy communities. Based on these observations, several preliminary options for PSRC follow-up are listed as well.

Fig. 13: Observations on Planning for Healthy Communities

Successes	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plans incorporated health perspectives. Many jurisdictions successfully integrated public health into their plans, especially related to land use, transportation, environment, and housing policy. • Involvement of public health agencies. Officials at county health departments engaged with several cities in the update process, contributing technical support, analysis, and advocacy for local measures to improve the health of their residents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health inequity persists. Many see access to elements of a healthy environment as not equitably distributed in the region. This includes access to safe and convenient pedestrian and bicycle facilities, access to healthy food, healthy buildings (especially housing), and parks and open space. • Changing needs of the population. Beyond addressing current public health needs, demographic dimensions of future growth, such as the aging of the population, are challenging to address through local plans.
Options for PSRC	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical assistance and education. PSRC can work with health districts to disseminate information about the benefits of creating a healthy built environment, along with best practice models and real world examples for how to leverage public and private investment to retrofit existing communities. 	

On climate change, VISION 2040 calls for actions toward greenhouse gas emissions reductions, with a goal that “the region will reduce its overall production of harmful elements that contribute to climate change.” With the transportation sector the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in the region, Transportation 2040 promotes a Four-Part Greenhouse Gas Reduction Strategy, including expansion of travel by modes other than single-occupant vehicles, and land use strategies, such as improvements to jobs-housing balance and transit-oriented development. Figure 14, below, summarizes successes and challenges identified in the Taking Stock workshops related to climate change. Based on these observations, several preliminary options for PSRC follow-up are listed as well.

Fig. 14: Observations on Climate Change Policies

Successes	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Plans addressed climate change. Most local plan updates included policies that addressed climate change. Even if not explicitly tied to climate change, all plans included policies addressing issues such as local mixed-use centers, multimodal transportation, or efficient public services, that contributed to climate change mitigation. Several plans addressed strategies on climate adaptation.• Integrated approaches to climate change. Several counties and cities developed detailed sustainability strategies that addressed climate change along with other interrelated topics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local climate change toolbox is limited. Climate change is seen by some jurisdictions as challenging to address through local actions, as opposed to regional, state, national, or global actions. Communities, in particular smaller cities, have limited resources to develop and implement climate change strategies.• Uneven local support for climate policies. While some communities reported broad public support for addressing climate change in their plan updates, others reported that political controversy around the issue constrained their ability to address climate issues, at least explicitly.
Options for PSRC	

- **Regional goals and guidance.** PSRC can contribute to providing more information about the short and long term benefits of local action to mitigate and adapt to climate change, along with guidance on tools and best practices that are suitable for various sizes and types of jurisdictions. Regional goals or targets may provide a useful framework for guiding and supporting local strategies.

While VISION 2040 does not include a section or chapter devoted to social equity, the plan includes housing, transportation, and development patterns policies that promote equitable access for people of all incomes and abilities. The Growing Transit Communities Strategy more directly addresses policies and actions that promote social equity in the context of transit oriented development.

Social equity was not explicitly addressed through PSRC plan review and certification. Nor was the topic much discussed during the Taking Stock workshops. With that in mind, figure 15, below, summarizes a handful of high-level observations about how the topic appeared in local comprehensive plans. Based on these observations, several preliminary options for PSRC follow-up are listed as well.

Figure 15: Observations on Social Equity

Successes	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Plans addressed several dimensions of social equity. Demographic profiles highlighted the trend toward greater diversity throughout the region. Plans included examples of new strategies to engage disadvantaged constituencies, including communities of color, immigrants, youth, seniors, and low-income households. Several plans integrated social equity within broader sustainability strategies. Even where not addressed explicitly, social equity was furthered through policies that expanded access to housing, transportation, educational, and governmental services and resources.• Exemplary local approaches to promoting social equity. King County and several cities, including signatories to the GTC Compact, adopted detailed strategies to promote social equity, including tools to prevent displacement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Relatively little statutory or regional policy guidance for local governments on social equity. Jurisdictions have begun to recognize the need to more thoroughly address social equity both in the process of developing plans and policies and in the substance of those policies. This starts with going beyond standard practices for community engagement. It may include more comprehensive approaches to assessing the equity impacts of proposed policies and tools to implement those policies. Either as a stand-alone section, or incorporated throughout the required plan elements, social equity impacts multiple policy areas that are at the core of comprehensive planning. Lacking a clear mandate or set of best practices, many jurisdictions addressed social equity as a secondary consideration in their plan updates.
Options for PSRC	

- **Raise profile of social equity planning.** PSRC can start to fill the gap in terms of regional guidance by considering goals and policies that may be added to VISION 2040. PSRC could also work with its members to identify regional, countywide, and local implementation actions to further social equity in the next round of comprehensive plan updates. The VISION 2040 update itself is an opportunity to demonstrate best practices in equitable engagement and policy development that includes robust analysis of equity impacts.

Process Topics: Technical Assistance and Certification Review

The following sections summarize feedback from local jurisdiction staff and state agencies regarding the process by which PSRC has engaged with local governments in support of comprehensive planning consistent with VISION 2040.

Following the adoption of VISION 2040 in 2008, PSRC worked for several years to provide guidance on technical assistance to counties and cities on steps they would take to further the goals and policies in the regional plan. The table in Fig. 16 summarizes elements of that work.

Fig. 16: Plan Review Process

Activity	Timing	Details
VISION 2040 Workshops	2013	In collaboration with the Washington State Dept. of Commerce. Several sessions offered. Attended by more than 150 participants.
Peer Networking	2014 on	Sessions at PSRC on various topics
Plan Review Manual	2010 / 2014	Comprehensive guide to plan review process, including relevant policies and criteria, examples and models, and reporting tools.
Guidance Papers	Various	Airport Compatible Land Use, Growth Targets and Mode Split Goals for Regional Centers, Housing Element Guide, Transit-Supportive Densities and Land Uses, and others
Data and Modeling	Ongoing	Land Use Targets / Land Use Vision, PSRC Travel Model, Census profiles, and others
Other Online Resources	2010 - 2015	Housing Innovations Program website, Growing Transit Communities, Planning for Whole Communities Toolkit, and others

As local governments developed their comprehensive plan updates and moved them to adoption in 2015 and 2016, PSRC provided review and feedback in two phases that addressed both certification criteria as well as broader policy considerations in the full range of policies in VISION 2040. First, jurisdictions were asked to provide draft plan elements for early review. The draft review typically occurred several months prior to plan adoption, often during the 60-day review period for Commerce. In all, PSRC provided more than 60 comment letters. As each plan update was formally adopted by a city or county, PSRC moved onto formal certification review, consistent with the Policy and Plan Review Process adopted by PSRC in 2003. Staff drafted a certification report, refined the draft in collaboration with jurisdiction staff, and submitted it to the PSRC policy boards along with a certification recommendation. The policy boards passed on their final recommendation to the Executive Board for certification action.

As of March 2017, PSRC has acted on 80 plans. Sixty of these were fully certified as consistent with VISION 2040, Transportation 2040, and the transportation provisions of GMA. Twenty plans received a conditional certification, indicating that while the plan was largely consistent with certification criteria, a limited set of issues needed to be addressed through further plan amendments to warrant full certification. Typically, a deadline of the end of 2017 was set for this work, during which local jurisdictions would remain eligible for regionally managed transportation funds. Figure 17 shows the plans that received conditional certifications and briefly characterizes the conditions.

Fig. 17: Summary of Conditionally Certified Plans

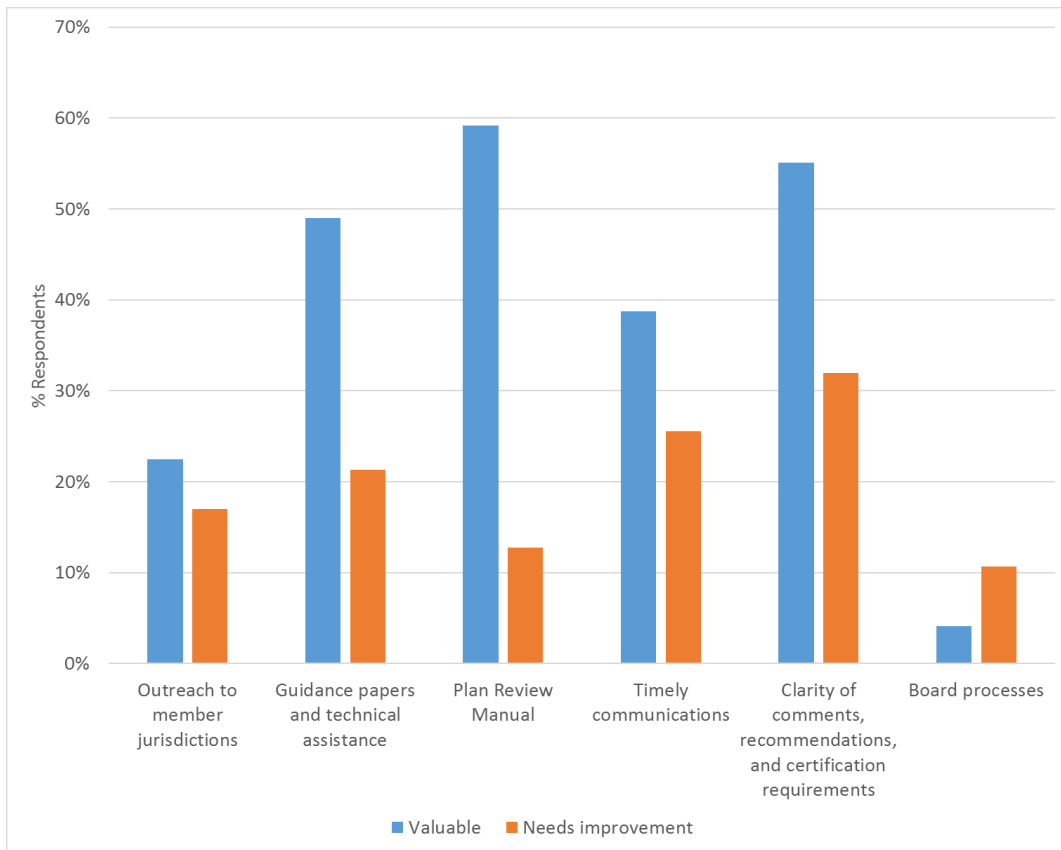
Jurisdiction	Targets	Capacity	Bike/Ped	Finance	RGS	Consistency
Arlington						
Bonney Lake						
Carnation						
Covington						
Duvall						
Gig Harbor						
Granite Falls						
Lakewood						
Milton						
Newcastle						
North Bend						
Orting						
Pacific						
Pierce County						
Puyallup						
Snoqualmie						
South Prairie						
Stanwood						
Tukwila						
Wilkeson						

The topic of **conditional certifications** came up frequently during the Taking Stock 2016 process. Many of the 19 cities and one county whose plans had received conditional certifications participated in the project. Most local governments made it clear that full certification is a preferred outcome to conditional certification. They expressed concerns that included potential costs, local perceptions and impacts, and continued access to funding. Most jurisdictions with conditionally certified plans also said they were on track to address the conditions by their deadlines.

Heightened concerns were expressed by a subset of the conditionally certified jurisdictions, the six Small Cities in the region whose plans had been conditioned on addressing locally planned growth that greatly exceeded adopted housing and/or employment growth targets. The cities talked about a variety of local issues reflected in their growth numbers, including recent growth trends, development in the pipeline, zoned development capacity, and past infrastructure investments. They talked about different perspectives on local expectations for planning for growth targets, whether targets represented a “ceiling” or a “floor,” and what it meant to align local plans with the Regional Growth Strategy.

The online survey for Taking Stock 2016 asked for high level feedback about various elements of PSRC engagement, including both technical assistance and plan review and certification. Figure 18, below, summarizes responses to questions that asked which activities by PSRC were most valuable and which activities needed improvement.

Fig. 18: Plan Review Resources



As indicated in the percent of responses, highly valued aspects of PSRC engagement included guidance papers and technical assistance, the Plan Review Manual, and clarity of comments and recommendations produced during plan review and certification. On the other hand, clarity and timeliness of communications were most seen as needing improvement in the future. The low rate of response on issues related to board processes can be understood in light of the fact that most plans were fully certified by the board, with little or no discussion, as these actions proceeded through the process.

Housing Innovations Program

The Housing Innovations Program is a new collection of planning resources that local governments in the central Puget Sound region can use to promote housing affordability and smart growth in their communities. We welcome your contributions and feedback.

Housing Toolkit

The Toolkit contains profiles of 49 tools, incentives and other strategies for encouraging affordable housing.

Urban Centers

Transit Oriented Development

Expensive Housing Markets

Innovative Single Family Techniques

Housing In
INNOVATIONS
CITIZENS
People

Education & Outreach

novations
49
Complete
Housing Toolkit

Planning for Whole Communities Toolkit

Land Use & Environment

Complete Communities

Economic Opportunity

Active Transportation

Plan Review Manual

A Resource to Assist with Plan Development and Review - including Certification

PSRC provides a variety of plan review resources.

Figure 19 summarizes successes and challenges related to technical assistance and PSRC resources discussed during the Taking Stock workshops. Based on these observations, several preliminary options for PSRC follow-up are listed as well.

Fig. 19: Observations on PSRC Technical Assistance

Successes	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VISION 2040 and the Plan Review Manual were widely used by local planning staff. • Workshops added value. Local staff found PSRC outreach and workshops valuable in providing essential information and setting a collaborative tone for the plan updates. • PSRC guidance papers and online resources were helpful, particularly in providing information on best practices and new or emerging policy topics or requirements. • Crucial PSRC role as data source. PSRC technical support for local planning in the form of forecasting, travel modeling census extracts, and other data products is indispensable to local jurisdictions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited local capacity. Small jurisdictions have limited staffing and financial resources to make best use of PSRC resources. • Misalignment between local, regional, and state timelines. Sequence and timing of planning activities, including GMA deadlines, Office of Financial Management population projections, and PSRC publications and outreach, were not synched up to enable all counties and cities to have the best available information when needed for their plan updates. • Difficulties integrating data from PSRC with data from Buildable Lands and other sources, particularly where land capacity greatly exceeds small area forecasts. • Confusion from multiple checklists and requirements. Statutory requirements for the transportation element not clearly integrated within the checklist. It is confusing for local jurisdictions that there are multiple checklists – PSRC, WSDOT, and Commerce.
Options for PSRC	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve alignment between state, regional, and local planning processes and deadlines. Steps can be taken to more closely align future timelines for state, regional, and local planning activities. PSRC can be an active participant in any such efforts, working in collaboration with its member jurisdictions. • Provide information early and often regarding countywide and local plan expectations. PSRC could provide a roadmap of outreach activities and technical support for countywide planning groups and for local governments well ahead of future updates to Countywide Planning Policies and comprehensive plans. PSRC should consider an update to the Plan Review Manual and Checklist to improve clarity and address concerns raised in Taking Stock 2016. • Provide proactive “hands-on” technical assistance. Small towns, in particular, may benefit if PSRC had a “circuit rider” planner or provided other hands-on assistance focused on incorporating best practices and using transportation modeling and analysis for local planning. 	

Figure 20 summarizes successes and challenges related to technical assistance and PSRC resources discussed during the Taking Stock workshops. Based on these observations, several preliminary options for PSRC follow-up are listed as well.

Fig. 20: Observations on Plan Review and Certification

Successes	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compressed timeline. Eighty plans were certified in just over one year, ensuring eligibility for regional transportation funds. • Value of PSRC comments. PSRC review and comments on a full range of policies in VISION 2040 was valuable to local jurisdictions, as were recommendations for further work contained in certification reports. These provided direction and support for local initiatives, such as housing strategies. • Improved coordination between PSRC and state agencies on plan review and comment letters. • PSRC staff were easy to work with. Generally, respondents indicated PSRC staff were responsive, professional, and took a hands-on approach when needed throughout the planning and plan review and certification process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusion about the respective roles of PSRC, Dept. of Commerce, and the Growth Management Hearings Board, particularly regarding scope of review (VISION 2040, GMA), approval or certification role. • Plan submittal procedures were not clear. The plan submittal page on PSRC website was rarely used and few completed the certification reporting tool, which some complained was difficult to use. • PSRC seen as more “top-down.” For some local jurisdictions, VISION 2040 and the ensuing certification process felt more top-down than previous rounds of local planning under VISION 2020. • Comment letters not consistent with certification reports. There were cases where the comments in the letter sent in response to draft plans did not match the recommendations and conditions included in the certification report. Primarily, this was an issue as the GMPB provided further guidance on criteria related to alignment of local plans with growth targets. • Distinction between requirements and recommendations unclear. Some cities saw a lack of clarity in the comment letters and certification reports regarding what were requirements for certification versus “only” recommendations. • Costs of responding to PSRC comments and certification actions. Addressing certification conditions and non-certification issues alike incurs costs for local governments with limited resources, especially where it involves complex planning processes or modeling work.

Options for PSRC

- **Update and improve certification procedures.** Utilizing feedback gathered through this process, PSRC may consider refinements to existing plan review processes, including the Plan Review Manual, Reporting Tool and Checklist, online submittal tools, and streamlined coordination with state agencies.
- **Consider options for making certification determinations earlier in the planning process.** One option that was discussed as part of Taking Stock 2016 was PSRC releasing draft certification reports prior to plan adoption, perhaps within the state 60-day review period within which the Washington State Department of Commerce reviews and provides input on plans.
- **Work with counties and cities to address common certification issues ahead of next plan updates.** Based on lessons learned through this process, PSRC can provide local governments with targeted guidance and technical assistance, with the aim of reducing future conditional certifications.
- **Address and clarify issues related to Small Cities' conditional certifications in VISION 2040 update.** Specifically, in updating and extending the Regional Growth Strategy, PSRC should address the role of countywide growth targets and local comprehensive plans in achieving the Regional Growth Strategy over the long term, and what criteria will be used to review local plan updates for certification.

Next Steps

The Taking Stock 2016 final report documents important themes that emerged during PSRC plan review along with important feedback from local jurisdictions. One purpose of the report is to inform a process of continual refinement in how PSRC carries out its role within the region under state law. Another is to draw upon comprehensive plan updates as material for considering policy issues to be addressed or clarified in an update to VISION 2040.

The primary audience for the report is the Growth Management Policy Board at PSRC, which has been briefed on its major findings. Other key audiences include other PSRC boards and committees (including the Regional Staff Committee), state agencies, PSRC member jurisdictions, and stakeholders within the region.

During 2017 and early 2018, PSRC staff will begin preparatory work ahead of a formal launch of the VISION 2040 update in 2018. The information in this report will be considered heavily in early scoping, including identifying policy areas where there has been a strong link between regional plan and local implementation, as well as areas where local governments have been challenged to fulfill regional goals and objectives. Issues were raised during the Taking Stock process, such as issues related to the Regional Growth Strategy, that may be explored through further data analysis, a more comprehensive planning process, and broad stakeholder and public engagement.

Finally, and perhaps most important, Taking Stock 2016 points the way toward PSRC more effectively supporting local planning through technical assistance and plan review. This can be achieved with an updated VISION 2040 that provides clear direction on implementation roles, support from PSRC to enable all local governments to address a full range of Multicounty Planning Policies, a plan review and certification process that is clearer and more predictable, and a process of ongoing implementation monitoring that informs PSRC boards and members about local policies and actions that have been adopted to further VISION 2040.