



2024 Issue Paper: Transportation

Position Statement

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

Summary of Recent Legislation

In 2021, the Legislature passed the Climate Commitment Act, creating the state's cap & invest program intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and other critical pollutants, particularly in communities highly impacted by air pollution. This bill, among other things, expanded use of alternatives to conventional modes of transportation to reduce emissions, including funding electrification of rail and ferries.

In 2022, the Legislature adopted a new 16-year transportation funding package that shifted the transportation paradigm from highway-focused to emphasis on strategies that would reduce the greenhouse gas emissions from transportation. While the 2022 package contained some important highway infrastructure projects, it shifted highway emphasis to maintenance and preservation and included historically high funding for transit, active transportation, alternative fuels and electrification. A special feature of this new package is zero-fare (free) transit and rail for youth under age 18.

In 2023, it was understood early in the legislative session that there would not be a major change in the transportation funding package, but that there would be adjustments; and that safety would be a high priority for the Legislature. This turned out to be how the session evolved. A number of safety-related bills were passed and the budget was increased significantly but not at the magnitude of a new funding package or new revenue sources. As hoped, funding for rail and transit was increased.

The League's priority was transit and rail, which fared reasonably well. One issue that was anticipated but did not move ahead is the shift in transportation funding to a system such as a road usage charge, which would replace some of the revenue lost because of diminishing gas tax revenues from more energy efficient vehicles and that would also have greater flexibility.

The gas tax can only be used for roads and ferries. This is likely to come up again in the next session.

Anticipated in the 2024 Washington State Legislative Session

Although this is the second year of the biennium, a short session, with little budget action anticipated, several issues continued from last year are anticipated.

Road Usage Charge. Although the Legislature had a bill last year, [HB 1832](#) Implementing a [voluntary] per mile charge on vehicle usage of public roadways, the State Transportation Commission is finalizing a report on this subject for transmittal to the Governor and Legislature in January. Their final meeting is after submittal of this report, so the ultimate recommendations are not yet available as of this writing. Nevertheless, a road usage charge would not only supplement the diminishing gas tax as a source of revenue for road projects, it could provide flexible revenues (unlike the gas tax, not limited to road, bridge and ferry costs) that could be used for transit, rail and other currently underfunded transportation uses.

Rail. Rail can provide efficient transportation for people and cargo, reducing greenhouse gas emissions; but it has not been adequately considered by the state Department of Transportation or Legislature. There are several proposals to the legislature from a rail coalition that will be requested. One of the potential funding sources for rail, particularly for an east-west line along the Snake River, is the funding from the Climate Commitment Act fund that generated more revenue than anticipated.

Transit-Oriented Development. Technically a growth management issue, transit-oriented development proposals rely on adequate transit service, which in turn, requires adequate transit funding. Most transit agencies cannot support the necessary level of service to support new housing density requirements because their funding is primarily local. Nevertheless, transit-oriented development is a logical, efficient way to organize land uses and transportation.

In 2023, [SB 5466](#) Transit-oriented development, which would amend the Growth Management Act to allow siting multi-family housing on parcels where any other residential use is permitted and prohibits local governments from requiring off-street parking within a transit station area progressed but did not fully pass by the end of session. It, or an amended version, is expected to be moved again in the upcoming session.

Vehicle Electrification. There are a number of proposals to support electrification of vehicles ranging from bicycles to school buses that will likely be heard in 2024.

Issue Chair: Cynthia Stewart, cstewart@lwvwa.org