



2021 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. The League also has positions that support redevelopment of the electrical grid, which could affect transportation.

Summary of Issues for the 2021 Legislative Session

Major transportation policy and budget packages are typically adopted only periodically, with minor updates in between. The reason for this is the length of time it takes to implement most transportation projects, which can be many years in the making.

In 2015, the legislature adopted a 16-year transportation funding package that included an increase in the gas tax and assumed funding for completion of several key construction projects needed for cargo distribution to ports but did not contemplate additional new road construction. Instead it prioritized road preservation and maintenance and multimodal transportation enhancements. Among the unresolved issues were how to address anticipated reductions in gas purchases as a result of increased use of electric vehicles.

In 2018, the state Department of Transportation issued its 2040 transportation plan, which focused on new issues, such as the need for redistributing economic growth through supplemental broadband access in rural areas, repairing 600 bridges that have been identified as substandard, developing a seismic lifeline route to address potential earthquake damage, the misalignment between buckets of existing revenues and their earmarked uses compared to what needs to be funded, and other related issues. The new plan contains proposed policies that support the goals adopted over a decade ago in new ways. These include economic vitality; system preservation; safety; mobility, particularly focusing on multimodal travel; and health and environment, focusing on clean energy and reduced use of vehicles.

Highlights of the 2019 legislative session contained an update to the 2015 transportation package that included:

- \$35 million for preliminary engineering for the long-overdue Columbia River Crossing, needed to support interstate commerce and to address the lack of earthquake protection on the current cross-Columbia structures.

- Approval of a commission to oversee a study of how to address commercial airport capacity to supplement Sea-Tac Airport.
- Funding to construct two new electric ferries.
- Adoption of an electric vehicle charging program.
- A proposed carbon tax, which did not pass, to support additional transportation projects.
- A clean fuels program intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which also failed to pass.

However, in 2020, many projects were put on hold because of the reliance on motor vehicle excise taxes and passage of I-976, which, if upheld, would have limited motor vehicle excise tax (MVET) license tab revenue to \$30 per vehicle and significantly reduced transportation project revenue. Also in 2020, a new set of proposed transportation policy goals were considered, including equity, environmental justice, and congestion relief. Although these were not passed, they are anticipated to emerge again in the 2021 session. If adopted, they would shift priorities for transportation funding toward fewer road projects and more transit and multimodal projects.

Transit has long been underfunded. Additional transit funding would reduce congestion, pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions and would better support low-income people. Local jurisdictions have a challenge getting sales tax increases passed, and a state policy with funding to support it could help improve local transit service capacity. This will be one of the League's goals for supplemental transportation funding in the 2021 session.

The Washington Supreme Court ruled I-976 unconstitutional in October 2020, which means that legislators will have to put new energy into how and what transportation projects are funded during the 2021 legislative session.

The League will support transportation proposals that:

- Enhance safety and environmental protection, including assuring water quality protection measures are part of each project.
- Address climate change needs and reduce CO₂ emissions.
- Enhance use of transit and light rail.
- Further reduce single-occupancy vehicle use.

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