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Honorable Dow Constantine
King County Executive
King County Chinook Building
401 5th Ave. Suite 800
Seattle, WA 98104

September 16, 2010

Re: 2010 Update to Traffic Concurrency Program

Dear County Executive Constantine:

This letter is submitted on behalf of the King County Transportation Concurrency Expert Review Panel, which was appointed pursuant to KCC 14.70.270 for the purpose of reviewing King County's traffic concurrency system and making annual recommendations to the Executive and Council regarding that system.

The Expert Review Panel has examined the 2010 Annual Report of the Department of Transportation relating to the traffic concurrency system, and has met with KCDOT staff. In accordance with its mandate under KCC 14.70.270, the Expert Review Panel has examined the underlying concurrency testing system, and KCDOT's recommendations regarding a revised concurrency map, which are being transmitted with the 2010 Annual Report. Based on its review, the Expert Review Panel has the following comments:

Data Collection System: As described in the 2009 Annual Report, KCDOT implemented a GPS/GIS based system for collecting travel time data, the key component of the concurrency testing system. Last year, the Expert Review Panel indicated that this new system should provide increased reliability and public confidence in the traffic concurrency system.

In 2010, KCDOT used the same GPS/GIS system for data collection. However, with budget constraints in mind, KCDOT opted to only test about 54% of the routes which are in the concurrency system. The Department tested all routes other than those that had levels of service in 2009 which were at least two Level of Service Standards better than necessary to pass concurrency testing. The Expert Review Panel concludes that this criteria was conservative and the selective testing process was reasonable given budgetary constraints and the fact that there is no data indicating that traffic volumes in the County increased so much between 2009 and 2010 that one would be concerned that a road segment which easily passed level of service standards in 2009 would now be in failure.

The Expert Review Panel does recommend that, if possible, travel time data on all arterial road segments be gathered in 2011 in anticipation of the 2012 Comprehensive Plan update process. This will provide the data needed to assess potential policy changes as part of the 2012 update. However, we do understand that the county has significant budget constraints and that if it is not feasible to gather travel-time data for all road segments, perhaps some combination of travel-time data and other data, such as traffic counts, could be used.

Concurrency Test Results and Proposed New Concurrency Map: Based on the most recent travel time data and analysis, the concurrency system finds that five of the twenty-five travel sheds in the County are currently failing to meet Level of Service Standards. The Panel has the following comments on this aspect of KCDOT's Annual Report.

- The Panel notes, as does the Annual Report, that in several cases, failure of certain travel sheds to meet concurrency standards is the result of the need for improvements on City and WSDOT facilities which are not within the County's control. This same situation existed in 2009. In some cases (i.e., the Juanita-Kirkland travel shed), the inherent difficulties in coordinating solutions to transportation problems which involve multiple jurisdictions are likely to decrease as annexations occur. The cities and WSDOT use different level of service methodologies and standards, which make it difficult to obtain consensus on the need for and/or type of improvements to resolve the deficiencies. (Also see discussion in next bullet item). However, King County should remain proactive in attempting to work with other jurisdictions to address road capacity problems which cross jurisdictional boundaries.
- As in 2009, one of the vexing problems is travel sheds which fail concurrency standards because they contain rural roads that connect two urban areas. These road sections are tested against the Rural LOS of B under the current concurrency system, even though the vast majority of traffic on these roads is generated by the urban areas they connect. KCDOT and the County Council may wish to re-examine the policy of applying an LOS of B to these specific road sections, although the committee has not reached agreement that a change is warranted. This situation becomes even more complicated when the road section in question is a WSDOT facility because WSDOT's LOS standards are less stringent than King County's Rural LOS standard. For example, the WSDOT LOS standard for the portions of SR 202 in the Rural Area is C, while King County's standard is B. This inconsistency could lead to situations in which a travel shed fails King County concurrency standards, but WSDOT sees no need to construct improvements because the road meets WSDOT's LOS standards. Regional coordination to address such issues is essential.
- Despite the foregoing comments, the Expert Review Panel finds the proposed 2010 Concurrency Map to be reasonably accurate and reliable. The Panel recommends that it be adopted.

Additional Recommendations:

The Expert Review Panel notes that several annexations have occurred in the past year and at least one more large annexation will become final in mid-2011. These annexations significantly alter the areas subject to County concurrency standards. KCDOT should re-examine travel shed boundaries in light of these changes before another update to the Concurrency Map is prepared.

The 2012 Comprehensive Plan process, which will take place in 2011, is a significant opportunity to address several major policy issues which affect traffic concurrency:

- The Comprehensive Plan has, for some time, contained policies regarding multi-modal transportation choices and Climate Change. Further work on how to best (or if at all) implement these policies under concurrency is still needed.
- The Expert Review Panel is aware that a Transportation Benefit District has been formed, but not yet actively implemented. As implementation of the District occurs, its impact on and relationship to the concurrency program should be evaluated.
- There are a few isolated unincorporated “islands” which have extremely limited opportunity for new development for various reasons. These areas should be evaluated and a decision made as to the appropriate level of service to apply to these cases or whether the county should seek to provide the transportation facilities needed to meet the LOS standard. For example, the Green River Valley travel shed currently fails concurrency. The area, which is small, is highly unlikely to see significant new development because most of it is agricultural lands that have sold their development rights to the County pursuant to the Agricultural Preservation Program. A question has been raised about whether it makes sense to prohibit what little development potential exists in this area, even though most agricultural buildings are not affected by the concurrency requirements, in light of the relatively high cost of fixing the problems, which cause the travel shed to fail concurrency tests.
- Level of service standards on some roadway segments should also be reviewed. For example, speeds (and therefore the level of service) on the segment of Novelty Hill Road between Trilogy and W Snoqualmie Valley Road are restricted due to the steep and winding roadway. It is possible that this speed restriction artificially triggers concurrency failure, even though the roadway may operate as well as its current design allows. An evaluation of this situation should be conducted because it is likely that there are no cost effective solutions for upgrading this roadway.
- As noted above, the inherent difficulties associated with the situations in which a rural road segment serves as a major connector between urban areas needs to be reviewed. The Expert Review Panel has discussed this problem in the past and will work with

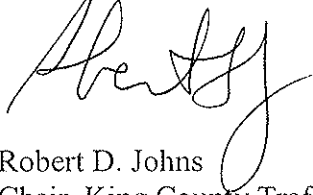
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KCDOT on alternatives which attempt to address the need for mobility between urban centers without creating pressures to increase densities in the intervening rural areas.

With these issues in mind, the Expert Review Panel intends to work closely with KCDOT on proposed updates as part of the 2012 Comprehensive Plan process.

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the KCDOT Annual Report on Traffic Concurrency and the proposed concurrency map.

Sincerely,



Robert D. Johns
Chair, King County Traffic Concurrency
Expert Review Panel

cc: King County Traffic Concurrency Expert Review Panel members
Linda Dougherty, Director of Road Services Division, KCDOT
John Shively, Road Services Staff Liaison to the Expert Review Panel

TCERP report - 2010 9-15-2010 Final