

VEHICLE MILES TRAVELED (VMT) PER YEAR

Outcome: Improve Air Quality

Countywide Planning Policy Rationale

“All jurisdictions, in coordination with Puget Sound Air Pollution Control Agency* and the Puget Sound Regional Council, shall develop policies, methodologies and standards that promote regional air quality, consistent with the Countywide Policy Plan.” (CA-14) “The land use pattern for King County shall protect the natural environment by...concentrating development” (FW-6) “The land use pattern shall be supported by a balanced transportation system which provides for a variety of mobility options....(FW-18) ”General capacity improvements promoting only single-occupant vehicle traffic shall be a lower priority.” (T-8)

*Now the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency

This indicator measures all vehicle miles traveled (VMT) in a given year on the streets and highways of King County. Because the total includes commercial and private vehicles, both economic activity and personal travel patterns influence the total. According to the Washington State Department of Transportation (DOT) statistics, Washington State residents traveled roughly 9,000 vehicle miles per year in the last decade, while King County’s residents traveled an average of 9,175 miles per year in the same time period. Since 1995, the pattern of vehicle miles traveled in Washington has resembled that in King County, an expected mirroring due to King County’s location along a major freight corridor and large population.

Total VMT As shown in Figure 12.1, the greatest annual increase in total VMT occurred between 1994 and 1995. Since then, total VMT has increased less than 1% per year. Total VMT in King County edged slightly higher in 2005; vehicles drove 45 million more miles than in the previous year.

Per Capita VMT Despite several years of high vehicle use in the late 1990’s, the average annual increase in total VMT has lagged behind population growth since 1995. Per capita VMT edged down from 9,154 miles in 1995 to 9,125 miles per person in 2005. It should be noted, however, that with the exception of 1996 and 2003, per capita VMT in all other years during this time period exceeded the 1995 rate. Indeed, from 1995 to 2003, per capita VMT averaged 9,175 miles per year.

Per capita VMT in 2005 for both King County and Washington State decreased from the prior year, while total VMT increased only slightly. Factors influencing these decreases in per capita VMT may include rising gas prices as seen in 2004 and 2005 and an increase in the use of public transportation.

Figure 12.1

