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Update on RTA: Costs and Travel Times

On July 8th, the Washington Research Council released a special report, *Regional Transit Again: a Look at the New Plan*, which examined the Ten-Year Regional Transit System Plan that the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority (RTA) will place before its voters on November 5th. This policy brief presents updated information on the taxpayer costs and rail travel times for the plan. In the next several weeks the Washington Research Council will publish Policy Briefs on freight mobility and congestion, and a Special Report on the benefits and costs of the RTA proposal.

Taxpayer Cost

As detailed in our earlier special report, the RTA proposes spending \$3.9 billion over 10 years to build and operate regional bus, commuter rail and light rail networks in the Everett/Seattle/Tacoma region. The RTA plan anticipates that funding for the program will include \$1,980 million in local taxes, \$1,052 million in long-term borrowing, \$727 million in federal grants, and \$171 million in passenger fares and other revenues. All of these costs and revenues are expressed in 1995 dollars.

The RTA would impose two new local taxes, a 4/10 of a percent sales tax and a 3/10 of a percent annual motor vehicle excise tax (MVET). For the portions of the RTA district lying within Pierce County or the City of Everett, the combined state and local sales tax rate would increase from 7.9 percent to 8.3 percent, while for the remainder of the district, the tax would increase from 8.2 percent to 8.6 percent. Within the whole district, the MVET (which is imposed annually on motor vehicles in lieu of the property tax) would increase from 2.2 percent of vehicle value to 2.5 percent. At the end of the projected 10-year construction phase, rates would be reduced to levels sufficient to fund operations and service the outstanding debt, unless voters approved a further phase of construction.

Table 1
RTA Taxes:
Cost to a Typical Family of Four

Income	Sales	MVET	Total
\$35,000	\$69	\$35	\$104
\$45,000	\$81	\$40	\$121
\$55,000	\$92	\$45	\$137
\$65,000	\$104	\$49	\$153
\$75,000	\$115	\$53	\$168

Source: DOR/OPR updates of Tax Alternatives Model.

Our July 8 report included estimates of the burden of these taxes on families of four based upon the Washington State Department of Revenue's 1988 "Tax Alternatives Model." Recently, researchers from the Department of Revenue (DOR) and the House of Representatives Office of Program Research (OPR) have updated the model of tax incidence in the state. With this model

it is possible to calculate burdens of the RTA taxes on families of four with incomes ranging from \$35,000 to \$75,000. The median family incomes for King, Pierce and Snohomish counties, as measured in the last census and expressed in current (1996) dollars, are \$55,400, \$43,700 and \$51,100.

Commuter and Light Rail Travel Times

The RTA has provided us with updated travel times on the commuter rail line that would link Lakewood and Everett, as shown in Table 2. These times differ somewhat from the times published this summer by RTA in its Ten-Year Regional Transit System Plan and cited in our earlier report. In particular, the 58 minute travel time between Seattle and East Everett is significantly less than the 67 minutes previously quoted.

The RTA has also provided revised travel times for the Seattle portion of the light rail system, as shown in Table 3. The Washington Research Council's July 8 report relied on travel times developed by LTK Engineers for the March 1995 ballot proposal; these were somewhat longer than the new times, which were prepared by RTA staff. The projected travel time between the convention center and the airport has dropped from 39 minutes to 30 minutes. Two factors account for this decrease: First, the estimated distance between these two stops has been reduced from 15.6 miles to 14.5 miles. As Paul Matsuoka of the RTA explains, the consultant who prepared the first estimates mistakenly included extra trackage such as sidings and turnabouts when calculating the distances between stations. Second, the estimated average train speed has increased from 24 to 29 miles per hour over the route. The old estimates were based on a model relating the average speed between stations to the distance traveled and the degree to which right of way is separated from other traffic. The new estimates were prepared explicitly modeling the acceleration and deceleration along the route. Matsuoka reports that the RTA has much greater confidence in the new methodology.



Table 2
Estimated Commuter Rail Travel Times in Minutes

	Lakewood	S. 56th St.	Tacoma	Puyallup	Sumner	Auburn	Kent	Tukwila	Boeing Access Rd.	Seattle	Edmonds	Mukilteo	West Everett
East Everett	130	126	120	107	105	96	87	81	75	58	30	12	4
West Everett	127	122	116	103	101	92	84	77	71	55	26	8	
Mukilteo	119	114	108	96	93	85	76	69	63	47	18		
Edmonds	101	96	90	78	75	67	58	51	45	29			
Seattle	67	62	57	44	41	33	24	17	11				
Boeing Access Road	56	51	45	32	30	21	13	6					
Tukwila	50	45	39	26	24	15	7						
Kent	43	38	33	20	17	9							
Auburn	34	30	24	11	8								
Sumner	26	21	15	3									
Puyallup	23	19	13										
Tacoma	11	6											
S. 56th St.	5												

Source: RTA., WRC.

Table 3
Estimated Light Rail Travel Times in Minutes

	S. 200th	Airport	SR-518	Tukwila	Boeing Access Rd.	Henderson	Othello	Columbia City	McClellan	I-90	International Dist.	Convention Place	First Hill	Broadway	Pacific
45th	39	37	35	32	29	26	24	21	18	16	13	8	6	5	2
Pacific	38	36	33	30	27	24	22	19	16	14	11	6	5	3	
Broadway	34	33	30	27	24	21	19	16	13	11	8	3	2		
First Hill	33	31	28	26	23	20	18	14	12	10	7	1			
Convention Place	32	30	27	24	21	18	16	13	10	8	5				
International District	26	24	22	19	16	13	11	8	5	3					
I-90	23	21	19	16	13	10	8	5	2						
McClellan	21	19	17	14	11	8	6	3							
Columbia City	19	17	14	12	8	5	4								
Othello	15	13	11	8	5	2									
Henderson	13	11	9	6	3										
Boeing Access Road	10	8	6	3											
Tukwila	7	5	3												
SR-518	4	3													
Airport	2														