



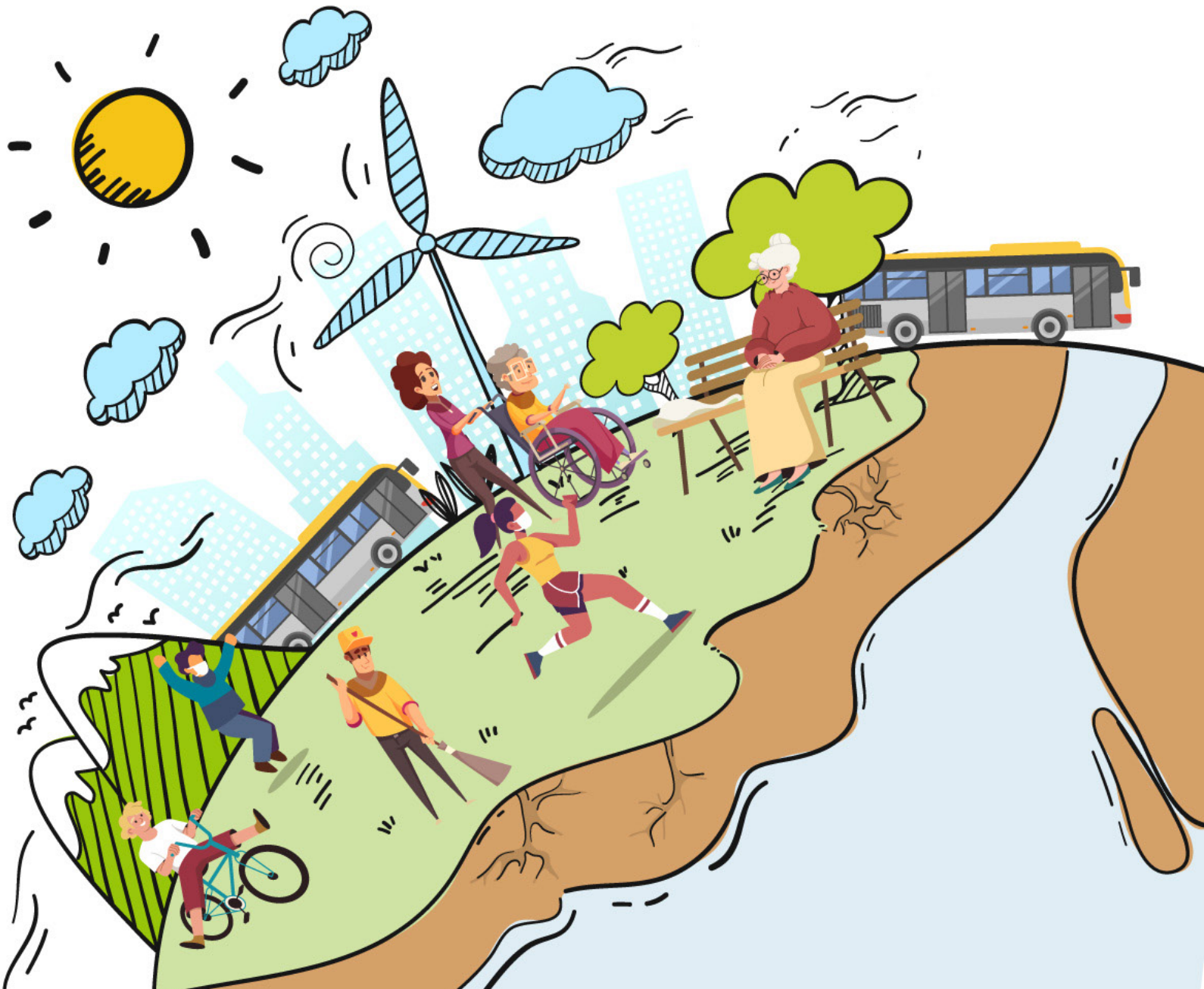
A TRANSPORTATION JUSTICE AGENDA

For

WASHINGTON STATE

By Paulo Nunes-Ueno

Transportation and Land Use Policy Lead, Front and Centered



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About Front and Centered

Front and Centered is a diverse and powerful coalition of groups across Washington State composed of and serving communities of color whose missions and members come together to advance equity and environmental and climate justice.

Front and Centered envisions a transition away from an economy where we dig, burn, and dump oil, and exploit workers for accumulation by a few, toward an economy where our communities and the earth are healed and thriving, our people have dignified livelihoods, and our government values, respects, and represents us.

We know a transition is inevitable, whether by disaster or design, but justice is not. The compounding threats of climate, environmental, economic, and racial injustice – along with the Covid pandemic – impact frontline communities first and worst. We follow the leadership, knowledge, and expertise of communities of color across Washington State and strive to ensure a Just Transition, where frontline communities are at the forefront of building equitable, democratic systems and creating transformative environmental and economic outcomes for everyone.

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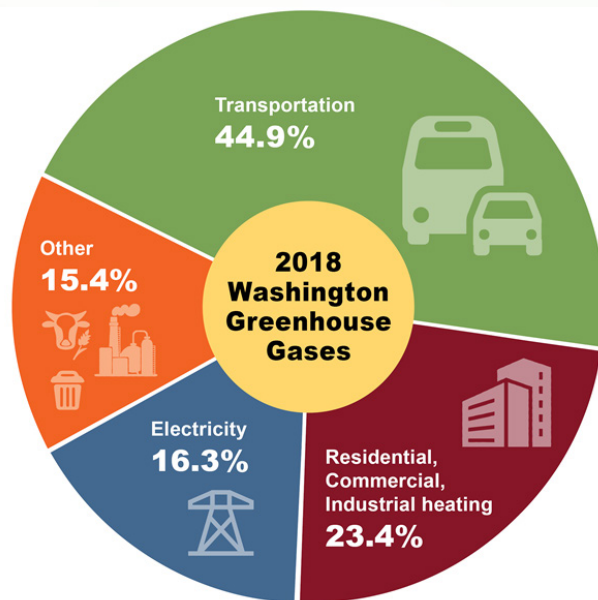
A Transportation Justice Agenda for Washington State

Executive Summary

Can you imagine a future where reliable public transportation and safe sidewalks, crosswalks, and bike paths are as commonplace as running water and electricity? What would the health and safety of our communities be like in this future?

In Washington State, transportation accounts for 44.9% of our greenhouse gas emissions, and cars and trucks make up over half of all pollution from transportation. At the same time, we are experiencing a 20-year high in pedestrian and bicycle deaths and an overall increase in traffic fatalities per vehicle miles traveled. *Clearly, we need to do things differently.* **Front and Centered is proposing a sweeping Transportation Justice Agenda to reorient the way we invest our transportation dollars and prioritize safety with clear standards for improving transit and safe sidewalks and crosswalks.**

Sources of Washington greenhouse gases in 2018






Source: Washington State Department of Ecology



Abby Griffith and others walk on a muddy path next to a high-speed road near Vancouver, WA. A person using a walker walks in the bike lane next to traffic. Photo credit: Paulo Nunes-Ueno

Our Transportation Justice Agenda calls for actions that will improve the health and freedom of all Washingtonians, particularly Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities. These populations still feel the effects of historical redlining, a discriminatory practice in which government agencies rated communities where people of color and other minorities lived as high investment risk. As a result, these neighborhoods became easy dumping grounds for the construction of highways and high-speed arterials.

Front and Center's Transportation Justice Agenda calls for:

-  **A moratorium and divestment from building or expanding highways in frontline communities**, those already most overburdened by pollution and racial and economic injustice in Washington State.
-  Create actionable standards and targets to **complete the missing sidewalks and build back the public transportation network** across the state.
-  **Make real investments that solve the problem:** A new state account and redirection of large investments towards closing the gaps in our transit service and safe sidewalks, a state transportation budget that supports climate justice and mobility justice for everyone in our state.

Together, these actions would be a significant down payment for a high-mobility/low-carbon transportation future that will reduce health disparities, boost local economies, and help respond to our climate crisis.

WASHINGTON TRANSPORTATION JUSTICE AGENDA

#1 Unplug the Zombie Highway Factory

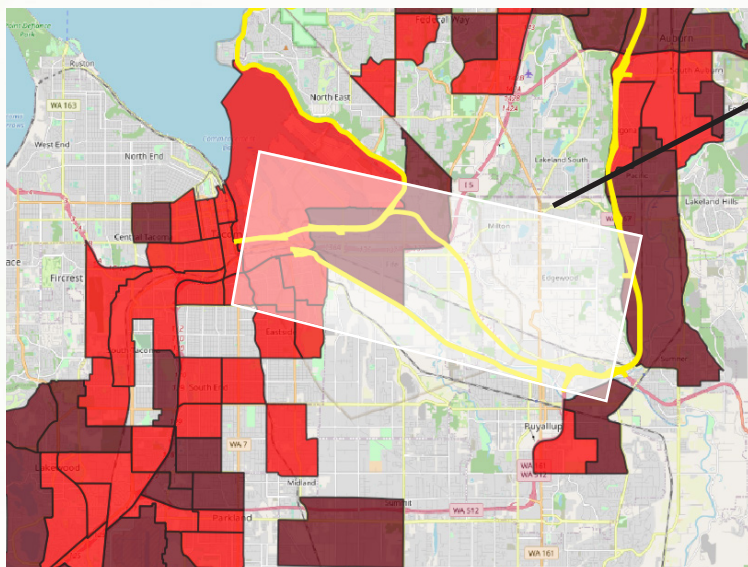
Front and Centered and our members and allies are calling on the state to stop destroying frontline communities with highways and the pollution they cause. We propose a moratorium on expanding roads and highways in the communities that rate a 9 or 10 on the [Washington State Environmental Health Disparities Map](#).

This legacy of racism in transportation planning and infrastructure investment in municipalities all over Washington State has led to inequitable health and livelihood outcomes for communities of color. It has also created a transportation system that is responsible for nearly half of the greenhouse gas emitted statewide.

New Washington Transportation Package Piles Negative Impacts on Already Overburdened Communities

During the 2022 legislative session, the Washington State Legislature passed the Move Ahead Washington transportation package worth \$17B, much of it for highway expansion. **More than half of the 13 major highway expansion projects in Move Ahead WA are being constructed in communities that are already the most overburdened with environmental health issues.** These projects directly impact 37 of the most overburdened census tracts in Washington, representing roughly 174,000 people. Most of these census tracts have a higher proportion of BIPOC individuals compared to Washington State as a whole. In addition, most of these projects are not required to undergo an Environmental Justice Assessment via the [Healthy Environment for All \(HEAL\) Act](#), as only projects initiated after July 1, 2023, are required to evaluate their impacts on marginalized populations.

For one revealing example, let's look at the Puget Sound Gateway project. Billed as an economic investment to improve access to the port of Tacoma, this mega project adds 36 new lane miles of freeways through communities ranked with the worst environmental health disparities in the state.



Puget Sound Gateway

New Lane Miles: 36

Additional VMT: 154 million

Additional GHG: .9 million tons

Environmental Health Disparity

Areas Impacted: 10

Move Ahead WA Funding: \$813M

Environmental Health Disparity Index

10	Highest Environmental Health Disparity (10)
9	Second Highest Environmental Health Disparity (9)

Source: Front and Centered

In addition to heaping harm on the most vulnerable, this highway building bonanza will make it more difficult for the state to reach its climate targets. Earlier this year Front and Centered and other groups used a peer-reviewed calculator to show that the legislature's transportation highway building proposals would create up to 9.1 million tons of carbon dioxide.

Vehicle Miles Traveled and Climate Pollution Impacts of Highway Expansion in Move Ahead Washington Package

Project	Lane Miles	VMT additional million vehicle miles annual		GHG additional MMT of CO2e total 202102050	
SR 18 widen	16	27	40	0.1	0.4
I-405 / Renton to Bellebue widen	24	124	186	0.6	1.8
I-405 / SR-522 to SR-527 widen	9	46	70	0.2	0.7
520 Rest of the West widen	2.6	15	23	0.1	1.2
Puget Sound Gateway SR 509 new	12	62	93	0.3	0.9
Puget Sound Gateway SR 167 new	24	41	61	0.2	0.6
Columbia River Crossing widen	10	52	86	0.2	0.8
I-5 Mounts to Steilcoom widen	6	31	46	0.1	0.5
US 2 Trestle widen	10	16	24	0.1	0.2
SR 3 Gorst to Bremerton widen	12	25	38	0.1	0.4
SR-3 Belfair widen	12	25	38	0.1	0.4
I-5 Nisqually widen	10	42	46	0.2	0.6
US 395 Spkane new	30	106	159	0.5	1.6
Total	177.6	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
		612	911	2.8	9.1

VMT = vehicle miles travelled
GHG = green house gas

Data developed by 350 Washington RMI SHIFT Calculator

#2 Make Sidewalks and Transit as Common as Indoor Plumbing

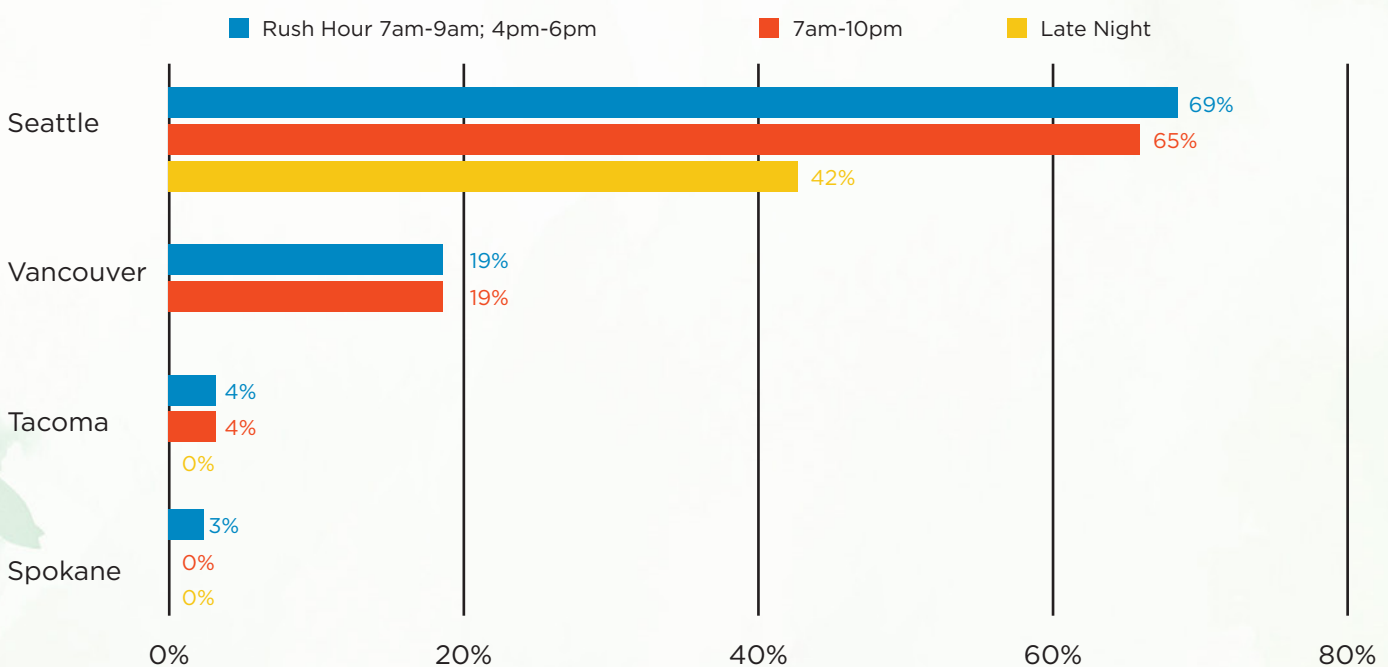
Front and Centered calls on the state legislature to establish standards for transit and sidewalks across the state. Today, only seven percent of Washingtonians have access to frequent and reliable public transportation.

The Washington Transportation Justice Agenda sets clear targets to close this gap:

- ★ Ensure that at least 65% of Washington residents have access to frequent and reliable transit by 2035
- ★ Ensure all transit stops have safe and accessible sidewalks in a half-mile radius by 2035

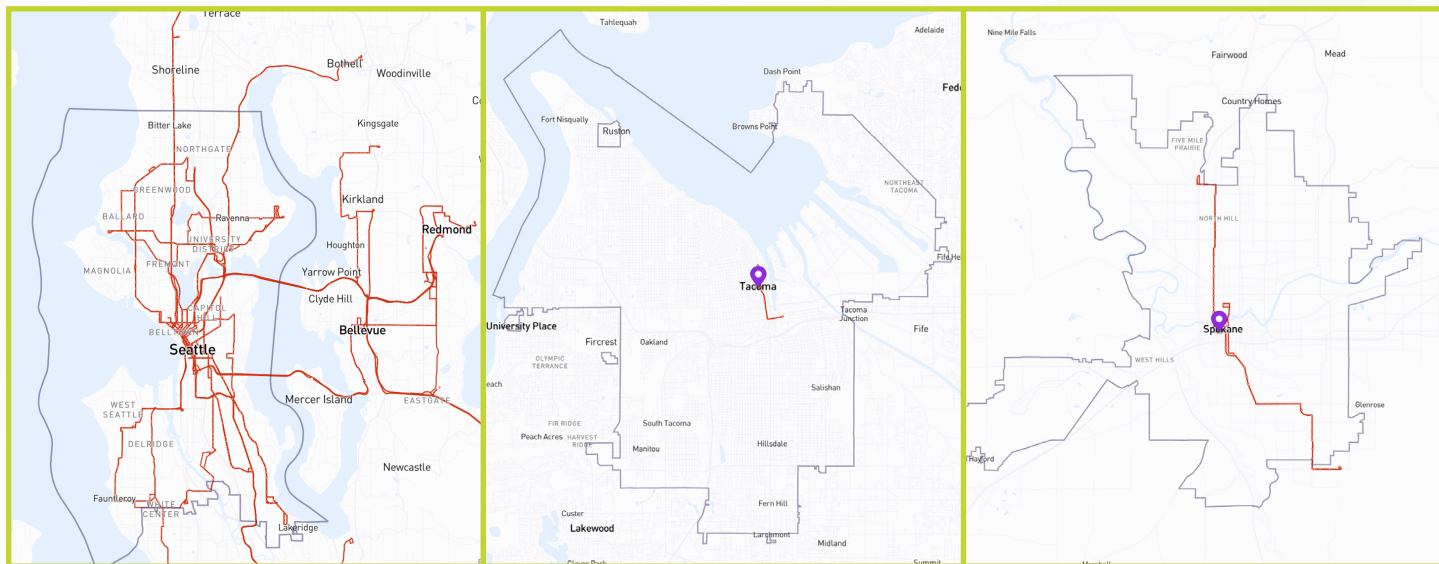
Front and Centered recently created and launched the [Washington Transit Access Map](#) which shows that our state's residents experience drastic inequalities in reliable transit service. **Nearly 70% of Seattleites can count on a bus or train that comes every 15 minutes. In Vancouver, WA it's only 19%. And in the states second and third largest cities Tacoma and Spokane the number falls to 4 and 3 percent.**

People with Access to Frequent Transit



Source: Washington Transit Access Map

Frequent Transit Network in Washington's Three Largest Cities



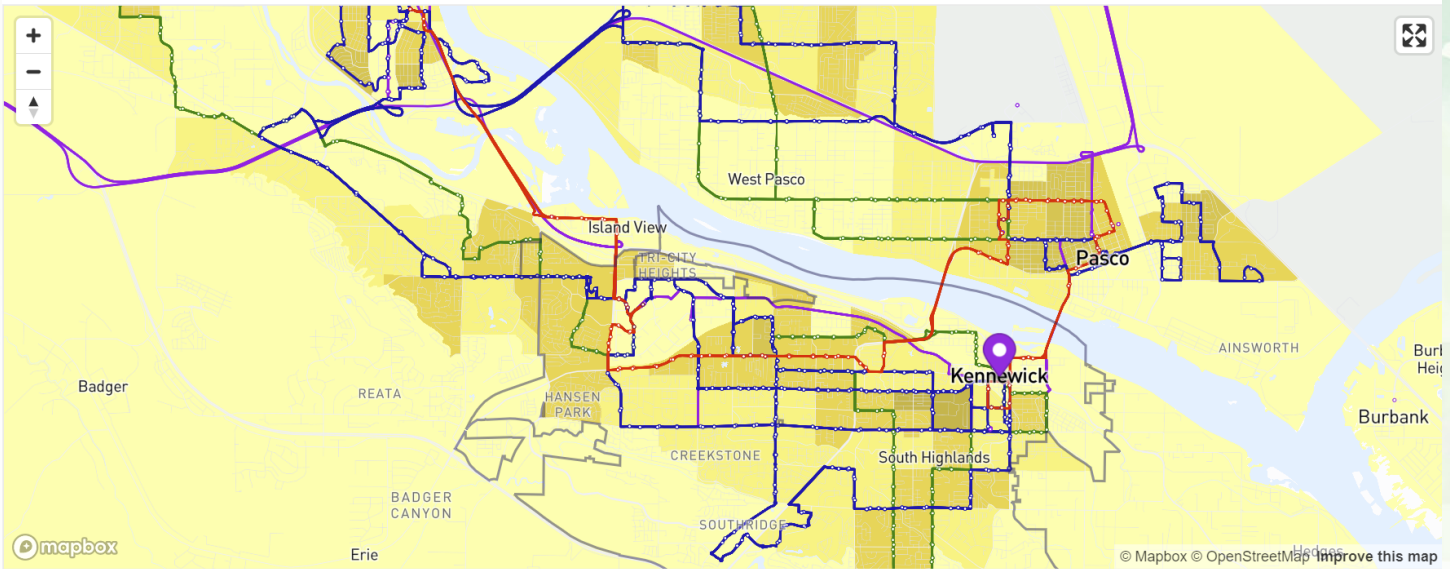
Source: Washington Transit Access Map

Washington Transit Access Map

Transit could be one of the most effective tools we have in the fight against the climate crisis. Certainly, it will be faster and cheaper to improve bus service than to convert all cars to electric, and provide better environmental outcomes.

[The Washington Transit Access Map](#) (WA TAM) will provide advocates with an accessible research and advocacy tool they can use to online campaign for better transit service that is frequent and spans all times of the day and night to ensure service for those who need it most.

Access to High Frequency Transit Kennewick, WA



Transit

- ☒ Transit Service (visible)
 - ☒ Most Frequent (15 minute headways)
 - ☒ Somewhat Frequent (30 minute headways)
 - ☒ Infrequent (90 minute headways)
 - ☒ Good luck getting anywhere (90+ minute headways)
 - ☐ Show areas within ½ mile of high frequency transit stops
- Timeframe**
- ☒ Rush Hour (7am-9am and 4pm-6pm)
 - ☐ Full Day (7am-10pm)
 - ☐ Late Night (12am-5am)
- ☒ Weekdays
☐ Weekends

... and who it serves

Population per acre

0 - 3 3 - 6 6 - 12 12 - 18 18 +

Quick Insights:

- Explore the map above to see how residential density compares to availability and frequency of transit service.
- Click on the legend above to view additional population and household demographics.

When Is High Frequency Transit Available?

Rush Hour

Weekdays: 7am - 9am and 4pm - 6pm

34%

27,997 people
near high frequency transit

Full Day

Weekdays: 7am - 10pm

34%

27,997 people
near high frequency transit

Late Night

Weekdays: 12am-5am

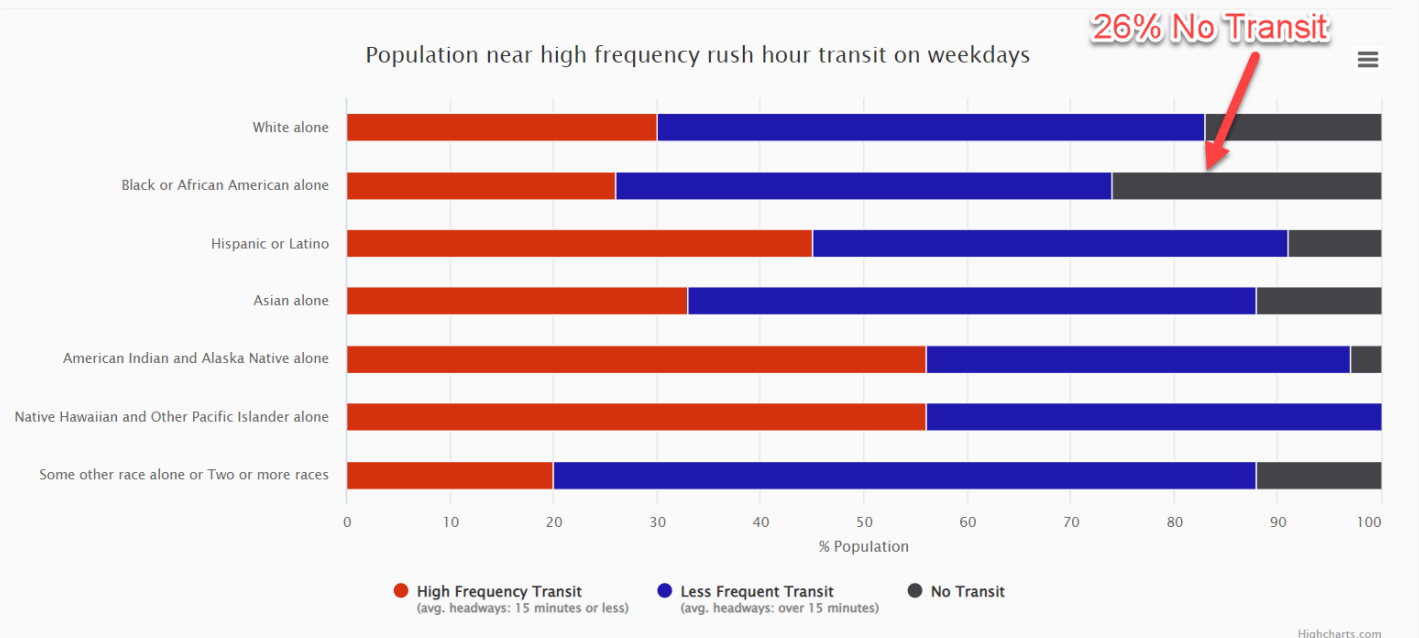
0%

0 people
near high frequency transit

☐ Weekdays ☐ Weekends

Who has access to high frequency transit?

View **Population by Race** living near **Rush Hour** high frequency transit on **Weekdays**



The situation is even worse for the sidewalks and curb ramps that make it possible for those of us who roll – wheelchair users, babies in strollers, and children on bikes – to stay safe as we move around where we live. Throughout the last ten years, an epidemic of pedestrian deaths has taken hold of our country. [In 2021, Washington State hit a grim milestone with the highest number of pedestrians and bicyclists killed in twenty years.](#) And yet, policymakers don't have complete data on the location of complete, missing, or damaged sidewalks, curb ramps, or other [pedestrian and bike facilities](#). They simply don't know where it's safe to walk or roll.

It's time for us to create standards for safe sidewalks and reliable transit. **And to invest in the infrastructure that will save lives.**



Krystal Monteros (right), president of the Tacoma Committee on Disability Issues and a member of the BIPOC Mobility Action Coalition, shows where missing sidewalks make it difficult for people with disabilities to get to a bus stop.

#3 Make Real Investments in Solving the Problem

We spend billions of dollars building highways in the most vulnerable communities. It's time to spend billions to provide Washington with the basics we've neglected: reliable transit and safe sidewalks.

- ★ Create a transportation justice account in the state budget
- ★ Identify sources of reliable long-term funding to reach the Washington transportation justice targets

Washington State decision-makers set lofty targets – greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reductions, cuts in vehicle miles traveled, for instance – and then create budgets that actively undermine these goals. **Transportation is the single biggest source of GHG emissions in Washington State and cars and trucks are by far the biggest offenders, yet transportation budgets overwhelmingly fund building or expanding new roads.** Washington is expected to receive around \$8.6 billion under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), \$4.7 billion of which is dedicated to highways, and only \$1.79 billion will be applied to public transportation.

Yet there is flexibility in how these dollars are spent. The Biden administration has asked states to use the IIJA dollars to undo the past harms of infrastructure projects and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Whether implementing the Move on Washington plan or deciding where to invest federal funds, the legislature should align with the targets they set and prioritize investments in frontline communities impacted most by the inequitable public policies of yesterday and today.

TRANSPORTATION JUSTICE IN ACTION

Fighting for Equity

Recently, Front and Centered co-hosted a workshop with the Kitsap Black Student Union on Transportation Justice. In a remarkable discussion, young people shared their experiences of feeling unsafe walking home after the last bus has stopped running or feeling like a burden on adults and friends with cars because the bus just doesn't get them to the places they need to go on time or at all.

Among the multi-generational group, there were 'aunties' and 'uncles' who remember that when they were teenagers in the 90s, they could use the bus to get to the mall or school.



But service has been cut in the last thirty years, leaving today's youth stuck with very few choices. "We're not asking for the world," said one participant. "We just want what we deserve."

Our Transportation Justice Agenda would not only advance the work of climate mitigation in Washington State, but also significantly address the inequities of our current transportation system.

"By halting the expansion of highways in overburdened communities, investing in transit, sidewalks, crosswalks, and bike paths, and redirecting federal and state dollars to safety projects, we can create a transportation system that helps our communities thrive."

~ Rosalinda Guillen, Executive Director, Community to Community

Front and Centered is helping communities ask for what they deserve by creating the Washington Transit Access Map and supporting the development of a frequent and reliable transit standard to make sure that communities across Washington, like the neighborhoods in Kitsap where the Black Student Union advocates live, can have safe and reliable transportation to school or work or to meet with friends and family.

Safe Streets and Thriving Communities

In Tacoma and in many communities across the state of Washington, the unequal impacts of our transportation system are not limited to highways. Portland Avenue in Tacoma's eastside is an example of the most dangerous type of road: a high-speed, multi-lane arterial street, sometimes called a "stroad," short for street-road. Over 60% of transportation fatalities in America happen on these types of streets because they prioritize the speed of cars through communities where people walk, bike, and take public transportation.

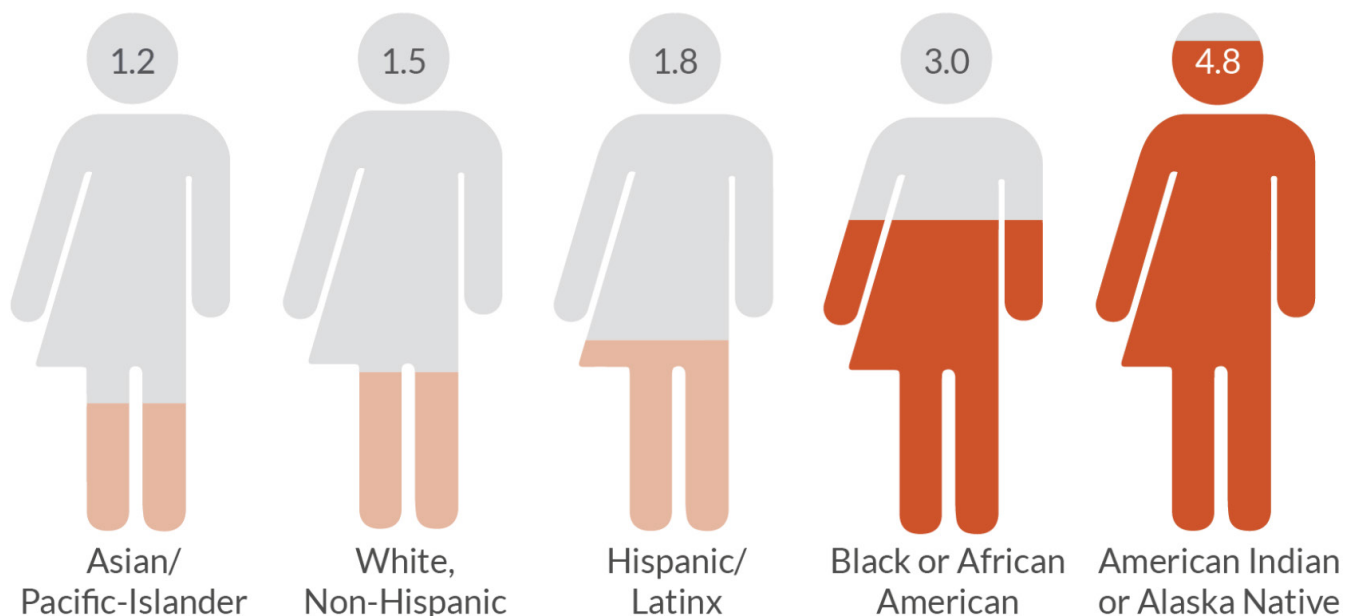
Pastor Willoughby and members of the Eastside Baptist Church walk with Krystal Monteros of the BIPOC Mobility Action Coalition and members of Front and Centered on Portland Avenue near their church. Photo credit: Paulo Nuñez-Ueno



Similar to highways, stroads were often built through BIPOC neighborhoods. In part, this explains the large racial disparities in pedestrian deaths. Stroads are especially deadly for pedestrians. And here, too, the disparities are glaring. Blacks are twice as likely to die while walking than whites, and Native Americans are over three times more at risk.

People of color, particularly Native and Black Americans, are more likely to die while walking than any other race or ethnic group

Pedestrian deaths per 100,000 by race & ethnicity (2016-2020)



Source: Smart Growth America, *Dangerous by Design* 2022

Reverend Frank A. Willoughby, Pastor of Eastside Baptist Church in Tacoma, is leading a community effort to transform Portland Avenue. He and his congregation envision a street that is family-friendly and provides safe ways for young families pushing strollers or people who use a wheelchair to walk to church or go shopping nearby.

“Our community is the lifeblood of our church at Eastside Baptist,” says Pastor Willoughby. “Right now, Portland Avenue is hurting our community. We want a family-oriented street where young families pushing strollers can walk safely. We want our kids to be able to get off the school bus and cross the street without danger of being hit by cars. Our neighborhood is our home, we want the members of our congregation to be able to walk to church, even if they are elderly, even if they use a cane or wheelchair. *This is not too much to ask.* Our vision is that this transformation of Portland Avenue can be the catalyst for a change in our whole neighborhood so young families can move here because it is affordable and stay because they are thriving.”

Community Safety and Representation

Like Portland Avenue, Central Avenue in Kent is another example of a stroad. Multiple wide lanes cause drivers to routinely exceed the speed limit. Widely spaced crossings leave pedestrians scrambling to cross the street.

UTOPIA Washington, an LGBTQIA+ Pacific Islander grass roots organization whose home is on Central Avenue, has been working to install a safe mid-block crossing now that its newly opened health clinic is directly across Central Avenue from its main offices. Walking from UTOPIA’s offices to their health clinic means sprinting across five lanes of traffic or walking a half mile to and from the nearest signalized crossing.

UTOPIA echoes the work of other BIPOC communities across the state: identifying the problems that lead to poor health and safety and organizing and advocating for the solutions their communities need. Washington policymakers must stand with them. UTOPIA is organizing the community to call for a rainbow crosswalk that makes pedestrians safer and celebrates the diversity and vibrancy of Kent’s community.

“Our Transportation Justice Agenda calls for actions that will improve the health and freedom of BIPOC communities. Front and Centered will continue to fight to ensure that our state invests our transportation dollars and prioritizes safety with clear standards for improving transit and safe sidewalks and crosswalks.”

~ Paul Tabayoyon



Central Avenue in Kent. UTOPIA clients and staff have to cross here to get from the offices to the health clinic. Photo source: Google Maps

Visit <https://frontandcentered.org/transportation-justice> for a downloadable PDF version of our agenda and for updates as we move forward.

Visit <https://WATransitAccessMap.org/> to explore The Washington Transit Access Map (WA TAM) and campaign for better transit service across Washington.