

CHAPTER 7

TRANSPORTATION ELEMENT

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Transportation Element

This element was developed to address the motorized and non-motorized transportation needs of the Town of LaConner for the next 20 years. This element specifically considers the location and condition of existing traffic circulation, the cause, scope, and nature of transportation problems, projected transportation needs, and plans for addressing all transportation needs while maintaining established level of service standards.

Concurrency

The levels of service currently in place will be maintained to meet future needs through upkeep of the existing streets and roadways, and expansion of transportation services where needed. The Uniform Development Code (Chapter 15.85 and 15.86) provides for street infrastructure development and standards to be concurrent with adjacent property development. LaConner participates in a Regional Transportation Organization serving Skagit, Island, and San Juan counties.

Major Transportation Considerations

Peak tourist season traffic creates bottlenecks throughout town. These bottlenecks and current traffic flow patterns lead to ineffective use of the existing parking facilities.

Coordination of Transportation Facilities

The Town is accessed via a system of county and state highways, which are maintained by those entities. The Town does not possess the resources, nor is it fiscally responsible for addressing all the traffic circulation system needs that may be identified through regional transportation planning. However, the Town has adequate funds and resources to maintain its existing transportation corridors.

Financing

A Six-year Transportation Infrastructure Plan (TIP) for construction and maintenance improvements to the streets in LaConner is adopted annually by resolution. Local funding is provided in part from Local Option Sales Tax, Real Estate Excise Tax, and User Fees. State and Federal grants are also sought to assist with transportation infrastructure maintenance.

GOALS AND POLICIES

GOAL A

Encourage multi-modal transportation routes that would most efficiently link residential, commercial and industrial areas of the Town.

Policies

7A-1 Improve traffic patterns during peak tourist seasons.

GOAL B

Provide for safe and expeditious vehicular and pedestrian traffic movement through the most heavily accessed areas of Town, i.e. Morris Street, First Street, and Maple Avenue, including senior citizen and handicapped barrier-free access.

Policies

- 7B-1 Encourage through-streets in new development wherever possible.
- 7B-2 Properly post dead-end streets to eliminate confusion.
- 7B-3 Ensure pedestrian and bicycle paths are safe and easily accessed.
- 7B-4 Maintain all existing streets and sidewalks in good repair at all times.
- 7B-5 Develop a comprehensive plan for sidewalks.

- 7B-6 Encourage access for low-impact transportation, such as bicycles and wheelchairs, through the provision of pedestrian walkways throughout town and along the shoreline.
- 7B-7 Retain and improve available street ends and right-of-ways for public access to the waterfront.

GOAL C

Provide adequate access to shoreline areas while preserving and protecting the natural shoreline.

Policies

- 7C-1 Extend the boardwalk and encourage waterfront upgrades.
- 7C-2 Properly observe view corridors during any development.
- 7C-3 Ensure existing and future boat launch sites, marinas, and boat storage facilities provide sufficient space for parking boat trailers and vehicles. Parking should be located as far inland as feasible.

GOAL D

Require adequate off-street parking for all zones.

Policies

- 7D-1 Offer incentives for business owners and employees that would encourage the use of existing parking lots in town.
- 7D-2 Identify and resolve property ownership in areas where Town streets encroach on private property.
- 7D-3 Encourage the use of public parking lots by providing directional signage.
- 7D-4 Ensure that businesses unable to provide the number of parking spaces required by ordinance comply with the provisions in the Comprehensive Parking Plan.

GOAL E

Identify transportation routes and management needs to meet current and future demands.

Policies

- 7E-1 Maintain established truck routes with appropriate signage.
- 7E-2 Encourage joint use of transportation corridors for utility purposes.

GOAL F

Encourage transportation links for public and private transportation access to county and state routes.

Policies

- 7F-1 Identify and develop options to meet public transportation needs.
- 7F-2 Emphasize the importance of maintaining viable transit linkages to LaConner through the Skagit/Island Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO).

GOAL G

Encourage access to commercial and industrial areas by water.

Policies

- 7G-1 Increase moorage and dock areas along the channel.

GOAL H

Acquire harbor areas where available.

Policies

7H-1 Encourage transient moorage and access.

GOAL I

Promote healthy lifestyles by implementing the pedestrian and bicycle components of the Transportation Plan.

Policies

- 7I-1 Identify and designate planned improvements for pedestrian and bicycle facilities as appropriate throughout the Town and at the Port of Skagit County Marina.
- 7I-2 Provide trails and pathways to connect residential areas with government and business areas.
- 7I-3 Along with trails, pathways, and boardwalk access, increase the opportunities for free or low-cost, non-competitive, outdoor recreational and fitness activities.
- 7I-4 Mark bicycle lanes on Morris Street, extending out to the county roundabout, and plan bicycle lane(s) in any future widening of Maple Avenue.

Appendix 7A

Data and Analysis

Traffic Circulation Within the Town

The traffic circulation system within LaConner can generally be described as a grid system. The major entrance into the downtown commercial area on First Street is via Morris Street. Routes leading to the industrial areas branch off Morris to Third Street on the north and via Maple Avenue and Caledonia Street to the south. Access to county roads and state highways is via Chilberg Road to the east and LaConner-Whitney Road to the north, connecting to State Highway 20 and nine miles east to Interstate 5. Trucks in route to the south industrial area circumvent the Town via Maple Avenue and Caledonia Street. The Port of Skagit County Marina, north of town, can be reached via Morris and Third Streets.

Influence of Regional Traffic

During the peak tourist season and special events, such as the Skagit Valley Tulip Festival, traffic flow is heavy, constant and slow due to congestion at the access and egress points. There is also inadequate use of available parking areas outside the immediate First Street area.

Parking

The LaConner Planning Department has developed a draft Parking Plan. The Plan addresses the immediate needs of the Town to better use the existing parking facilities, and direct tourists and encourage local businesses to make the best use of the space available.

Mass Transit

Tour buses serve the tourist industry, and county van service provides transportation to elderly tenants of the Harbor Villa apartment complex and the LaConner Retirement Inn. In 1993, LaConner was included in the Skagit Public Transit Benefit Area. Mass transit service, SKAT, is available to the public on a regular basis for mobility between the Town and other areas in the County. Service varies depending on rider counts and funding cuts.

Most people in LaConner use automobiles to travel to work, therefore, mass transit is most important to those who cannot drive, for example: for the elderly, low-income individuals, people with disabilities, or youth who do not have

alternative means of transportation. The greatest need is for mobility between the Town and other urban areas, such as Mount Vernon.

Pedestrian Walkways/Bicycle Lanes

Pedestrian access to all points in LaConner is convenient but inadequate. Sidewalks do not exist in all areas of town. Some public right-of-ways are sufficient to provide safe walking paths but many are graveled and not conducive to walking or biking. No bicycle lanes currently exist but the Town and some businesses have provided bicycle racks for public use. Bicycles are restricted from riding on downtown sidewalks. Wheelchair access to walkways and streets is difficult and dangerous in some areas. In the downtown area most curbs have been cut and ramped for wheelchair access.

Curbs, Sidewalks, Landscaping, and Lighting

The LaConner Public Works Department is responsible for maintaining the Town's streets as well as landscaped Town property. Puget Sound Energy maintains electrical utility poles and lights. These features contribute to the safety and quality of the Town's residential, commercial and industrial areas. A few areas in LaConner do not have developed streets, sidewalks or lights. These amenities would be in place concurrent with new development as it occurs.

Mapping the Existing Circulation System

Traffic is controlled by a system of stop signs (over 90 signs) and flashing lights. In 2003, the intersection of LaConner-Whitney Road, Chilberg Road and Morris Street was reconfigured using a roundabout intersection to regulate traffic flow into and out of town. At the same time, Morris Street was improved with widened travel lanes, defined parking and stormwater system improvements.

Caledonia Street was widened and resurfaced with shoulder drainage improvements. Caledonia Street End was widened with sidewalk and railing for added pedestrian safety in the Industrial area.

Past Transportation Problems

Flooded streets and right-of-ways due to stormwater runoff still persist. Traffic congestion during the tourist season is ongoing. Most streets have been repaved over the last five years, but need continuous upkeep as well as sidewalks and adequate drainage. Safety in the vicinity of crosswalks leading to the schools has been a concern, as are all street crossings, where pedestrian right-of-ways may not be observed. County traffic engineers should review the intersection of Maple and Caledonia, used by trucks entering and leaving the south end and pedestrians, for a safer traffic control.

Level of Service

In this element, Level of Service standards consist of the following:

- A. Free-flow traffic conditions, with minimal delay to stopped vehicles at intersections.
- B. Generally stable traffic flow conditions.
- C. Occasional backups may develop, but delay to vehicles is short-term and still tolerable.
- D. During short periods of the peak hour, delays to approaching vehicles may be substantial but are tolerable during times of less demand.
- E. Intersections operate at or near capacity, with long queues developing on all approaches and long delays.
- F. Jammed conditions on all approaches with excessively long delays and vehicles unable to move at times.

The minimum Level of Service Standard for the Town is C. All Town streets and County roads in the LaConner area are operating below their daily and peak-hour volume capacities. Capacities for major arterials are as follows: Morris Street – 12,000 vehicles per day (vpd); Maple Avenue – 16,000 vpd; First Street – 8,000 vpd. First Street operated at 80-90% capacity in 1988 with significant delays to traffic in both directions due to parking maneuvers and heavy pedestrian crossings. This situation has intensified during the peak tourist season. Under normal conditions most streets in LaConner operate at a level of service (LOS) of B or better. Occasional backups may develop, but delays are short-term and still tolerable. The County provides biannual traffic count information to the Town for Morris Street, Maple Avenue and some primary collector streets.

Application of Concurrency

Because LaConner is a small town with relatively few development permit applications, a single development may have a significant impact on the town as a whole. The Town reviews each permit for concurrency at the time of application, and transportation issues, such as ingress, egress, and parking availability are assessed.

Future Needs and Alternatives

For a detailed analysis of traffic conditions and alternatives, refer to the Comprehensive Transportation and Parking Study by Gibson Traffic consultants, 1988. The study is hereby incorporated by reference and available at Town Hall.

The Skagit County Public Works transportation group provides annual seasonal traffic counts for the Town's major arterial flows.

Analysis and Needed Capacity Improvements

Traffic volumes have been studied periodically over the years. In 1988, Gibson Traffic Consultants performed a detailed Transportation and Parking Study for the Town. Many of the recommendations in that report were eventually achieved. However, the traffic flow increases did not occur as predicted. The traffic studies performed by Skagit County in 2004 revealed that the flow through town during peak seasons has not changed much.

Some local patterns have changed. With the increased success of industrial business in the Port of Skagit County, daily commuter traffic on North Third Street and Morris Street has increased significantly. Although this is a localized increase, the overall traffic flow through the Town has not changed. Port tenants and town administration have expressed a need to examine the feasibility of adding an alternate access road to the Port of Skagit facilities in the north end of town along Drainage Slough.

Parking is limited in town. However, the Town has invested in additional public parking on South Third Street and parking requirements for new development have been strictly enforced.

Analysis of Needed Safety Improvements

Some streets and sidewalks impair wheelchair access and pedestrian safety. Wheelchair access on sidewalks could be improved by replacing and adding ramps and sidewalks. Most curbs in the downtown area are now in compliance with American Disabilities Act (ADA) wheelchair access requirements. Parking configurations could be improved to prevent backing into oncoming traffic in some areas.

Analysis of Projected Transportation Needs

Most existing streets and sidewalks require annual maintenance to retain their viability for vehicular and pedestrian traffic. An updated stormwater drainage system serves as preventive maintenance to avoid flooding and debris. The Morris Street project, which is now completed, should decrease and/or eliminate stormwater flooding and maintenance in that area of town for the immediate future.

The projected population for the year 2025 in LaConner has been estimated to be somewhere between 980 and 1,143 using a 1% annual growth rate. This adds between 175 to 348 people. The average household in LaConner is 2.25 people. This would add 78 to 155 residential units to the Town. With an average of 2 vehicles per household, this would add 156 to 310 vehicles to the Town's resident population.

The Town's roads and parking areas can accommodate this growth, but the primary impact is the commercial and tourist traffic superimposed over the local demands.

Future Transit Needs

The Town has relied on private shuttles for transit service, but this has not met the needs of seniors and teenagers for shopping and entertainment in the Mount Vernon and Cascade Mall areas. Skagit Public Transit Benefit Area (PTBA, commonly known as SKAT) became available in 1993.

The Town of LaConner also needs to work closely with the Skagit Council on Aging (SCOA) and the Skagit County Commissioners to ensure that SKAT service for seniors in LaConner is maintained, enhanced, and increased over the next few years. As the population of LaConner ages, there will be more demand for the specialized transportation service. SKAT has decreased services to LaConner in recent years, and has made Dial-a-Ride available to those that qualify. This service is limited.

Future Pedestrian/Bicycle Lane Needs

Because of the limited paved right-of-way on Maple Avenue, there is no room to install a bicycle lane that would connect the feeder roads into town with Pioneer Park and points west. It is not likely that ISTEA (Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act) enhancement funds would be available to widen Maple Avenue in order to accommodate a bicycle lane. However, the Town should budget to establish bicycle traffic lanes for Morris Street.

Future Commercial and Recreational Water Transportation Facilities Needs

Although the Port of Skagit County operates the LaConner Marina with two moorage basins on the north end of town, and private and public docks are available, no facilities currently exist for a water transportation service. Water transportation facilities, including seaplanes, are seen as a need and could be accommodated as long as safety requirements are met.