

2020 ISSUE PAPER: TRANSPORTATION

Position Statement

The League of Women Voters of US and WA have several policy statements related to transportation. Read together, they support a balanced, appropriately funded, multi-modal transportation system with sufficient capacity to maintain the system. Additionally, the League has a multitude of environmental protection and climate change positions that support reduction in use of single occupancy vehicles, increased use of electric vehicles, and increased opportunity to reduce travel, such as through telecommuting. The League also has positions that support redevelopment of the electrical grid, which could affect transportation.

Summary of Issues for the 2020 Legislative Session

Major transportation policy and budget packages are typically adopted only periodically with minor updates between. The reason for this is the length of time it takes to implement most transportation projects. They can be many years in the making.

In 2015, the Legislature adopted a 16-year transportation funding package that included an increase in the gas tax and assumed funding for completion of several key construction projects needed for cargo distribution to ports but did not contemplate additional new road construction. Instead it prioritized road preservation and maintenance and multi-modal transportation enhancements. Among the unresolved issues were how to address anticipated reductions in gas purchases as a result of increased use of electric vehicles.

In 2018, the Department of Transportation issued the 2040 transportation plan which focused on new issues, such as the need for redistributing economic growth through supplemental broadband access in rural areas, repair of 600 bridges that have been identified as substandard, development of a seismic lifeline route to address potential earthquake damage, misalignment between buckets of existing revenues and their earmarked uses compared to what needs to be funded, and other related issues. The new plan contains proposed policies that support the goals adopted over a decade ago in new ways. These include economic vitality; system preservation; safety; mobility, particularly focusing on multimodal travel; and health and environment, focusing on clean energy and reduced use of vehicles.

Highlights of the 2019 legislative session were an update to the 2015 transportation package that included \$35 million for preliminary engineering for the long-overdue Columbia River Crossing, needed to support interstate commerce and to address the lack of earthquake protection on the current cross-Columbia structures; approval of a commission to oversee a study of how to address commercial airport capacity to supplement Sea-Tac Airport; funding to construct two new electric ferries; and adoption of an electric vehicle charging program. The session did not result in passage of the carbon tax, which was proposed to support additional transportation projects nor in final passage of the Clean Fuels Program, intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

A long-underfunded category is transit support. Additional transit funding for transit would reduce congestion, pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions and would support low-income people better. Local jurisdictions have a challenge getting sales tax increases funded, and a state policy with funding to support it could help improve local transit service capacity. This will be one of the League goals for supplemental transportation funding in the short session.

One of the biggest issues will be whether or not I-976 passes (not known as of production of this document). If the Initiative passes, the State will have to completely revise its funding program. If it fails, the legislature can move

forward with existing plans.

In this second half of the biennium, which will allow only minor budget changes—with the possible exception of addressing potential impacts of I-976—the League will support transportation proposals that enhance safety and environmental protection, including assuring that water quality protection measures are part of each project; address climate change needs and reduce CO₂ emissions; enhance use of transit and light rail; and further reduce single occupancy vehicle use.

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