

# Growth and Transportation Efficiency Centers

November 2008



## Expanding Trip Reduction in Urban Areas

Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is collaborating with local governments, transit agencies, and businesses to support economic development in growing urban centers. The new Growth and Transportation Efficiency Center (GTEC) program, which is part of the Commute Trip Reduction (CTR) law, works with businesses to find new ways to encourage employees to ride the bus, vanpool, carpool, walk, bike, work from home, and use other commute options besides driving alone.

“We need to provide transportation choices to people all around the state,” said Joe Hyer, owner of Alpine Experience in downtown Olympia and Olympia City Councilmember.

“CTR is great for the large employers, but those tools haven’t been available for smaller employers until now. A GTEC helps smaller employers like me that want to be a part of transportation solutions. A GTEC allows us to leverage resources in order to achieve goals for the least amount of investment.”

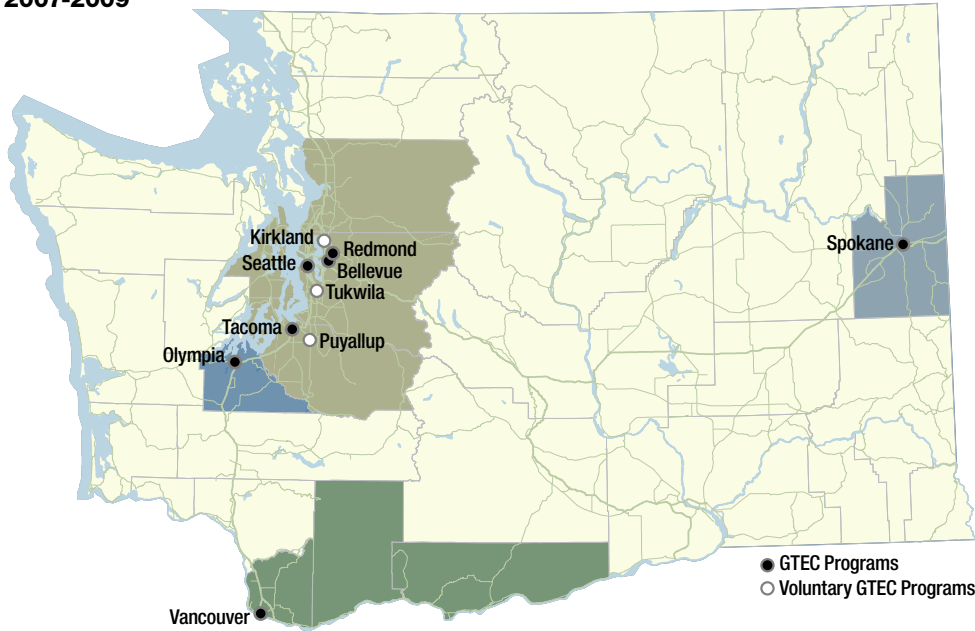
While the statewide CTR program focuses on commuters traveling to major employers, GTECs provide comprehensive programs to smaller employers, residents and students. By working with small businesses, neighborhoods and schools, the program is providing services to more than 235,000 commuters around the state who are not currently a part of a regional CTR program. The goal of the GTEC program

is to reduce more than 14,000 vehicle trips by 2011 that would otherwise be traveling on some of the state’s most congested highways. Achieving this goal will mean a reduction of nearly 95 million annual VMT.

The GTEC program is one of WSDOT’s *Moving Washington* strategies for reducing traffic congestion by managing demand. Offering more choices to commuters will make the best use of highway capacity by better distributing the demands placed on our most congested bridges and roadways. The program will also help communities meet their local goals for growth and economic development, reduce their carbon footprint, and improve air quality and public health.

# Statewide Implementation

## Growth and Transportation Efficiency Centers (GTEC) 2007-2009



Fourteen cities from around the state developed GTEC plans and applied for funding from the Governor's CTR Board in 2007. The board selected seven GTECs for funding, using the \$2.4 million one-time allocation provided in the 2007-2009 Legislative transportation budget. The seven funded GTECs are located in downtown areas of:

- Bellevue
- Olympia
- Redmond
- Spokane
- Seattle
- Tacoma
- Vancouver

Additionally, three cities, Kirkland, Puyallup and Tukwila have opted to voluntarily move forward with elements of their GTEC plans without state funding, so that they will be prepared for future funding opportunities.

### Local, Regional, and State Partnerships

WSDOT is working with local governments, transit agencies, the business community and regional transportation planning organizations to establish strong community partnerships focused on creating demand management programs and transportation-efficient land use policies within designated GTECs. These partnerships help foster innovation and strategies that are customized to meet local needs and interests. The state provides technical assistance and funding support for the local programs.

## Tacoma: A Downtown on the Go

The city of Tacoma's GTEC provides services to 27,000 new commuters in their downtown area, including students at the University of Washington Tacoma (UWT) campus, small employers, and residents in the St. Helen's neighborhood. They have set a goal to reduce 2,048 drive-alone trips and over 13 million vehicle miles traveled (VMT) annually by 2011.



Dan Burden provides a Walkability Audit for a Tacoma neighborhood.

Tacoma's program has hit the ground running with a variety of activities designed to advance their program goals, including:

- **Developed the *Downtown on the Go!*** brand for their GTEC in collaboration with UWT and the Tacoma Chamber of Commerce. The new campaign was officially launched during a transportation fair on October 1.
- **Ongoing expansion** of the participating population of the online commute calendar at [www.piercetrips.com](http://www.piercetrips.com), the first major push has broadened the population to include non-CTR affected worksites, students and residents. Participants are eligible for up to 50 transit passes per month and other incentives for using commute alternatives.
- **Dan Burden from Walkable Communities Inc.** led walking audits of the St. Helen's neighborhood and the UWT campus. These audits presented a wide array of stakeholders, with the opportunity to gain firsthand understanding of streetscape challenges and opportunities in Tacoma. These audits reveal the need for better design and pedestrian friendly policies, which in turn makes streets and sidewalks safer and more inviting and walkable.



The new bike locker program in downtown Bellevue launched with support from a state GTEC grant.



## The Program Benefits

Forming a GTEC can help communities to focus policies, programs, and services in a core area to reduce drive-alone trips and vehicle miles traveled. Cities, counties, employers, and residents all benefit from improved transportation efficiency, energy conservation and air quality. Program benefits include:

### Improving Transportation Efficiency

The program will help build a viable community where people live and work. They will move more people, more efficiently, with fewer cars. Service and infrastructure improvements can lead to more people taking public transportation, walking, biking, and carpooling and more parking spaces for customers. This will help expand capacity on the roads serving the centers. Additionally, GTECs can assist local and regional construction impacts by offering a ready supply of transportation choices to commuters impacted by the projects.

### Attracting Growth and Economic Development

Effective trip reduction strategies can benefit economic development by allowing more people to access centers for work and shopping. GTEC communities can help maintain a competitive edge for attracting jobs and housing in an area where people have an easier time getting around. Employers and developers are more likely to locate in areas if employees have easy

access to jobs and there is a reduced need for additional parking, which can then free up space for commercial and residential development.

### Expanding Business Involvement and Partnerships

A key component of the program is to work with smaller employers who do not currently participate in the Commute Trip Reduction (CTR) program. The program broadens the involvement of employers in trip reduction, expanding the benefits with less of the regulatory requirements of the base CTR program. Local chambers of commerce, business associations and transportation management associations (TMAs) are primary partners in each of the efficiency centers.



Bellevue commuter bikes to work from his home.

### Reducing Climate Emissions

The GTEC program provides an effective means of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by implementing strategies to reduce VMT. Incentives, information and services help commuters reduce their carbon footprint by choosing commute alternatives. The program's focus on land use decision-making at the local level helps ensure that current and future development practices integrate and encourage alternative commute modes.

### Improving Air Quality and Public Health

Getting more people out of their cars and onto buses, trains, vanpools, bikes, and other commute alternatives helps improve air quality by reducing harmful emissions. Research shows that programs which encourage walkable communities and efficient land use help residents and employees be more physically active and can improve public health.

## Olympia GTEC: Assistance for Small Employers

The program offers customized tools for small employers to provide commute options for their employees. Since April of 2008, the city of Olympia has been implementing their GTEC, which includes the *Downtown Commuter Program*. The program provides a package of services for all downtown employees to encourage walking, biking, transit and ridesharing.

"It's great that the City is taking a lead in making trip reduction a priority for downtown employees! *The Downtown Commuter Program* offers fantastic incentives that business owners may not have been able, or thought, to provide on their own," said Daniel Furrer, Manager, Archibald Sisters and President, Olympia Downtown Association. "I'm certain that continued commitment to the program will only result in more positive outcomes!"



Daniel Furrer, manager of Archibald Sisters is excited about Olympia's new program.



Erika Lari started to ride her bike to work due to the new program incentives.

"Until this summer, I feared riding a bike in traffic," said Erika Lari, who works within Olympia's GTEC, "Encouragement from this program has allowed me to discover the financial advantages of alternate transportation, a wide range of health benefits, and the sheer pleasure of riding my bike every day." Erika started participating in the program in August.



The Downtown Commuter Program logo.

## The Program Components

Each GTEC is tailored to its local area, with partnerships and strategies based on local needs and resources. Programs are only eligible for state funding if they contain the following elements:

- Goals for reductions in drive alone trips and vehicle miles traveled that are more aggressive than the CTR program goals
- Short- and long-term strategies for achieving the goals
- A measurement and performance monitoring plan
- A financial plan demonstrating how the program can be implemented with resources from public and private sources (state funds require 50 percent local funds for match)
- An organizational structure for implementing the program, including partnerships with businesses and transit
- An evaluation of local land use and transportation policies to determine the extent to which they complement and support trip reduction efforts

## The Program Strategies

GTECs provide benefits for the state highway system while supporting local goals and policies to direct growth and economic development into their urban centers.

The program is implementing the following strategies:

### ***Trip reduction incentives for commuters and/or residents***

- Incentives for carpooling, vanpooling, using transit, telecommuting, biking and walking
- Transit passes

### ***Infrastructure investments***

- Signage and information for commuters
- Bicycle lane striping, and bike racks and lockers

- Pedestrian improvements to promote safety and comfort
- Identifying potential investment in additional transit services to meet employer needs

### ***Policy development and implementation***

Aligning local jurisdiction policies to address GTEC mobility goals, including:

- Managing parking
- Establishing design/development standards
- Ensuring that transit services within GTEC boundaries are given highest priority
- Aligning criteria for new development with area transportation goals

## Measurement

WSDOT will use commuter surveys to track progress for each program. In 2008, each of the seven funded GTECs and three additional voluntary GTECs distributed surveys and collected baseline data about travelers within the GTEC. WSDOT is analyzing the baseline data from these surveys and will use this data as a benchmark to determine future performance of the GTECs in reducing drive-alone trips and VMT.

## The Next Steps

The legislature provided this one-time funding for the program in 2007. WSDOT will evaluate the program and make recommendations for future funding levels in a report to the legislature by January 2009. The initial experience of the program indicates a need for greater levels of technical support and data collection, as well as the development of initiatives in regional parking management, multimodal concurrency, and the inclusion of GTECs in state, regional, and local funding priorities.

## An Important Strategy to Address Climate Change

The GTEC program is well placed to address the challenges of climate change. The 10 GTECs have set aggressive goals to reduce drive alone trips and VMT. By bringing together business and residential development decision-making with mode split goals for transportation, the GTEC program can help centers with sizeable travel markets create policies that reduce their VMT per capita. As the program matures, there will be new opportunities to support efficient transportation along more of the state's key highway corridors.

In Washington, transportation accounts for nearly half (47 percent) of the total greenhouse gas emissions (including emissions from cars, trucks, planes, and ships). Reducing VMT will help the state achieve its greenhouse gas emission goals. In 2008 the State Legislature passed House Bill 2815, which requires the state to reduce VMT by 18 percent by 2020. The program provides incentives and tools to strengthen the transportation and land use connection. GTEC helps guide local governments toward more effective land use policies, such as parking management, which in turn can produce longer-term benefits for congestion relief, air quality and greenhouse gas emissions.

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