Introduction

The Growth Management Act (GMA) (chapter 36.70A RCW) requires development of a comprehensive plan. Snohomish County's comprehensive plan consists of several components which are contained in separate volumes, including:

- The General Policy Plan (GPP)
- Transportation Element
- Capital Facilities Plan
- Capital Improvement Program
- Parks and Recreation Element

Together, the GPP along with the other components meet the requirements of a GMA comprehensive plan. All of these plan elements work together to guide population and employment growth for Snohomish County. Each plan element addresses specific GMA requirements for local comprehensive plans, and implements the general policy guidance of the Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs).

The GMA requires periodic updates of local comprehensive plans to address new population and employment growth forecasts for a new 20-year planning period. The "horizon" for this updated plan is the year 2035.

This introduction provides a general overview of the Snohomish County General Policy Plan (GPP) and describes the demographic trends expected for future growth in the county. Analysis of these demographic trends provides insight into lifestyle, housing, and employment choices to guide planning for future needs.

GPP – Purpose and Use

The GPP provides overall policy direction for all of the various components of the GMA Comprehensive Plan. This direction includes goals, objectives, and policies for the plan elements, the Future Land Use Map (FLUM), and other supporting maps. Further, the GPP provides the direction for ongoing and future county planning efforts. These efforts may include annual plan amendments, more detailed or focused planning studies, monitoring of development patterns, and policy evaluation and refinement. The GPP also provides direction for the county's development regulations.

The chapters of the GPP reflect the goals and requirements of the GMA. The plan chapters include a narrative and goals, objectives, and policies for:

- Population and employment.
- Land use for urban, rural and resource areas.
- Housing.
- Transportation.
- Capital facilities.

- Utilities.
- Economic development.
- Natural environment.
- Interjurisdictional coordination.
- Parks and recreation.

Policies in each chapter serve to implement several major goals which, if accomplished, would result in local actions that satisfy the goals of the GMA. Each GPP goal has one or more objectives and policies that, taken together, implement the GMA.

Introductory text within each chapter of the GPP provides context and does not provide policy direction. Such text represents a "snapshot in time" of the county's dynamic comprehensive plan and may be referred to when interpreting intent.

Major Concepts

Resource Areas

The GMA requires that plans address resource lands including timber production, mineral resources, and agriculture.

The scenic backdrop of the Cascade Mountains with their forest cover is a visual reminder of both the aesthetic and the economic benefits of forestry. This plan continues the recognition and conservation of forestland for timber production.

Geological forces left rich mineral resources scattered throughout the county. This plan includes an inventory of the resources as well as goals and policies for enabling the extraction of resources and the reclaiming of the areas.

Agricultural resources drew settlers to the county, and present day citizens of Snohomish County are still deeply connected to farming. Farming needs support and encouragement if it is to remain viable into the future. This plan designates land for agriculture and contains conservation measures for farming as well as goals and programs to encourage the industry.

Rural Areas

GMA requires a "Rural Element" that includes lands "not designated for urban growth, agriculture, forest, or mineral resources" (RCW 36.70A.070(5)). Pre-GMA trend forecasts showed 28% of the county's population growth occurring in rural areas. Actual growth patterns since adoption of the county's first GMA plan in 1995 show that only 11% of total population growth from 1995-2013 has occurred outside the UGAs. This dramatic shift in pre-GMA and post-GMA growth patterns strongly suggests that the county's plan has been a significant force for preservation of the county's rural lands.

Urban Areas

Snohomish County has 20 towns and cities classified as urban. As required by the GMA, the GPP delineates urban growth area (UGA) boundaries (RCW 36.70A.110). All of the cities have UGAs around them. Most of the UGAs include unincorporated urban land, allowing for future city expansion (a few towns or cities have already annexed their entire UGAs).

The GMA requires this plan to accommodate the urban growth projected to occur in the county, including growth in towns and cities, for the succeeding twenty-year period (RCW 36.70A.130(3)(b)). This requirement is translated into population and employment growth targets for the urban areas and these targets are detailed in the Countywide Planning Policies.

The GMA requires that the county regularly review its UGAs as established by RCW 36.70A.130(5)(a). This review includes updating the growth targets. The targets and this plan both envision that the unincorporated urban areas and the cities would together accommodate at least 91.5% of the county's total population growth. Growth Monitoring Reports, also required by the CPPs and prepared annually by the county, have shown that 8% of the population growth did occur in the urban areas from 2005 to 2013.

The plan continues to support the cities in accommodating new growth through infill within their present corporate boundaries. An analysis of available capacity shows that projected population and employment growth can be accommodated within the current UGA boundaries, and through appropriate adjustments to the urban land use designations within them. The county recognizes that its urban zoning and building codes need revision to encourage higher standards of design and development. Goals and policies in the urban design, interjurisdictional cooperation, urban land use and centers sections address steps taken to meet these needs.

Consistency with Other Plans

The GPP is consistent with and continues to implement the GMA and several other policy directives. The GPP addresses each of the GMA goals and applies them to unincorporated Snohomish County in a balanced manner.

The GPP also implements and is consistent with the regional vision as expressed in the Multicounty Planning Policies maintained by the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC). These policies call for focusing population and employment growth in mixed-use centers that are served by a multi-modal transportation system. The policies and land use designations in the GPP represent local implementation of these ideals.

The GPP is consistent with the Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs) for Snohomish County. The CPPs consist of policy statements that establish a countywide framework from which county and city comprehensive plans are developed. Original adoption of the CPPs was in 1993 and there have been several amendments to meet changing GMA requirements, including a major revision in 2011 to increase alignment with the Multicounty Planning Policies.

Countywide Planning Policies ensure that city and county comprehensive plans are consistent with each other (RCW 36.70A.210). The population and employment growth targets and their distribution throughout Snohomish County are one of the most significant components of the CPPs.

The GPP also strives for consistency with the plans of adjacent jurisdictions. During the most recent comprehensive plan update, the county sought to coordinate plan development with the cities, Native American tribes, and other affected public agencies. The county attempted to respond to the concerns of these jurisdictions and made appropriate changes to the plan. Since many cities had not completed their own updates at the time of county plan consideration and adoption, and since some city plans may not have been completely compatible with county goals and objectives, a plan reconciliation process may be appropriate. The CPPs anticipate and provide for such a reconciliation process in the policy CPP GF-5 and the procedures in CPP Appen-

dix C. The process allows the county and any affected cities to work out significant differences in their selected growth targets and any corresponding plan differences. The reconciliation process could produce plan amendments to one or several jurisdictions' comprehensive plans during the annual cycles for such amendments.

Continuing Plan Development

An effective comprehensive plan cannot be a static document, but must be a dynamic guide to the future - one that the county monitors and refines in response to changing circumstances and events. There will certainly be adjustments and refinements over the coming years for reasons such as:

(1) Changes in the GMA;

(2) New decisions from the Growth Management Hearings Board and courts;

(3) Direction from policy makers; and

(4) Input from citizens and stakeholders.

The docketing process ensures that the general public – as well as the county itself – has a regular opportunity to propose plan amendments for formal consideration.

Technical Reports

The GPP was prepared using several plans and technical reports as a reference. Some of these reports are required by GMA. These documents are listed in Appendix I at the back of this document and are available from the Department of Planning and Development Services and the Department of Public Works.

Demographic Trends and Projections

After first providing some background on the planning guidance that establishes the amount and geographic distribution of projected growth in Snohomish County throughout the 20-year plan horizon, the following sections discuss both past and projected changes in the characteristics of Snohomish County's population.

VISION 2040 Regional Growth Strategy

With the 2015 GMA Plan Update, Snohomish County must address implementation of the VISION 2040 regional plan. VISION 2040 was adopted by the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) in 2008, and contains the Regional Growth Strategy (RGS). The RGS outlines a new strategic framework for accommodating future population and employment growth in the region which builds upon the urban growth area (UGA) emphasis provided in the GMA. It does this by shifting the geographic distribution of future growth, especially population, towards major cities, and away from unincorporated urban and rural areas, compared with past trends and past growth targets.

Specifically within Snohomish County, the distribution of population growth under the RGS changes significantly by shifting more growth towards cities with regional growth centers – metropolitan (Everett) and core cities (Lynnwood, Bothell) – and away from the unincorporated UGA than in the past[1].

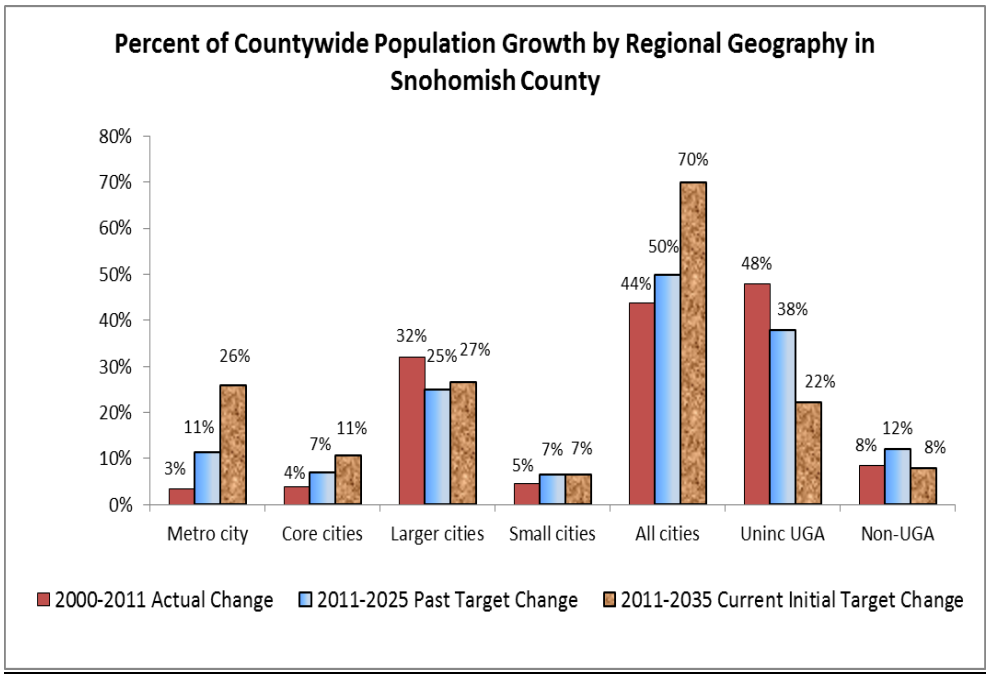


Figure 1. (Source: PSRC, VISION 2040 Regional Growth Strategy)

In June 2013, the Snohomish County Council adopted initial 2035 population targets that are consistent with the RGS into the Countywide Planning Policies. Figure 1 depicts the shifts called for under the RGS, as represented by the initial targets, for the VISION 2040 regional ge-

[1] The geographic distribution of future employment growth in Snohomish County is not altered as significantly as the population distribution is under the RGS.

ographies[2] (a categorization by PSRC of different jurisdictions, based on similar size and function).

The metropolitan city (Everett) is allocated 26% of the county's population growth to 2035, up considerably from the 3% countywide share it accommodated between 2000 and 2011, and the 11% assigned under past targets to 2025. A similar but less pronounced pattern is shown for the core cities (Bothell and Lynnwood). Conversely, with only 22% of the county's population growth to 2035 assigned to the unincorporated UGA, this is less than half the countywide growth share (48%) these areas accommodated between 2000 and 2011. The unincorporated UGA was also assigned a smaller share of countywide population growth than had been previously assigned (38%) under past targets to 2025.

Even though these shifts in the future growth distributions will be challenging to implement, there are several demographic trends currently underway or projected to occur by 2035 which appear to help facilitate the Regional Growth Strategy's planned shift in the distribution of future residential growth. These trends, along with a description of other general demographic trends, are described below.

Overall projected population growth in Snohomish County slows

Snohomish County's population is projected to continuing growing, but by lesser amounts and at a slower rate than in the past (Figure 2).

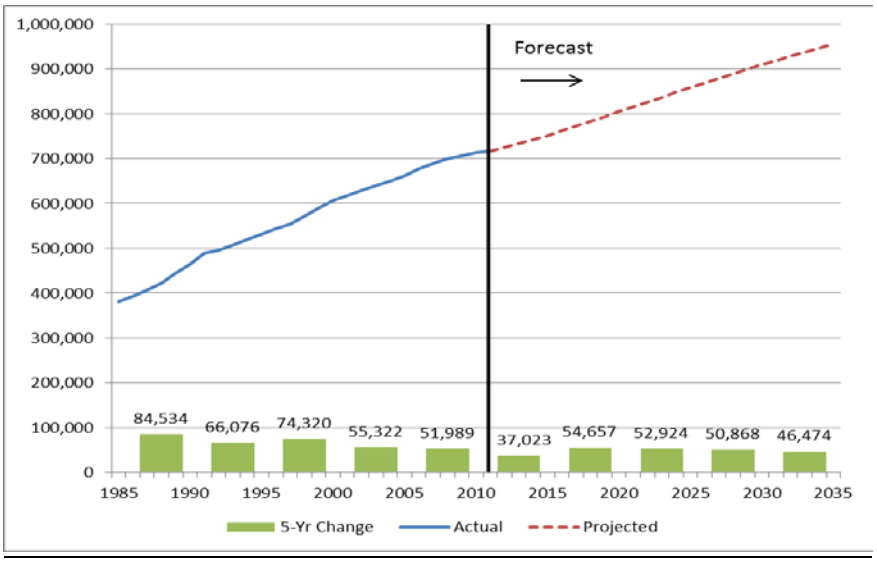


Figure 2. Snohomish County Total Population (Source: OFM)

[2] Metropolitan City – Everett
Core Cities – Bothell, Lynnwood
Larger Cities – Arlington, Edmonds, Lake Stevens, Marysville, Mill Creek, Monroe, Mountlake Terrace, Mukilteo
Small Cities – Brier, Darrington, Gold Bar, Granite Falls, Index, Snohomish, Stanwood, Sultan, Woodway
Unincorporated UGA – Snohomish County (unincorporated urban areas)
Non-UGA – Snohomish County (rural/resource/tribal areas).

The 2015 plan update is based on accommodating 955,257 total residents, which is very close to the medium state Office of Financial Management (OFM) population projection to 2035 of 955,281 total residents. OFM's medium projection represents a 241,946 population gain between 2010 and 2035 (+33.9%, or 1.2% per year on average), compared with the 332,241 gain (+87.2%, or 2.5% per year on average) experienced during the previous 25 years. This translates into a lower projected average decadal population increase of 96,778 in the county through 2035, compared with the average of 132,896 population gain experienced per decade during 1985-2010.

Projected reductions in both natural increase and net migration drive slower growth assumptions

Snohomish County's slower projected population growth is driven by a combination of reductions in both natural increase and net migration (Figure 3).

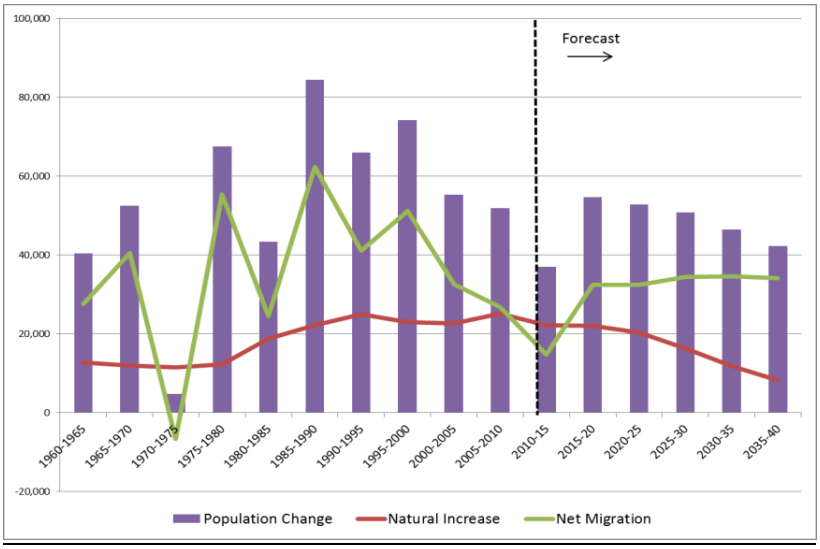


Figure 3. Snohomish County - Total Population Change Components (Source: OFM)

After the sharp downturn in net migration to Snohomish County experienced during and following the Great Recession of 2007-2009, net migration during the period 2015-2035 is projected to rebound to an average of 6,706 net migrants per year. However, this increased level of net migration is not expected to reach the level of net migration experienced during 1985-2010, when Snohomish County averaged 8,570 net migrants per year.

Similarly, natural increase (births minus deaths) is projected to drop to an average of 3,540 per year during the period 2015-2035, compared with the earlier period 1985-2010 when it averaged 4,720 per year. While projected births continue to climb at roughly the same rate exhibited since 1990, deaths are expected to rise rapidly over the next 20 years. This combination will cause natural increase to drop continuously during the forecast period, most notably after 2025 when the number of deaths of county residents increases rapidly as the baby boomers age (Figure 4).[3]

[3] References to different generation names in the U.S. in this section use the following categorizations of birth years: **World War II Generation**: 1945 and before; **Baby Boom Generation**: 1946-1964; **Generation X/Baby Bust**: 1965-1981; **Millennials/Echo Boom/Generation Y**: 1982-1999; and **Generation Z**: 2000-present.

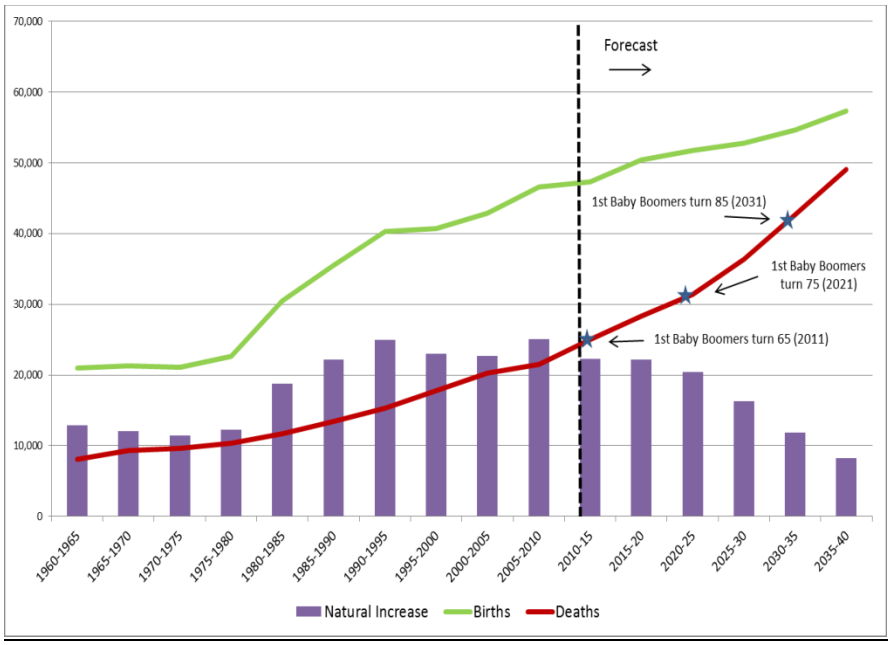
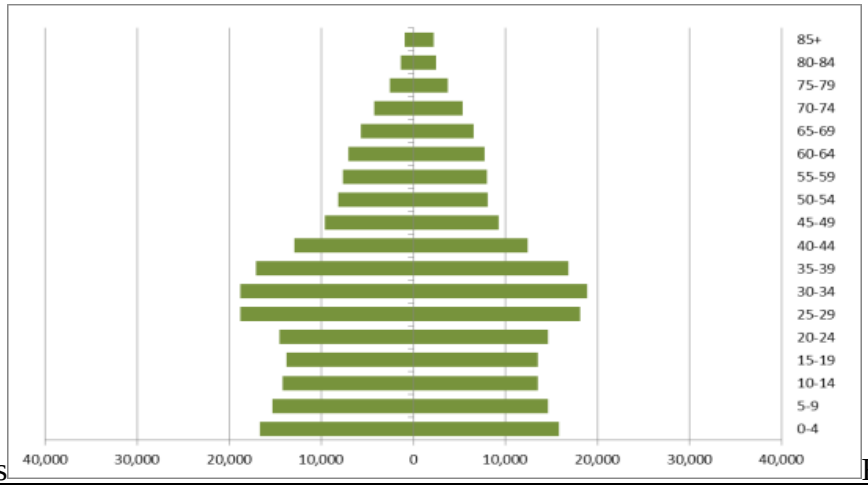


Figure 4. Snohomish County - Natural Increase (Source: OFM)

Snohomish County population pyramids: 1985, 2010 & 2035

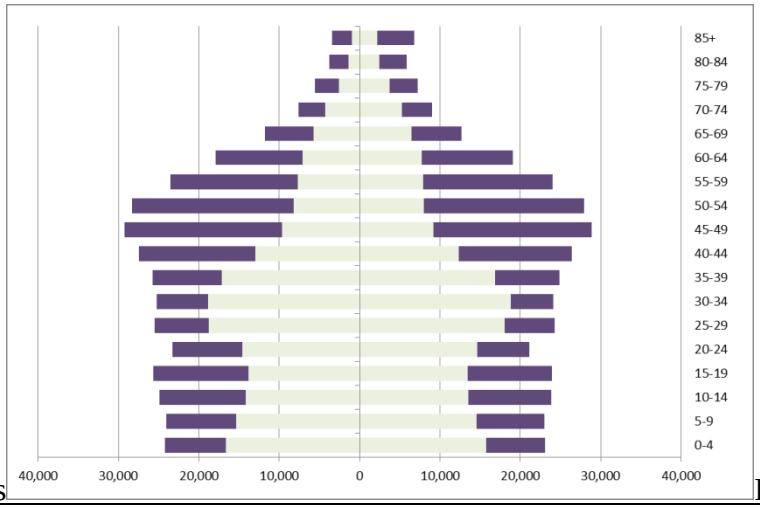
The aging of Snohomish County's population can be readily visualized in the series of population pyramid graphs below (Figures 5, 6 & 7) which depict the age and sex distributions of the county's total population for the years 1985, 2010 and 2035, respectively. Each pyramid builds on the previous one, allowing a visual depiction of population change by age group that has occurred (or is projected to occur) in Snohomish County at three points in time across 50 years.



Males Females

Figure 5. 1985 Snohomish County Population Pyramid (Source: OFM)

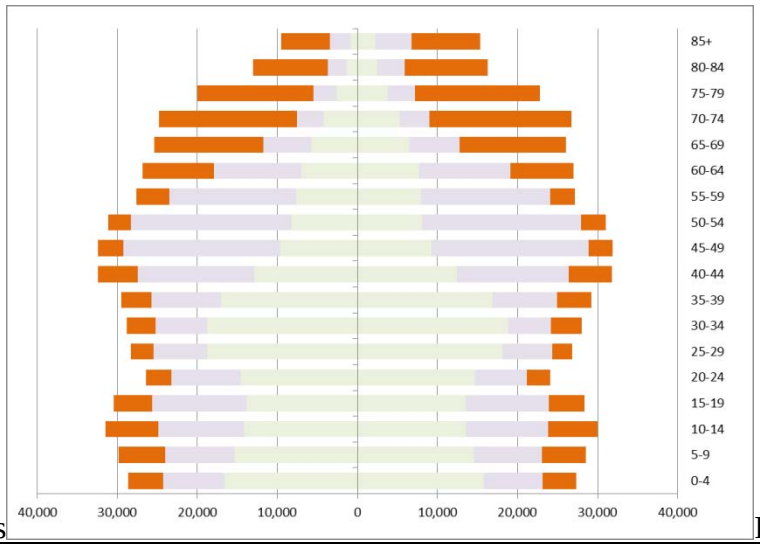
In ***1985***, there is a clearly pronounced baby boomer population bulge (at roughly ages 21-39). The Boomer "Echo" also begins to appear in the 0-4 age group, as the baby boomers start to have children (who eventually become part of the millennial generation).



Males Females

Figure 6. 2010 Snohomish County Population Pyramid (Source: OFM)

By ***2010*** (with 1985 still shown in light green for comparison), the baby boomer population bulge has grown significantly and moved into the 46-64 age groups. These pre-retirement age groups account for the largest amount of population change by age group since 1985, driven by a combination of the baby boom generation reaching middle age, and the sizable in-migration to the county of baby boomers that responded to the substantial job growth the county experienced during this period. Population change in the <30 age groups is also relatively large as the millennial and younger population grew through a combination of increased births and in-migration.



Males Females

Figure 7. 2035 Snohomish County Population Pyramid (Source: OFM)

By ***2035*** (with 1985 still shown in light green and 2010 still shown in light purple for comparison), the age groups which show the biggest gains are projected to be in the 65 and older age groups, as the entire baby boom generation moves into their senior years (roughly 71-89). Population gains in the <60 age groups are also projected to occur, but due to reduced levels of natural

increase and net-migration, their impact on the county's age distribution is expected to be less pronounced than the unprecedented impact created by the aging baby boomers.

Oldest age groups are projected to grow the fastest

The OFM projections clearly show that the age characteristics of the population that Snohomish County is planning for by 2035 will be significantly different from those of previous GMA planning efforts when most of the county's population growth was in their prime working years.

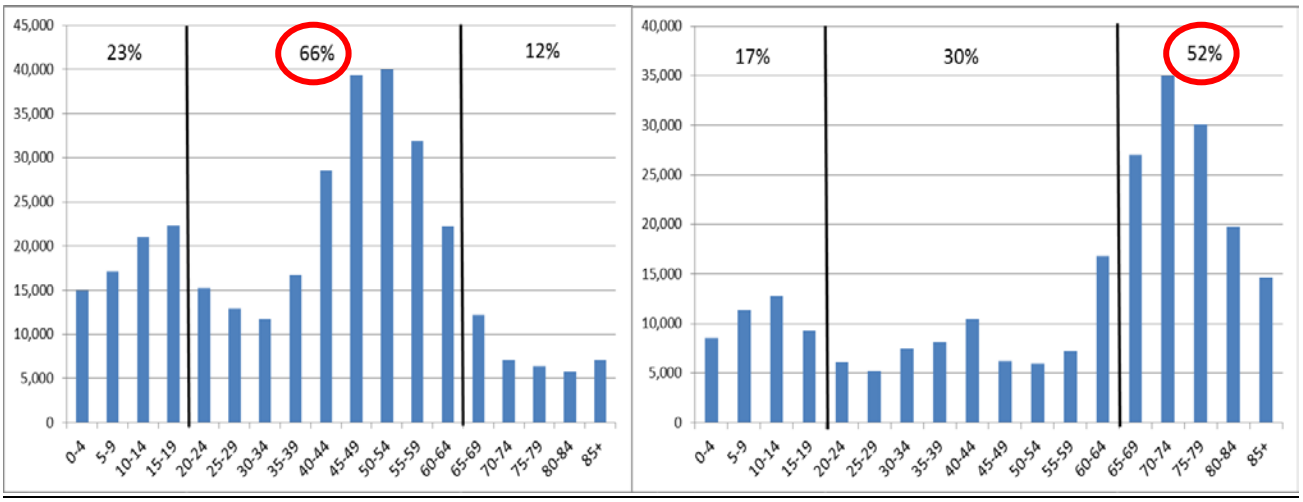
Figure 9 shows that the age groups which are projected to experience the greatest population increases by the year 2035 in Snohomish County will be 65 years of age and above. In fact, most (52%) of the county's population increase by age group is projected to be in these older age groups. This compares with only 12% of the county's population gains by age group occurring in these older age groups between 1985 and 2010 (Figure 8) – a time period during which a large majority of the county's population growth (66%) was in the prime working age groups (ages 20-65).

For the 2010 – 2035 planning period, Snohomish County is still projected to experience modest gains in population within the prime working age groups, as a result of both the aging of the millennial population and continued in-migration to the county due to projected job growth conditions. However, at 30% of the total county population gains by age group between 2010 and 2035, this is less than half the share experienced by the 20-65 year old age groups during the previous 25 years.

Past and Projected County Population Change by Age Group: (Source: OFM)

Figure 8. 1985 – 2010:
Prime Working Age Groups Accounted for a Majority of the County's Population Change by Age Group

Figure 9. 2010 – 2035:
65 and Older Age Groups Will Account for a Majority of the County's Population Change by Age Group



The emergence of greatly increased shares of population change by age group in the 65+ age category is shown over time below in Figure 10, beginning between 2010 and 2020. In that decade, the share of total county population change in the 65 and older age groups is projected to be 46%

– up from just 17% experienced during the previous decade (2000-2010). The share of total county population change that is in the 65 and older age groups after the 2010-2020 decade is projected to rise even further and peak at 60% between 2020 and 2030. Figure 11 shows this same information, expressed in terms of average annual population gains by age group over time.

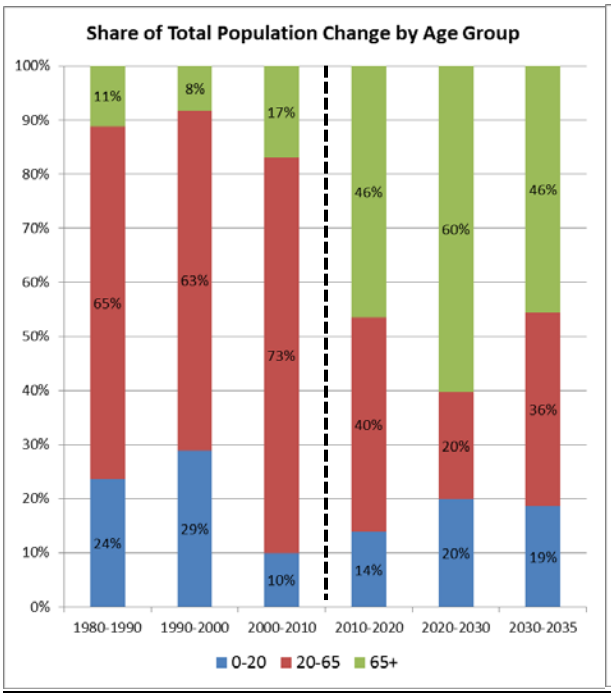


Figure 10. (Source: OFM)

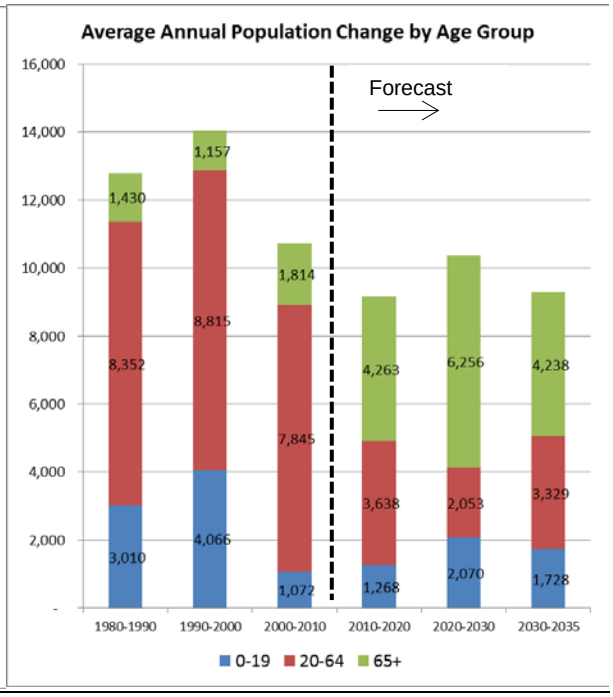
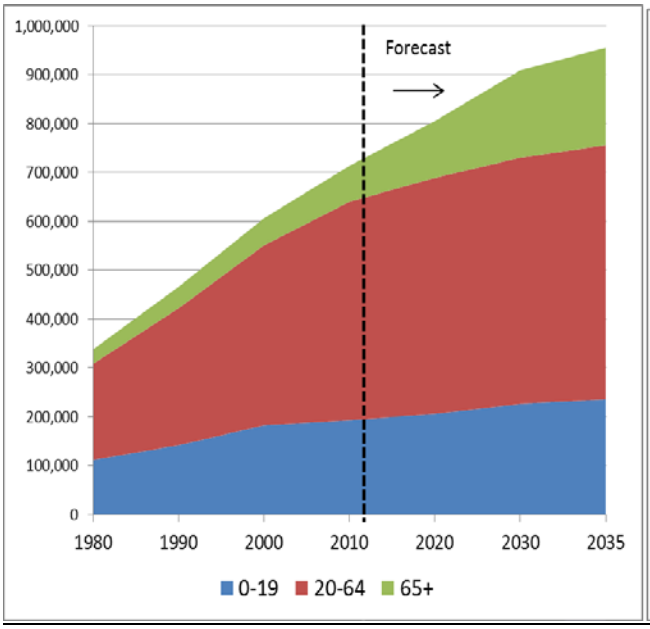


Figure 11. (Source: OFM)

Looking at the age characteristics over time from the total population perspective, Figures 12 & 13 show that the population age 65 and older is expected to nearly triple by 2035 – from 73,544 in 2010, to 199,920 in 2035 – causing this age group's share of total county population to rise from 10% to 21% during this time period.

Snohomish County Total Population Projection by Age Group:



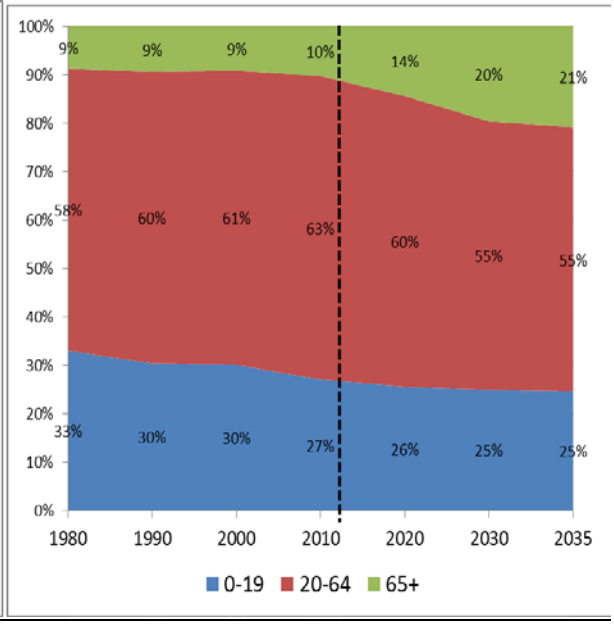


Figure 12. (Source: OFM)

Figure 13. (Source: OFM)

OFM Medium Population Projection to 2035 by Age Group, Snohomish County:

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020	2030	2035
0-19	111,227	141,329	181,987	192,708	205,385	226,088	234,726
20-64	196,961	280,482	368,633	447,083	483,458	503,991	520,635
65+	29,532	43,831	55,404	73,544	116,172	178,728	199,920
Total	337,720	465,642	606,024	713,335	805,015	908,807	955,281

Percent Distribution of OFM Medium Projected Population by Age Group to 2035, Snohomish County:

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020	2030	2035
0-19	33%	30%	30%	27%	26%	25%	25%
20-64	58%	60%	61%	63%	60%	55%	55%
65+	9%	9%	9%	10%	14%	20%	21%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

With such changes in the age structure of Snohomish County's population anticipated over the next 20 years, what are some of the effects on future land use, housing and transportation needs that may be precipitated by these changes? With significant increases in the number of seniors projected by 2035, current demographic observations indicate that older residents will likely create (compared with past trends) more demand for:

- housing in urban/central city locations,
- rental tenure and multi-family housing arrangements, and
- public transit services.

Residential locations of older age groups are more concentrated in cities

Figure 14 shows the percentage of age groups for Snohomish County residents in 2010 living in cities, unincorporated UGAs, and the unincorporated rural/resource (non-UGA) areas. It clearly shows that the residential locations of the oldest age groups are most concentrated in cities, with cities being the locations for 62% of the population in their 70's, climbing further to 70% for the population 80 and older – the highest share of any age group found to reside in cities. In contrast, the percentage of county population residing in unincorporated areas (both in urban and non-urban areas) declines progressively among the oldest age groups.

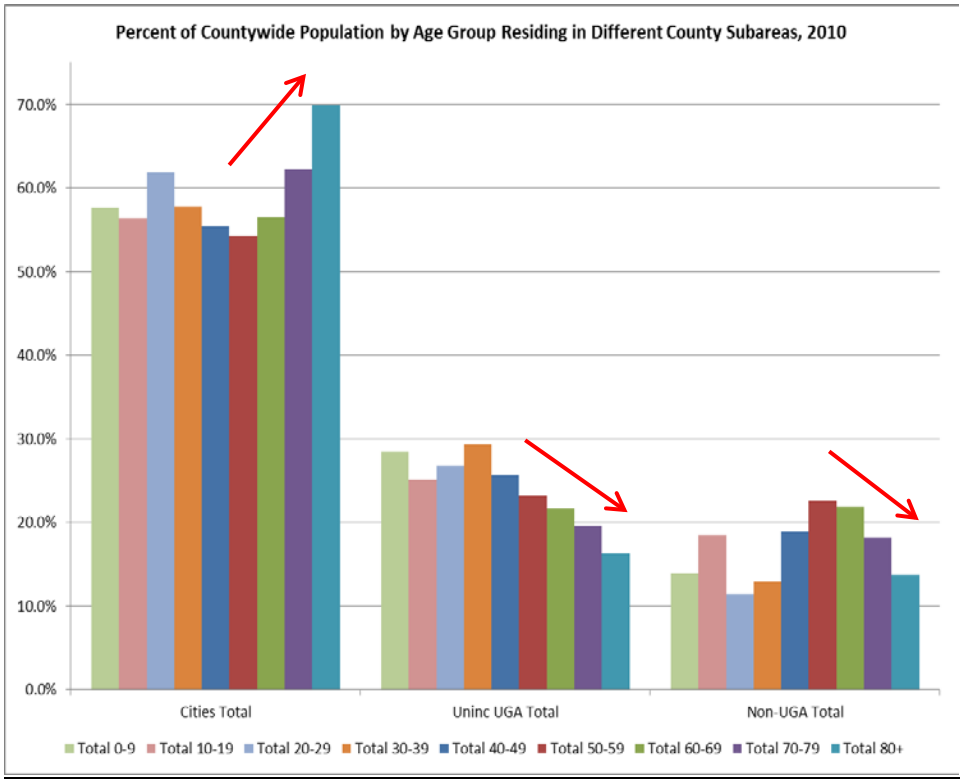


Figure 14. (Source: 2010 U.S. Census)

Based on this observed pattern, as baby boomers age, it is likely that greater concentrations of older residents will be located in cities within Snohomish County, and less in both unincorporated urban and rural areas. Access to medical facilities and services, through the use of public transportation options, will likely become an increasingly important determinant in the choice of cities as residential locations for a growing senior population.

Alone, this observed pattern of greater residential concentrations in cities for the oldest residents of the county is not enough to match the future population growth shares by regional geography anticipated by the RGS, especially with regard to specific metropolitan and core cities, but the pattern will still likely help to bolster the regional plan's attempts at greater centralization of future population within Snohomish County cities.[4]

Of note, the percentage of millennials living in cities in 2010, as indicated by the 20-29 age group, spikes at 62% (matching the same percentage of people in their 70's that live in cities), but then subsides for people in the 30 to 69 age groups. Recent opinion survey research suggests that there are stronger residential preferences for close-in, transit-connected, mixed-use urban communities among millennials than among older generations when in their 20's[5]. It remains to

[4] Assuming that the 2035 population by age group projected for Snohomish County aligns itself geographically as it did in 2010 (as shown in Figure 14), the resulting distribution of 2011-2035 population growth for cities overall would be 60%, up from the 44% total city share observed between 2000 and 2011, but short of the 70% share of 2011-2035 countywide population growth called for by the RGS.

[5] For examples, see: "Why urban demographers are right about the trend toward downtowns and walkable suburbs," *Switchboard, Natural Resources Defense Council Staff Blog*, February 25, 2014; "The Next Big Question Facing

be seen whether these current millennial preferences are maintained over time, especially if job prospects and economic conditions begin to improve for this generation. If they do hold up, then combined with the aging baby boom population, this cohort could further strengthen a market-based impetus towards greater centralization of future population within Snohomish County cities, consistent with the RGS direction.

With older age groups, housing tenure and type shifts more towards rentals and multi-family housing

The homeownership rate in Snohomish County peaks at 80 percent just after retirement age (65-74), and then gradually declines for each successively older age group (Figure 15). This same general pattern can be observed in 2000 and 2012, although the decline in homeownership rate after retirement age was less pronounced in 2012. The 2012 results however revealed lower homeownership rates for the younger age groups compared with 2000, indicating that the housing crash and Great Recession beginning in 2007 hit younger households the hardest.

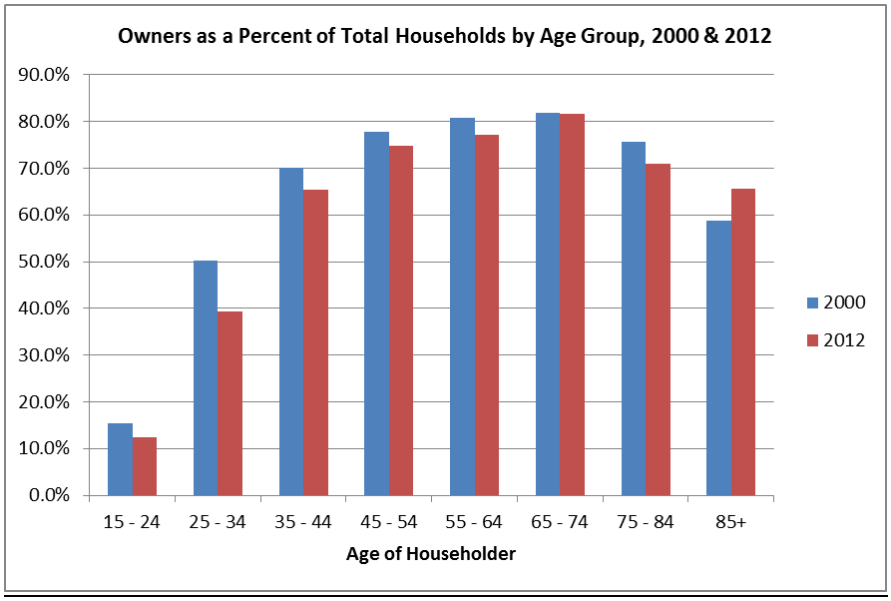


Figure 15. Homeownership rates by age group, Snohomish County, 2000, 2012 (2012 ACS)

Figure 16 shows renter households in Snohomish County as a percent of total households by age group – the mirror image of the 2012 homeownership rate graph. The highest percentages of renter households are in the youngest age groups, dropping to below 20 percent just after retirement age (65 to 74 years of age), then rising gradually to nearly 35 percent for householders 85 and above.

Cities: Will Millennials Stay?," *The Atlantic CityLab*, September 11, 2012; "Millennials & Mobility: Understanding the Millennial Mindset," *American Public Transportation Association*, October 2013.

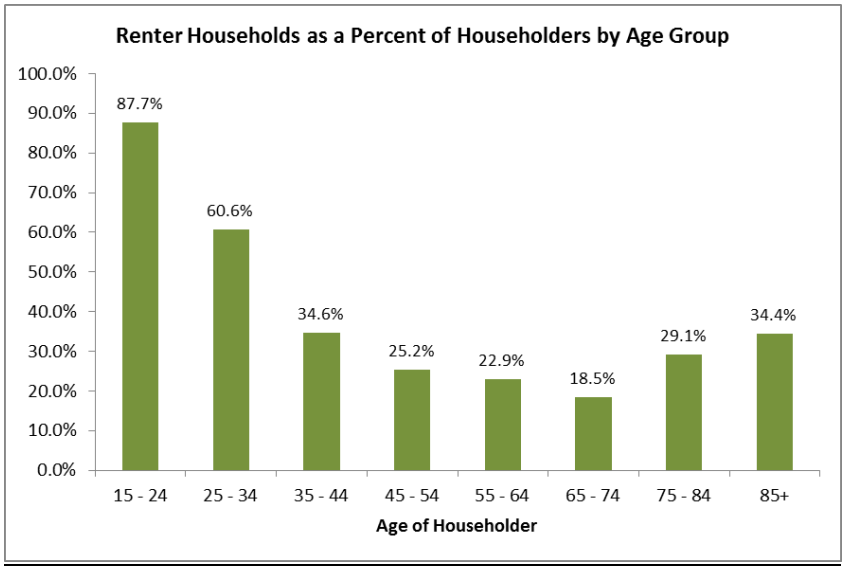


Figure 16. Renter households as a percent of total households by age group, Snohomish County, 2012 (Source: ACS)

Residence in multi-family buildings by age groups in Snohomish County generally resembles the same relationship described above between rental tenure and age. Figure 17 shows the break-down of county households by units in structure by age group, with the highest percentage of multi-family occupancy, 34 percent, in the youngest age group (15-34), dropping to 14 percent in prime working age group (35 – 64), but rising to 20 percent in the oldest group (65 and older).

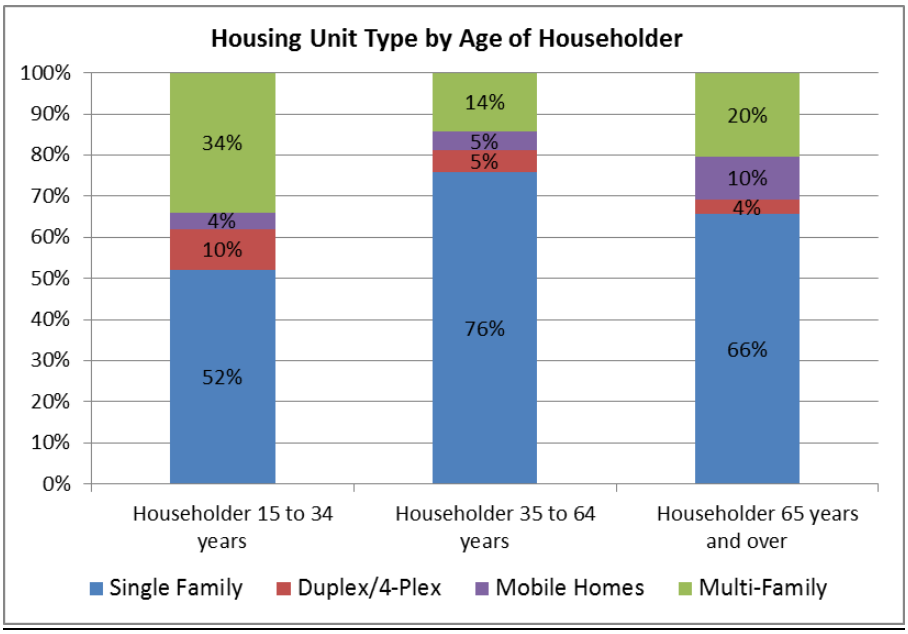


Figure 17. Households by structure type by householder age group, as a percent of total households, Snohomish County, 2012 (Source: ACS)

Over the next twenty years, increasing numbers of residents 65 years of age and older will be selling their homes and seeking alternative living arrangements

With significant increases in the senior population in Snohomish County as the baby boomers age over the next twenty years, it is expected that the number of housing units they release into the housing market will rise. This will occur as seniors move in with relatives, move to more senior-accessible owner-occupied or rental residences or group home facilities either within or outside the county, or pass away. With age, the increased physical and financial difficulties associated with upkeep and maintenance of typical large-lot single family housing will drive the demand for alternative living arrangements.

The already observed trends in increased rental tenure and multi-family housing arrangements with age, combined with the size of the projected increase in the number of older county residents, suggests a large, upcoming shift in housing needs. These needs will likely generate increased construction of senior housing over the next two decades, including assisted, independent, and congregate living residences. To meet the unique housing needs of an aging population, this new supply will need to be provided in central urban locations, ideally in walkable locations with good access to public transit, stores and medical facilities.

With continued projected growth in the county's prime working age population, it is anticipated that there will be a market in Snohomish County for the housing that seniors will be selling

The size of the millennial generation in Snohomish County is projected to be augmented by net in-migration over the next two decades in response to projected long-term job growth conditions. As a result, much of the demand for the housing released by the baby boomers will likely come from the projected growth in millennials as they transition to their prime working years and middle age over the next twenty years[6]. This housing market outcome, however, assumes improvement in the millennials' labor force participation rates and income, and a return to more traditional rates of new household formation for this age group. Also, reestablishment of first-time homebuyer potential for this age group also assumes an adequate resolution of their record student debt loads.

Snohomish County's household types continue to change

The past notion of Snohomish County as a community that primarily houses married-couple families with children has changed remarkably over time (Figure 18). In 1970, these households accounted for 46% of households countywide – the largest share of any household type at that time. By 2012, married-couple families with children had shrunk to representing only 22% of households countywide – now the third largest share of household types, behind married-couple families without children (30%) and single person households (25%). With the aging of Snohomish County's population, it is expected that the share of single person households will rise further, generating increased demand for smaller housing units.

[6] See Myers, D. & Ryu, S.H., "Aging Baby Boomers and the Generational Housing Bubble: Foresight and Mitigation of an Epic Transition," *Journal of the American Planning Association*, Vol. 74, No. 1, Winter 2008. This research article suggests that Washington State, based on population projections, will likely experience a greater balance between the supply of existing homes released by baby boomers and the demand for housing created by younger households over time, compared with many other parts of the nation.

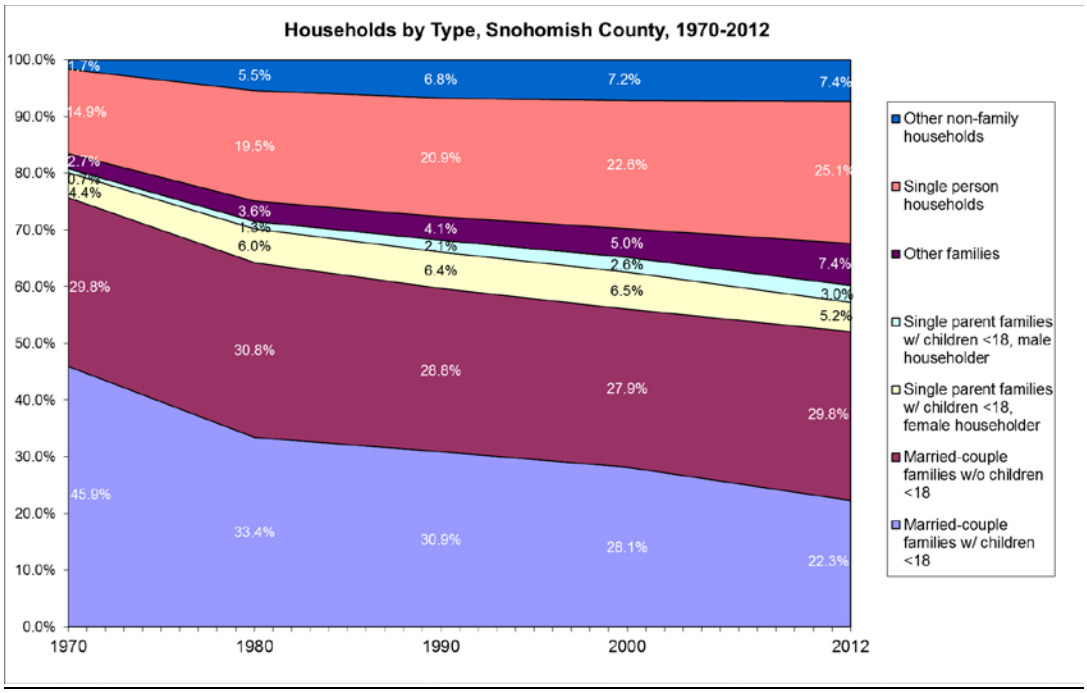


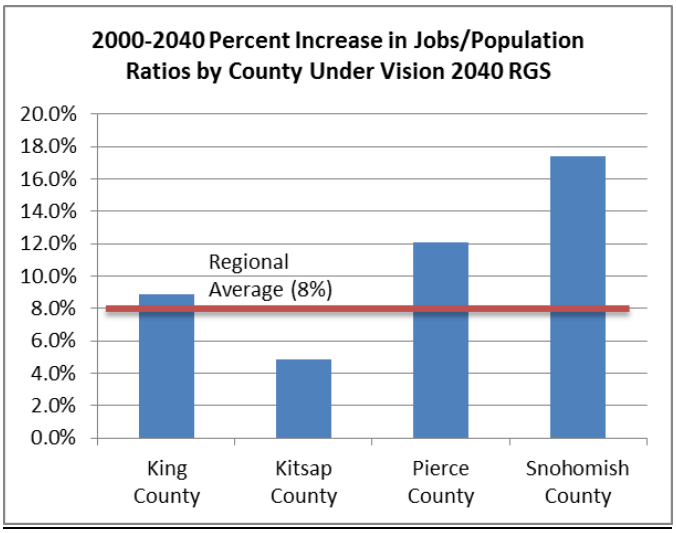
Figure 18. Snohomish County Households by Type, 1970 – 2012 (Source: U.S. Census and 2012 ACS)

Trends in travel behavior

At the same time significant age-related demographic changes are occurring in Snohomish County, there are also significant changes underway in automobile usage, in which reduced driving trends are associated with trends towards a greater concentration of residential development in urban areas. After first providing some of the regional policy context for reducing travel demand, the following sections describe recent automobile usage trends, and assess their potential impact on the location of future housing demand in Snohomish County.

The Regional Growth Strategy of VISION 2040 promotes a growth pattern that improves the jobs-housing balance over time in the region. The concept strives towards relative proximity of jobs and housing supply within a geographic area, thereby improving accessibility to jobs and reducing commute distances for the local workforce.

For Snohomish County, this regional policy translated into a greater amount of future employment growth, in order to improve the county's jobs-housing ratio over time. Specifically, under the RGS, Snohomish County's share of the region's total employment rises from 12.5% in 2000 to 15.5% in 2040. To accomplish this, 1 in 5 new jobs created in the region from 2000 to 2040 would need to be in Snohomish County. Should this goal be achieved, Snohomish County would experience the largest boost in its jobs-population ratio among counties in the central Puget Sound region (Figure 19), consequently helping to reduce commute distances for the county's workforce.



Jobs/Population	King County	Kitsap County	Pierce County	Snohomish County	Region TOTAL
2000	0.74	0.39	0.40	0.39	0.58
2040	0.80	0.41	0.45	0.46	0.62
2000-2040 Pct Change	8.9%	4.9%	12.1%	17.4%	8.0%

Figure 19. (Source: Puget Sound Regional Council, VISION 2040 Regional Growth Strategy)

One possible outcome of progress towards this goal would be reduced cross-county commuter flows among Snohomish County workers over time. In percentage terms, some slight progress has been observed on this measurement since 2000. In 2000, 37% (111,534) of the county's workforce travelled to work locations outside the county. By 2012, the share dropped slightly to 36% (129,173). This volume, however, still represents the largest cross-county commuter flow in Washington State.

Americans are driving less

The most recent national estimates show that per capita vehicle miles traveled (VMT) has declined for the ninth consecutive year. After peaking in 2004, per capita VMT has dropped each year, translating into a total decline of 6.9% from 2004 through 2013 (Figure 20). This downward trend does not appear to correlate with the nation's recent economic recovery and gas price trends.

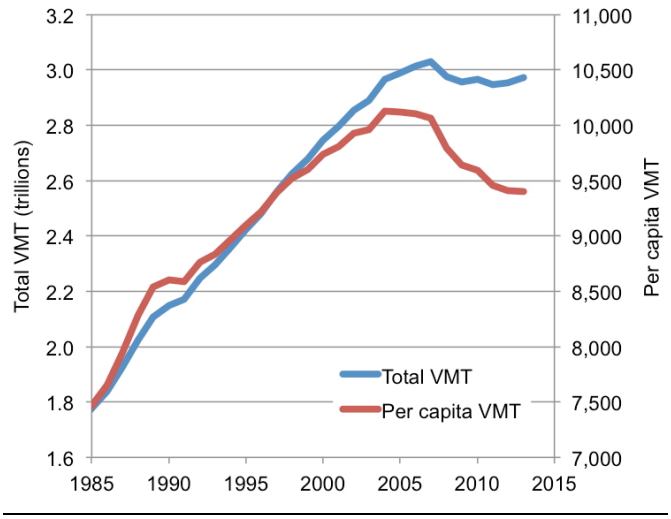


Figure 20. Annual VMT per capita trend for the United States, shown in red. (Source: FHWA)

Note also that Figure 20 indicates that total VMT in 2013 is roughly the same as it was in 2004 when the 9-year period of per capita VMT decline began.

Older age groups drive less, and are most likely to represent households without vehicles.

A key demographic factor underlying this trend is the aging of the U.S. population. Older persons drive less, and with the aging of the large baby boom generation, it is expected that the reduction in per capita VMT will continue. Figure 21 shows the substantial drop-off in per capita VMT in the older age groups, compared with the younger, prime working age groups.

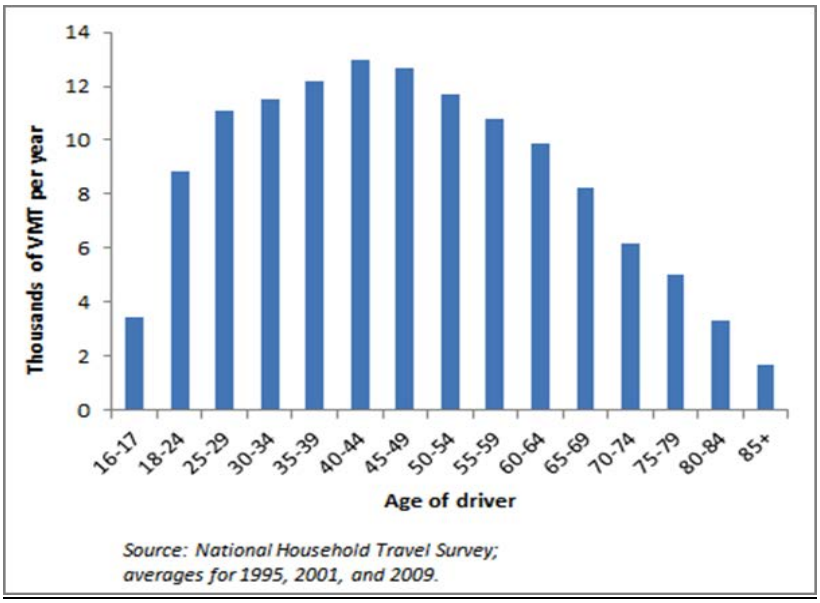


Figure 21. Per capita VMT by Age of Driver

Within Snohomish County, Figure 22 shows the increase in percentage of households without vehicles available for householders age 65 and over, compared with younger households. As a larger share of Snohomish County's population reaches age 65 and above over the next twenty

years, there will be less reliance on automobile use, and greater reliance on public transportation options for these older age groups.

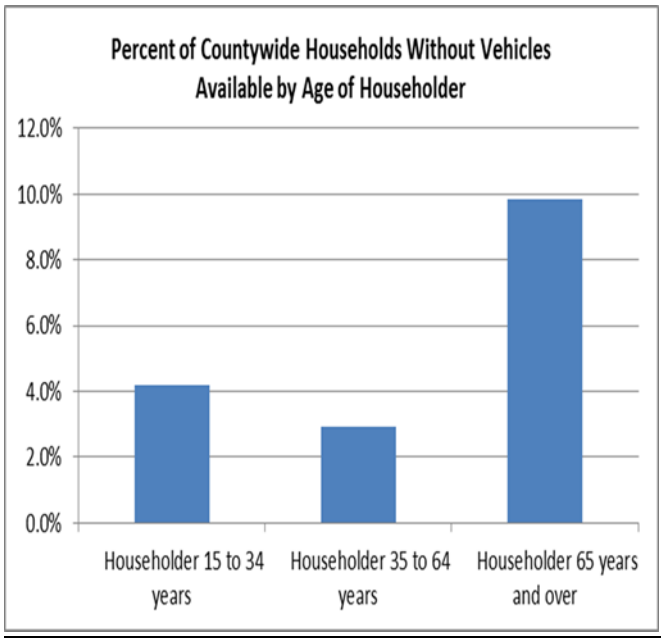
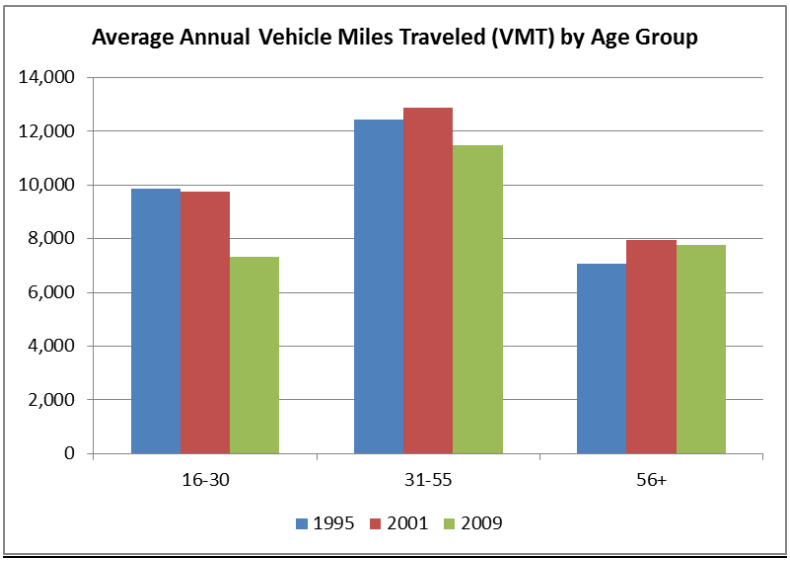


Figure 22. Percent of Households without Vehicles by Age of Householder, Snohomish County, 2012 (Source: ACS)

In Figure 21, also note that the youngest age groups show lower per capita VMT than those in their middle age years. The millennial generation may continue to show less reliance on automobile use compared with previous generations if current trends continue. Specifically, millennials have exhibited the largest per capita VMT drops by age group over the past decade, declining nationally by 25% from 1995 to 2009 (Figure 23).



Survey Year	Average Annual VMT (per person by age group)			Percent Change		
	16-30	31-55	56+	16-30	31-55	56+
1995	9,872	12,446	7,081	-	-	-
2001	9,748	12,892	7,951	-1.25	3.58	12.28
2009	7,319	11,493	7,781	-24.9	-10.8	-2.06

Source: National Household Travel Surveys 1995, 2001, 2009, FHWA

Figure 23. Average annual vehicle miles (VMT) traveled by age group, United States (Source: FHWA)

Combined with the aging of the baby boomers and the associated reductions in driving, reduced driving and car usage by the millennials, if sustained during improved economic conditions, could further augment demand for local public transportation options in the future. From a land use perspective, these public transportation options are best delivered within areas that have a more compact form of urban development.

What does all this mean for Snohomish County's 2015 Plan Update?

Considering the combination of trends described above – the rapid growth of a new senior-driven housing market for senior accessible housing in close-in locations, the likely availability of a single family housing stock released by seniors to the millennial work force, the dramatic shift away from traditionally suburban household types (e.g., two parent families with children) that once dominated housing demand in this county, and the trend towards less driving – it would appear that there will likely be less demand than has been the case in the past for new, decentralized single family detached housing developments in Snohomish County. These same trends suggest greater demand for housing in urban/central city locations, accessible to medical facilities and commercial/community activities, and with good transit service connections during the next two decades.

Evidence of a more centralized pattern of residential development in Snohomish County has in fact already been noted for some years now under GMA. Rural areas as locations for new housing construction has generally trended downwards since 1990, and has dropped significantly since 2007, as can be seen in Figure 24. Even as unincorporated housing permit activity has rebounded since 2011 (driven solely by a sharp increase in urban multi-family permits), rural housing permits have stayed at reduced levels. Recorded lots in unincorporated rural areas, similarly dropped dramatically after 2007, and have remained low, even as recorded lots in unincorporated urban areas increased after 2011. As a sign of renewed interest in residential construction, recorded lot activity indicates that the development interest appears to be on the urban side of the UGA boundary (Figure 25).

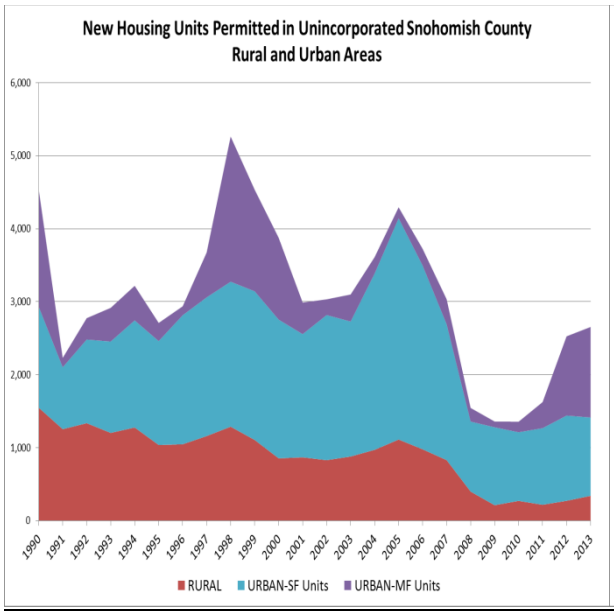


Figure 24. (Source: Snohomish County PDS)

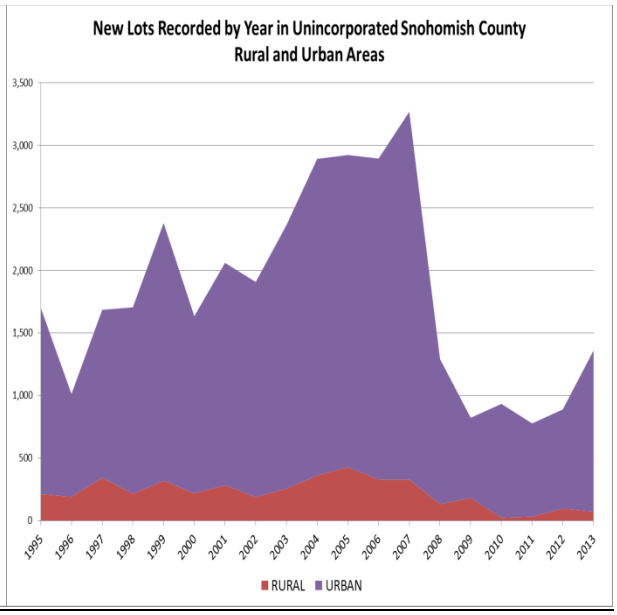


Figure 25. (Source: Snohomish County PDS)

Caveats

Finally, as with all projections, there may be many conditions that unfold over the next 20 years that are unpredicted and unpredictable. Many of the land use, housing and transportation system responses to the demographic changes that Snohomish County will be experiencing during the next 20 years lack historical precedent. As a result, review of the assumptions used for this analysis for accuracy and potential refinement should occur periodically over time. The next opportunity for a major update of these demographic assumptions is in 2017, when the state Office of Financial Management is required to produce the next set of GMA population projections.

Sources of potential forecast error:

- More out-migration of retirees than projected. The housing decisions that the baby boomers will make following retirement are not entirely understood at this point. Out-migration of retirees to areas of the U.S. with warmer climates has tapered off in recent years, but should this trend reverse and greater out-migration of older residents from Snohomish County occur, this would alter the projected population by age assumptions underlying the current GMA plan update.

- More job growth and more in-migration of working age population (including women of childbearing age, 15-44) than projected. Currently, the most recent OFM projections indicate a lower level of in-migration to Snohomish County than has occurred in the past (see Figure 3). Should Snohomish County experience greater job growth conditions, resulting in more in-migration of millennials into Snohomish County, the demand for new housing may exceed that provided by the potential supply of housing released into the market by baby boomers as they retire over the next two decades. In response, this would potentially create a market for new housing in locations with greater land supply, possibly in more traditional, decentralized locations of Snohomish County.

- Resumption of increased commuting into King County by Snohomish County's workforce due to lack of progress towards the improved jobs-housing balance called for in the RGS. Should the shift of future employment growth to Snohomish County under the RGS not occur (Figure 19), and strong employment growth conditions be maintained in King County without corresponding residential increases, a return to the role of Snohomish County as the location for a significant portion of the housing for King County workers could result. This would fuel greater local housing demand, with the same potential effects as those under the second bullet above (which described the caveat of more Snohomish County job growth than projected).