Seattle 2035

Updating Seattle's Comprehensive Plan

Background Report: January 2014

The Future is Now!

Seattle and the Puget Sound region have seen a large amount of population growth since the late 1970's and are expected to continue growing. Our spectacular setting, vibrant neighborhoods, increasingly diverse population and progressive politics are attracting people and businesses. Little trace of the Great Recession slowdown remains—the city and the surrounding region are thriving.

We are beginning the important process of updating our Comprehensive Plan, a plan that will build on the four core values that were the foundation of the 1994 Comprehensive Plan and the 2004 update, and that still guide our decisions today:

COMMUNITY — developing strong connections among a diverse range of people and places.

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP — protect and improve the quality of our global and local natural environment.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY — a strong economy and a pathway to employment is fundamental to maintaining our quality of life.

SOCIAL EQUITY — limited resources and opportunities must be shared; and the inclusion of under-represented communities in decision-making processes is essential.

Since 1994, the plan successfully guided three quarters of the new housing to designated urban centers and urban villages. It spurred City investments in new or renovated parks, libraries, fire stations and community centers to allow our city to grow while improving our quality of life. Despite our successes, not everyone has benefited. Some are not thriving in school or able to support a family with low wage work. The rising cost of housing is eating up a larger percentage of our income. Many do not have access to the most frequent transit.

Planning for the next 20 years requires an understanding of how our city has grown and changed. As the economic engine of the Puget Sound Region, the City of Seattle expects 120,000 new residents and 115,000 new jobs by 2035. That's more growth than we experienced over the last 20 years. The time to plan for that growth is now. The way to plan for that growth is Seattle 2035—a yearlong, citywide conversation that will result in a new, updated comprehensive plan to guide how we grow. This Background Report highlights important trends that should influence how we think about the future:

- Seattle's population increased significantly – we've added nearly 100,000 people since the Comprehensive Plan was first adopted in 1994—a 20% increase.
- Racial and ethnic diversity continues to increase.
- High levels of education have helped attract employers offering good jobs. Over half of Seattle's adults hold a bachelor's degree.
- More people are walking, biking, and taking transit to get around. Less than half drive alone to get to work.

The current Plan calls for the City to embrace growth. Today our challenge is a different one—how can we leverage growth to build better neighborhoods, create jobs and economic opportunity for all our residents, and improve the safety and vitality of our city? We believe this plan will ensure that future growth can:

- Deliver the elements that make great neighborhoods—infrastructure, services and amenities.
- Connect people to new transit investments and opportunities—regional jobs, education and cultural resources.
- Fulfill the vision expressed in our core values.

This Background Report provides a range of information about the people, jobs and housing in Seattle. It's intended to spark informed discussion and innovative thinking, as well as, pose tough questions about our future. This is a critical time for a public dialogue about the opportunities and challenges we face as we grow over the next 20 years.

Please join us over the next year in thinking about and planning for Seattle's future.

Sincerely,

Diane M. Sugimura,
Director

Updating Seattle's Comprehensive Plan

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What is Seattle 2035?

Seattle 2035 is our process to update Seattle's Comprehensive Plan (the Plan), which guides how we can best support the 120,000 more people and 115,000 more jobs projected to come to Seattle in the next 20 years. The Comprehensive Plan was initially adopted in 1994 and significantly updated in 2004. This background report summarizes of how Seattle has changed over the past 20 years, identifies actions that help implement the Plan, and notes areas where more work is needed to achieve our goals.

Why do we have a comprehensive plan?

Our region is growing

In 1990, the Washington State Legislature adopted the Growth Management Act (GMA) to reduce sprawl and direct new households and jobs within areas that already have basic infrastructure, like roads and utilities, rather than transform farms and forests into new neighborhoods.

The GMA requires regions, counties, and cities to develop comprehensive plans for where and how growth will occur within their jurisdictions. The Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) prepared the plan for our region, which includes King, Pierce, Snohomish, and Kitsap counties.

The PSRC regional plan, *Vision 2040*, designates general urban growth areas and two types of centers where the majority of new housing and jobs will be located. The region has 27 urban centers with planning estimates for residential and employment growth and eight manufacturing/industrial centers with planning estimates for jobs. Six of the urban centers and two of the manufacturing/industrial centers are in Seattle.

Besides these requirements, Seattle chooses to have a plan in order to make a better city.

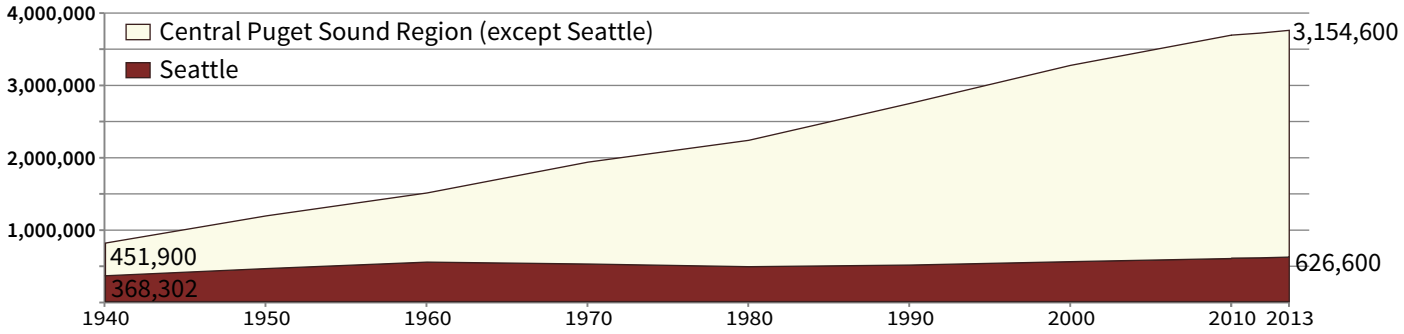
The map on page 3 shows these growth areas and lists the portion of current population and jobs within each of the four counties.

Seattle's Comprehensive Plan: Toward a Sustainable Seattle takes the regional strategy further by designating 24 urban villages in addition to the six urban centers. As with *Vision 2040*, Seattle's Urban Village Strategy encourages new housing and jobs to be located in neighborhoods with the infrastructure and services needed to support growth.

Locating housing and jobs close to one another makes it easier for people to walk, bike or take transit to shop, visit a restaurant or get to work. This strategy makes it more predictable and efficient for the City to provide services in these areas.

The map on page 4 shows Seattle's urban centers and villages and describes the current proportion of housing units and jobs within the three types of centers and villages.

1940-2013 population in Seattle and the Central Puget Sound Region

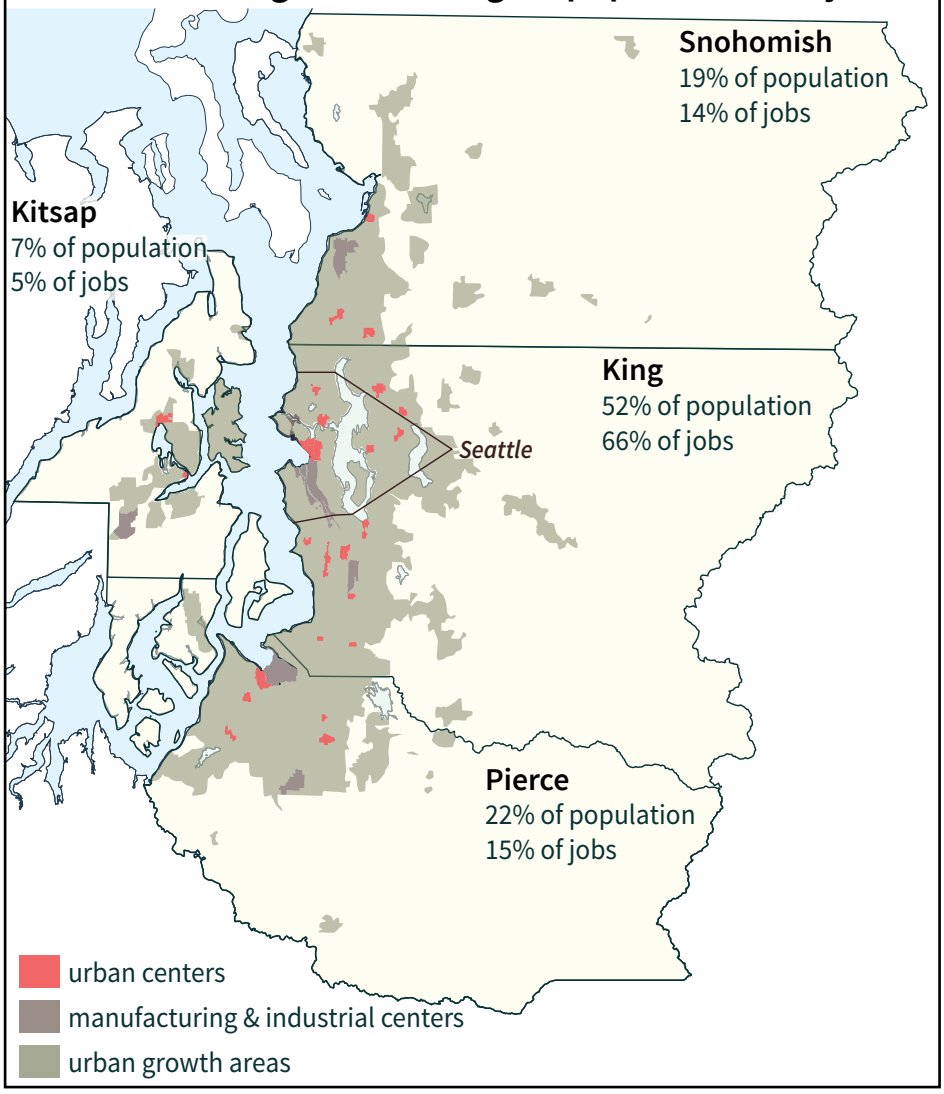


The Plan was developed after years of analysis and community participation. Through that process, four core values emerged. These four values inform the fundamental principles that guide our Plan:

- **Community**
- **Environmental Stewardship**
- **Economic Opportunity & Security**
- **Social Equity**

Next year, 2014, marks the 20th anniversary of Seattle adopting the Plan. This report looks at how the city has changed over the past 20 years and at how well some of the original Plan's ambitions have been realized.

2012 Central Puget Sound Region population and jobs



Seattle 2035

2012 Seattle housing units and jobs in urban centers and villages

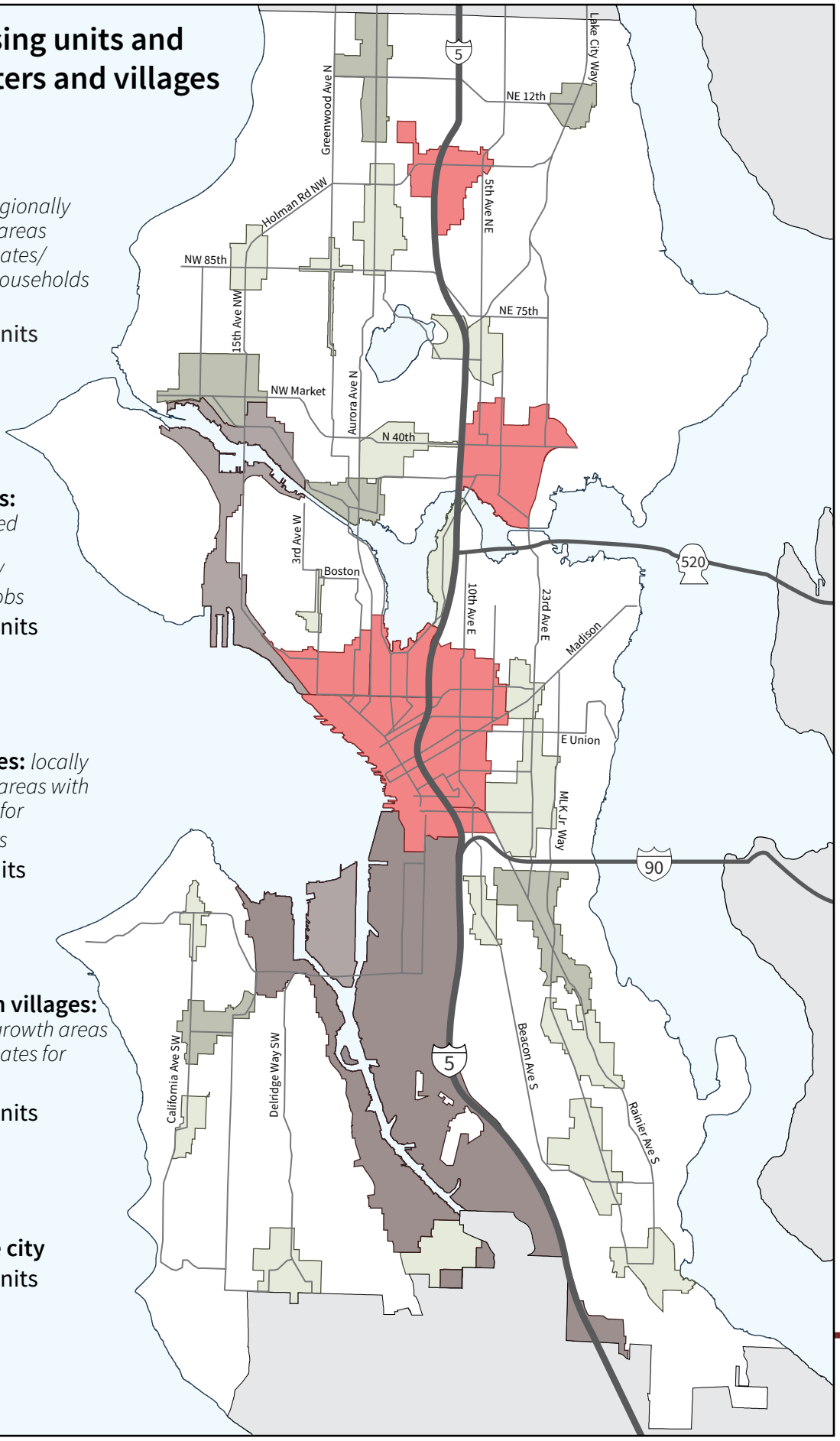
urban centers: *regionally designated growth areas with planning estimates/ growth targets for households and jobs*
22% of housing units
57% of jobs
7% of land area

manufacturing / industrial centers: *regionally designated growth areas with planning estimates/ growth targets for jobs*
<1% of housing units
15% of jobs
11% of land area

hub urban villages: *locally designated growth areas with planning estimates for households and jobs*
7% of housing units
5% of jobs
3% of land area

residential urban villages: *locally designated growth areas with planning estimates for households*
13% of housing units
7% of jobs
7% of land area

remainder of the city
58% of housing units
16% of jobs
72% of land area



How is Seattle changing?

In the past 20 years, Seattle has grown by more than 100,000 people and 56,000 jobs. As intended in the Plan, most of the increase in households and jobs has occurred in our urban centers and villages that make up a small portion of the city. This page briefly summarizes some of the key information discussed in more detail on the following pages.

Who we are

Seattle continues to attract a relatively large proportion of people in their 20s and 30s despite national trends toward a larger portion of people in their 50s related to aging Baby Boomers. The number of children in Seattle remains low even relative to other cities around the country as well as the rest of King County.

Where we live

Most of the new housing units built over the past 20 years have been within urban centers and villages. Newer housing units tend to be smaller and have fewer bedrooms and are more likely to be in multifamily buildings. Homeownership rates have stayed about the same and are lower than the rest of King County.

Where we work

Job growth has been much slower than anticipated both in Seattle and throughout the Central Puget Sound Region. Downtown Seattle remains one of the major employment hubs in our region. High technology and service industries are major employers. Jobs in industrial centers also remain an important part of our regional and state economy.

How we get around

More people are using transit, bicycling and walking to accomplish day-to-day tasks, including commuting to work and school. New transit service includes light rail to SeaTac Airport, which started in 2009, the South Lake Union Streetcar, Sounder Commuter, RapidRide and express bus service.

Investing in our communities

Levies for housing, libraries, community centers, parks, and schools have directed significant investments in neighborhoods across Seattle. 38 neighborhood plans have guided other investments through neighborhood matching funds and other grants. The City is also committed to reducing racial inequity and creating more healthy communities.

The natural environment

Comprehensive planning is fundamentally about reducing human impacts on the natural environment. Since the 1994 Plan was adopted, the City has become more acutely aware of how human activities change our global climate and have taken many steps to reduce Seattle's impact and prepare to adapt to these changes.

Who we are

When the Plan was initially adopted, we expected that Seattle's population would become more diverse, get older, and include fewer families with children. The city's population has become more diverse, but not as quickly as the rest of King County. Rather than getting older, Seattle continues to attract a greater portion of people in their 20s and 30s. While Seattle has relatively few households with children compared to other cities and the region, the proportion of children has not decreased as much as some forecasts suggested. Seattle's population is also increasingly well educated.

Seattle residents are becoming more diverse...

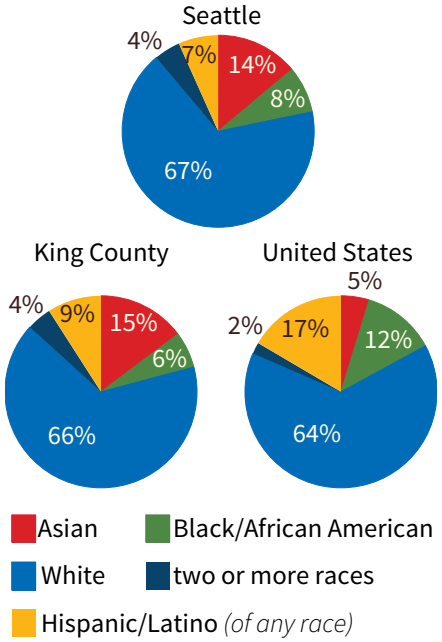
The race and ethnicity of people who live in Seattle looks very similar to King County, which is quite different than the country as a whole. The percentage of those with Asian heritage in Seattle is roughly three times that of the United States as a whole. People here are also twice as likely to be of two or more races. At the same time, people in Seattle are less likely than people in the nation as a whole to be Black/African American or to be Hispanic/Latino.

In 1990, 13% of people living in Seattle were born outside the United States and 15% spoke a language other than English at home. Today the shares are 18% and 23% respectively.

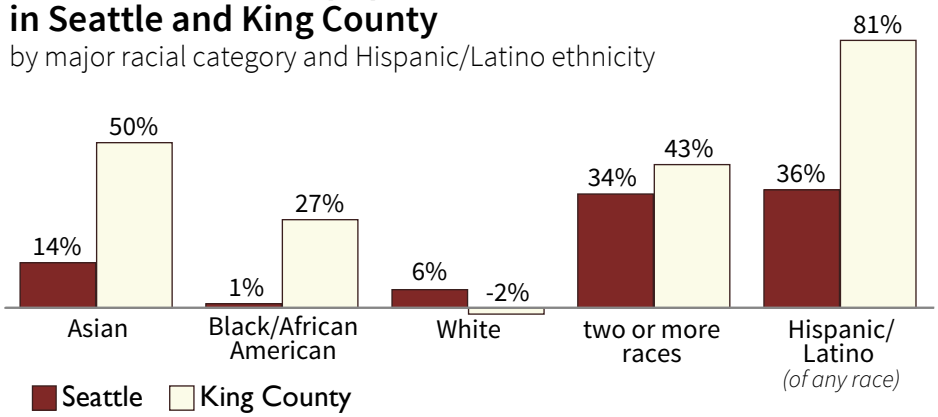
But at a slower rate than King County

Changes in how the Census asks people about race and ethnicity make some comparisons potentially misleading. Over the past 10 years, the non-white population has increased more quickly in the region than in the city of Seattle, as illustrated in the chart below.

2010 population
by major racial category and Hispanic/Latino ethnicity



Percent increase in population from 2000 to 2010 in Seattle and King County
by major racial category and Hispanic/Latino ethnicity



2010 population
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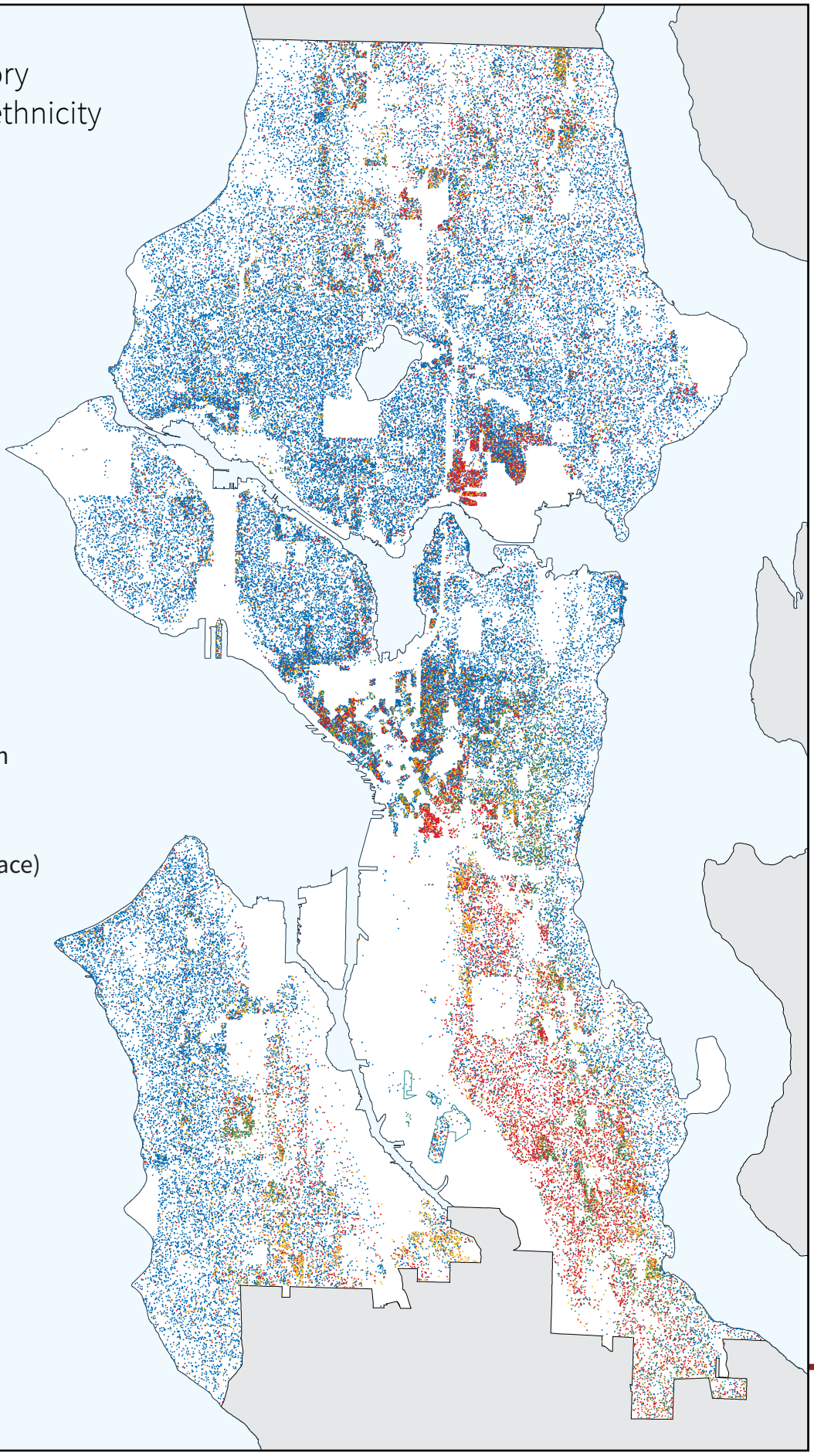
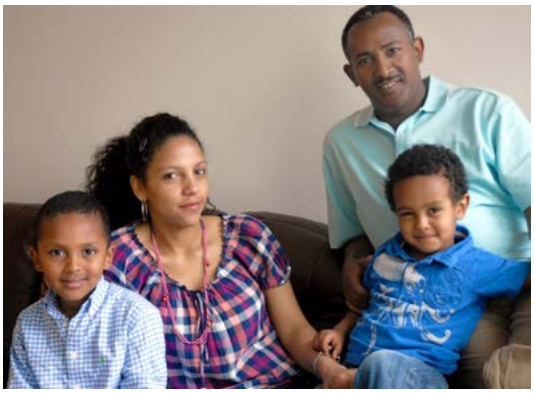
and Hispanic/Latino ethnicity



one dot equals five people

- Asian
- Black/African American
- White
- Hispanic/Latino (any race)



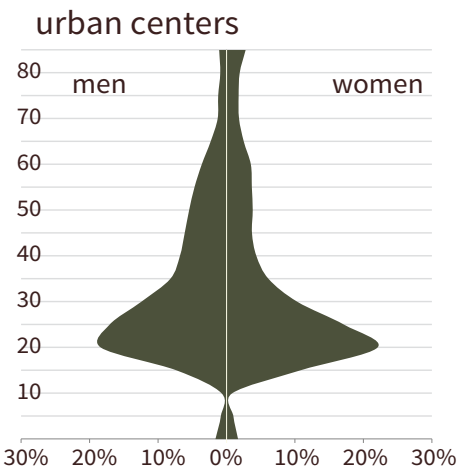
Seattle continues to attract young adults...

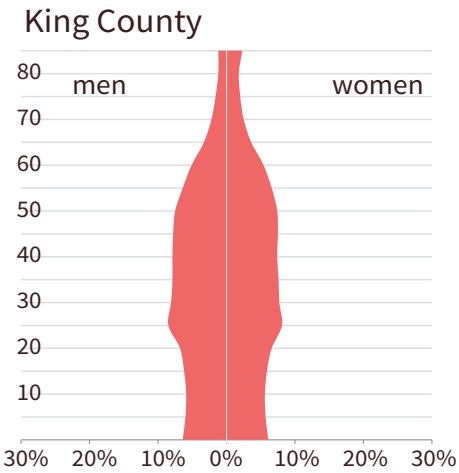
More young adults live in Seattle than King County or the country as a whole. It was expected that there would be relatively more people in their 40s and 50s in Seattle as the Baby Boomers aged, adults in their 20s and 30s continue to be the largest age group.

Age distribution in Seattle varies quite a bit by location—urban centers have relatively more people in their 20s and relatively fewer children than the city as a whole. Residential urban villages have age distributions that are more similar to Seattle as a whole.

But not as many children

The percentage of households with children in Seattle declined considerably in the 1970s. In 1990, 16.5% of Seattle's population was under 18; it's approximately 15.5% today. One of smallest proportions of children among large cities in the country.





Cal Anderson Park by cashgroves

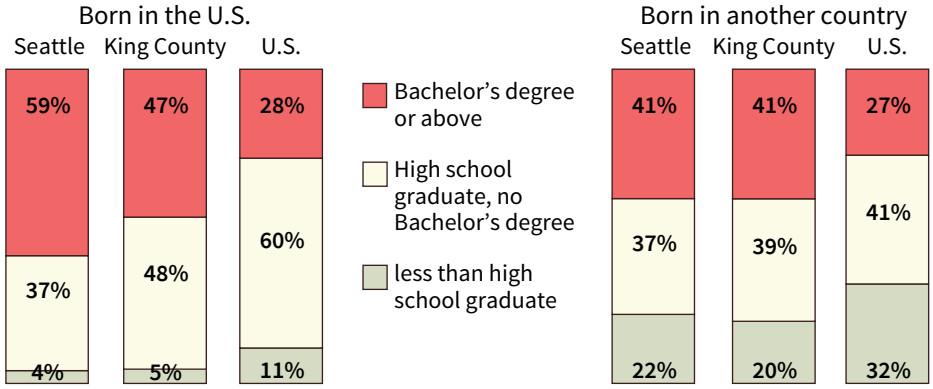
Seattle residents are well educated

Seattle consistently ranks as one of the most highly educated cities in the country. More than half of people in Seattle have at least a bachelor's degree. This proportion is higher than in King County and more than twice the rate of the U.S. as a whole. People born in the U.S. have higher educational attainment than those born in another country. The foreign-born population living in Seattle has a higher average level of educational attainment than does the overall population living in the U.S.

People in Seattle also have higher educational attainment rates now than in 1990 when 38% held bachelor's degrees. Nevertheless, there are significant disparities in educational attainment among people of different races and ethnicities.

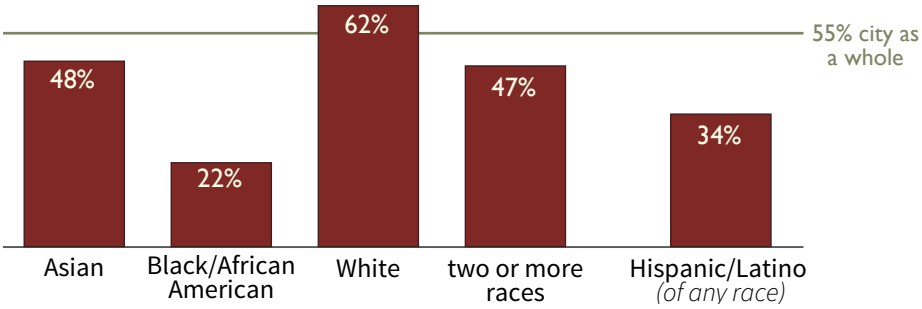
Educational attainment for people 24 and older

by place of birth



2011 percent of population over 24 with bachelor's degree or higher

by major racial category and Hispanic/Latino ethnicity



Where we live

In 2013, approximately 626,600 people lived in Seattle, almost 100,000 more than in 1995. There are also approximately 317,600 homes, almost 58,000 more than were here in 1995. Seattle includes many different types of housing, from free-standing bungalows to downtown high rises. While detached single-family houses occupy the largest portion of the city's land, most new homes have been built in multifamily and mixed-use buildings within urban centers and villages.

Most housing growth is in urban centers and villages now

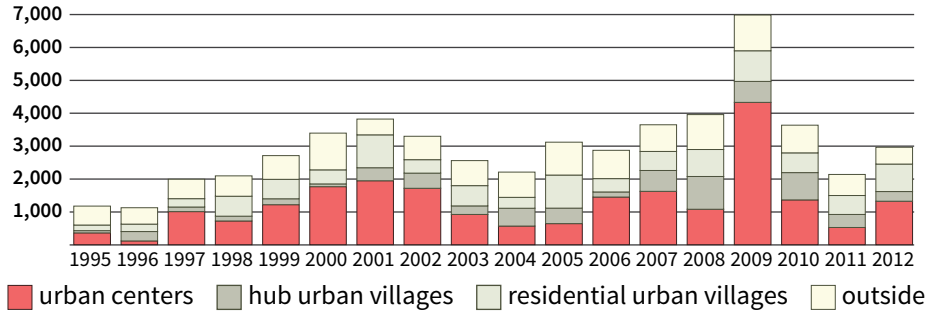
The 1994 Plan projected that Seattle would grow by 50,000 to 60,000 households by the end of 2014. From 1995 through September 2013, almost 58,000 new housing units have been built.

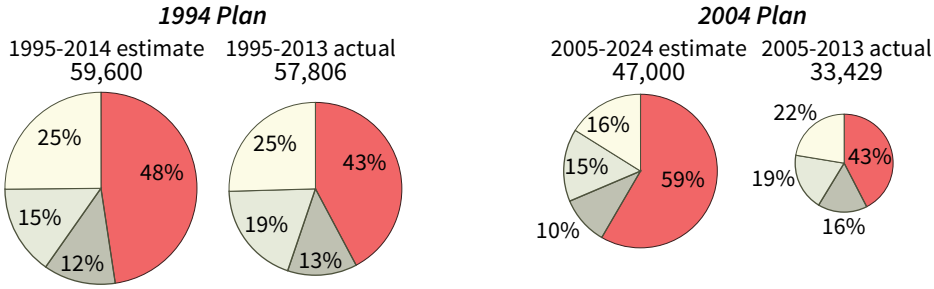
The 1994 Plan also provided estimates about how much of that residential growth would go into urban centers, hub urban villages, and residential urban villages. In the 20 years since the Plan was adopted, housing growth in these places has occurred in roughly the same proportions as the Plan anticipated in 1994.

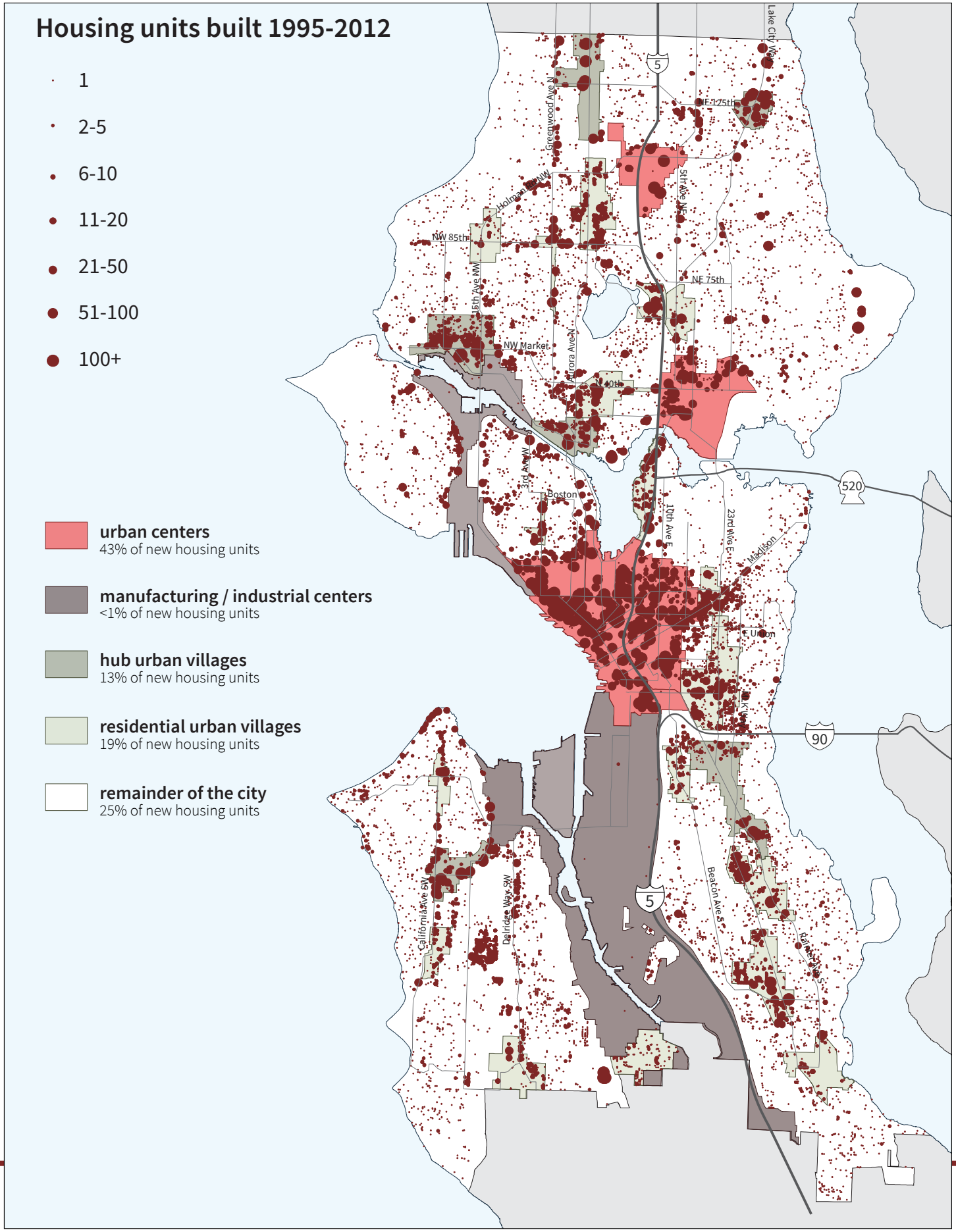
When Seattle completed the 2004 update, the Plan was revised and the growth estimates, based on state population forecasts, projected a slower rate of growth. The 2004 Plan estimated there would be 47,000 new households between 2005 and 2024.

Between 2005 and September 2013, more than 33,000 housing units have been built — more than two-thirds of the number of housing units expected to be built over the 20 years ending in 2024.

Housing units built 1995-2012






Housing units built 1995-2012
1
2-5
6-10
11-20
21-50
51-100
100+
urban centers
43% of new housing units
manufacturing / industrial centers
<1% of new housing units
hub urban villages
13% of new housing units
residential urban villages
19% of new housing units
remainder of the city
25% of new housing units
Lake City Way
NE 125th
Greenwood Ave N
5th Ave NE
Holman Rd NW
NW 85th
15th Ave NW
NE 75th
NW Market
Aurora Ave N
N 40th
3rd Ave W
Boston
10th Ave E
23rd Ave E
Madison
E Union
E Yesler Way
520
90
5
California Ave SW
Delridge Way SW
Beacon Ave S
Rainier Ave S

One-person households are common

Seattle households tend to be small. Over 40% of the city's households consist of only one person, which is a much higher rate than in King County or the U.S. The percentage of one-person households has remained about the same since 1990.

Housing in Seattle also tends to be smaller and have fewer bedrooms than the rest of King County, as illustrated in the chart below.

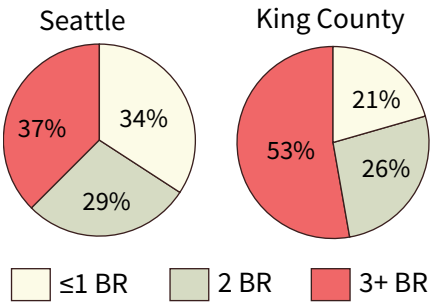
Affordable family-sized housing is scarce

Most housing with three or more bedrooms are in detached single family homes, which are rarely affordable for households at or below median income. Rental homes are generally more affordable, but few have three or more bedrooms, particularly in newer buildings, which are also generally more expensive.

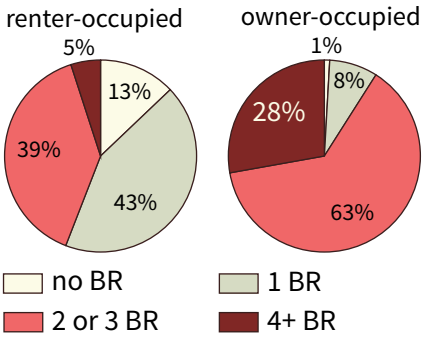
More homes are within multifamily buildings

Most of the new housing units built in Seattle over the past 20 years have been in multifamily buildings. There are more apartments and condominiums, many of which have retail at street level. There are also more townhouses and backyard cottages. Homes in multifamily buildings began to outnumber single-family detached homes sometime in the 1990s.

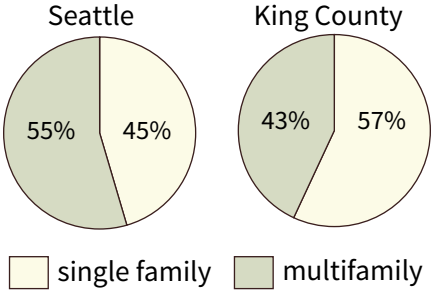
Number of bedrooms



Number of bedrooms by housing type



Type of building



More households rent than own

In 1990, approximately 52% of households in Seattle rented and 48% owned their homes. Although these proportions have fluctuated slightly over the years, the portion was the same in 2010. Households in urban centers are much more likely to be renters than owners, as shown in the chart below.

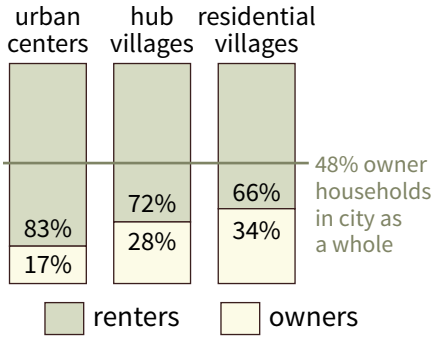
Homeownership rates vary by race and ethnicity

While homeownership rates increased slightly for White households from 2000 to 2010, they decreased significantly for Black/African American households. In 2010, more than 50% of White households owned their homes while the average across other races and ethnicities was 36%.

Households spend an increasing share of their income on housing

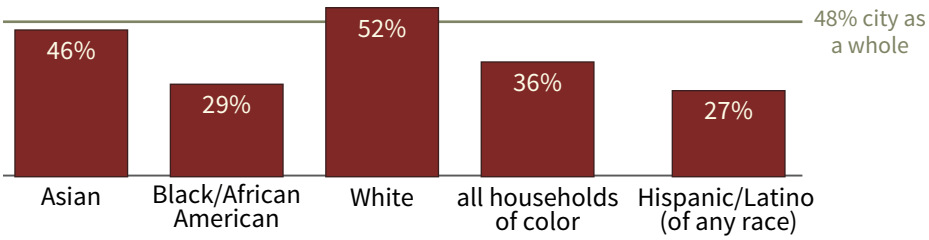
Households are considered "cost burdened" if they spend more than 30% of their income on housing. Today, more than 30% of owner and 45% of renter households are cost burdened. Almost 20% of all households and 50% of very low income households are severely cost burdened, which means they spend more than half of their income on housing.

Renter & owner households



2010 homeownership rates

by major racial category and Hispanic/Latino ethnicity



Where we work

In 2012, there were more than 480,000 jobs covered by unemployment insurance in Seattle, which accounts for approximately 85-90% of all jobs in the city. Almost half of the jobs in Seattle were located within the Center City—Downtown, Capitol Hill, First Hill, Uptown, and South Lake Union. Another 15% of jobs are in Seattle's manufacturing/industrial centers, with about an equal share in the remaining urban villages. There were an estimated 56,000 more jobs in Seattle in 2012 compared to 1995.

Job growth has been slower than expected

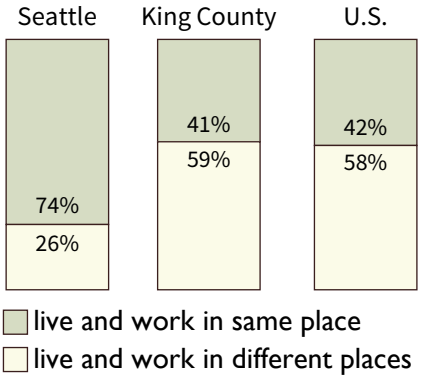
The 1994 Plan anticipated that the city would add 130,000 to 147,000 jobs between 1995 and 2014. Employment has fluctuated over the past 20 years reflecting broader economic trends. The number of jobs covered by employment insurance reached a high of 502,000 during the dot-com boom. As of 2012, the number of these jobs stood at 483,000, an increase of approximately 56,000 since the Plan was first adopted.

As the original Plan projected, over 60% of the job growth occurred in urban centers. Job growth has been stronger in the past few years as Seattle recovers from the Great Recession more quickly than many other cities.

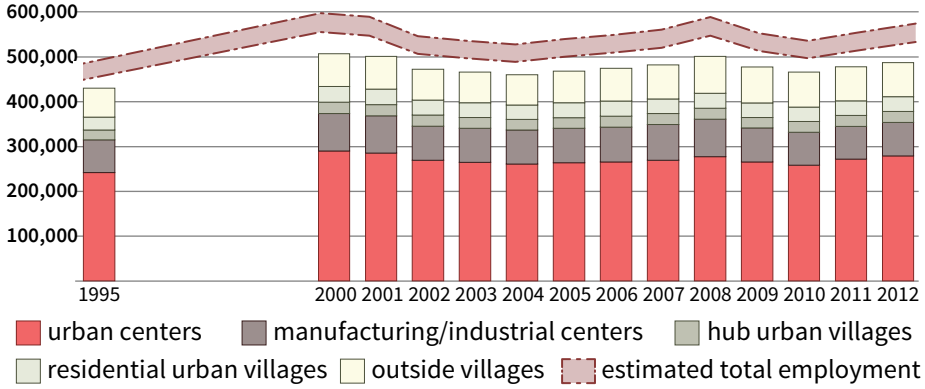
People who live in Seattle are more likely to work in Seattle

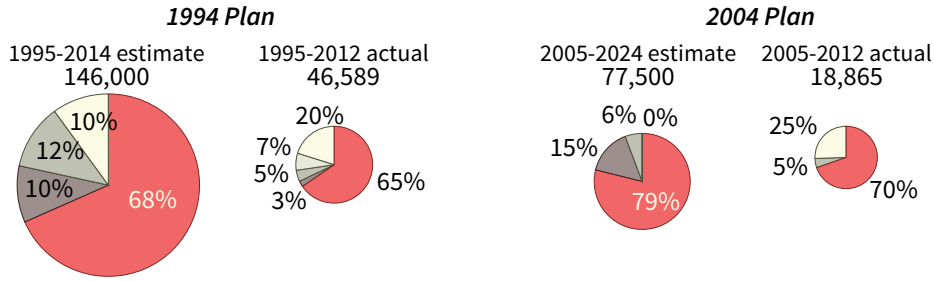
Almost three-quarters of people who live in Seattle also work here. In both King County and the nation as a whole, less than half of the people with jobs live and work in the same place.

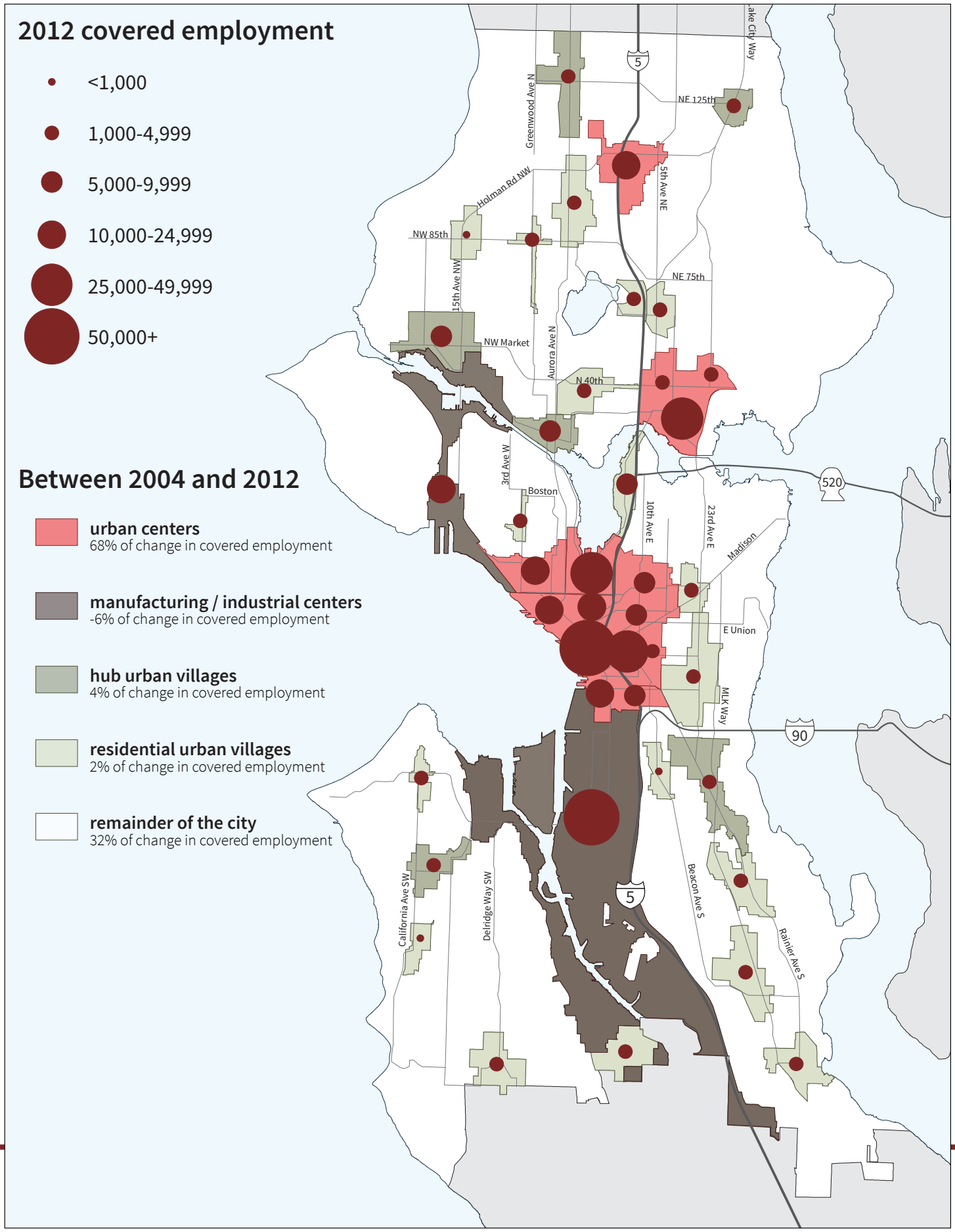
Workers by place of work



1995 2000-2012 covered employment






2012 covered employment
<1,000
1,000-4,999
5,000-9,999
10,000-24,999
25,000-49,999
50,000+
Between 2004 and 2012
urban centers
68% of change in covered employment
manufacturing / industrial centers
-6% of change in covered employment
hub urban villages
4% of change in covered employment
residential urban villages
2% of change in covered employment
remainder of the city
32% of change in covered employment
Greenwood Ave N
NE 125th
5th Ave NE
Holman Rd NW
NW 85th
15th Ave NW
NE 75th
NW Market
Aurora Ave N
N 40th
3rd Ave W
Boston
10th Ave E
23rd Ave E
Madison
E Union
MLK Way
520
90
5
California Ave SW
Delridge Way SW
Beacon Ave S
Rainier Ave S

The ratio of jobs to housing has decreased

One goal of growth management is to encourage the development of housing close to jobs. A balance can help reduce long commutes. The ratio of jobs to housing in Seattle and throughout the Central Puget Sound Region has been decreasing. King County is the only county in our region with a jobs-to-housing ratio above 1. The regional jobs-to-housing ratio decreased from 1.30 in 2000 to 1.15 in 2010.

There are more high-tech jobs, particularly in South Lake Union

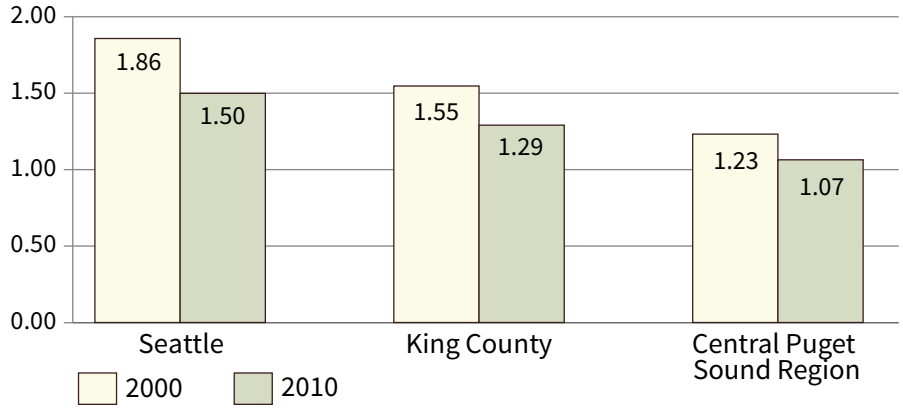
Since South Lake Union was designated as an urban center in 2004, the neighborhood has become a magnet for high-tech and biotech jobs with employers like Amazon and the University of Washington School of Medicine hiring thousands of employees, who also support a vibrant new restaurant and retail district.

Manufacturing and industrial centers are an important part of the economy

There were essentially the same number of jobs within our regionally designated Manufacturing and Industrial Centers in 2012 as in 1995, these jobs remain an important part of our economy and typically pay a living wage.

In 2012, a new Container Port element was adopted into the Plan, as required by a 2009 amendment to the GMA. This new element recognizes the important role Seattle's Port plays in the state economy—accounting for thousands of jobs, millions of dollars in local and state taxes, and billions of dollars in business revenue.

Ratio of jobs-to-housing in 2000 and 2010



Income has increased, but not for all households

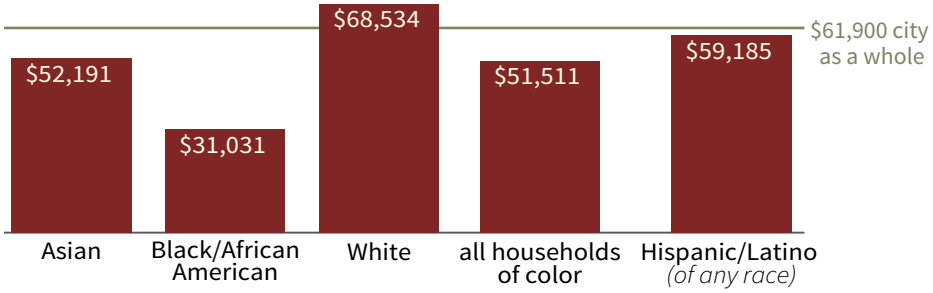
Median household income has increased from approximately $52,000 in 1989 to almost $62,000 in 2010 (adjusted for inflation). However, household income varies significantly by race and ethnicity. The median income for White households was almost $70,000 while the median income for Black/African American households was just $31,000.

People of color are more likely to be in poverty

Similar disparities in poverty rates also exist. People of color are much more likely to be in poverty than White people. Disparities are most stark for children: more than 40% of Black/African American children are in poverty compared to just 4% of White children.

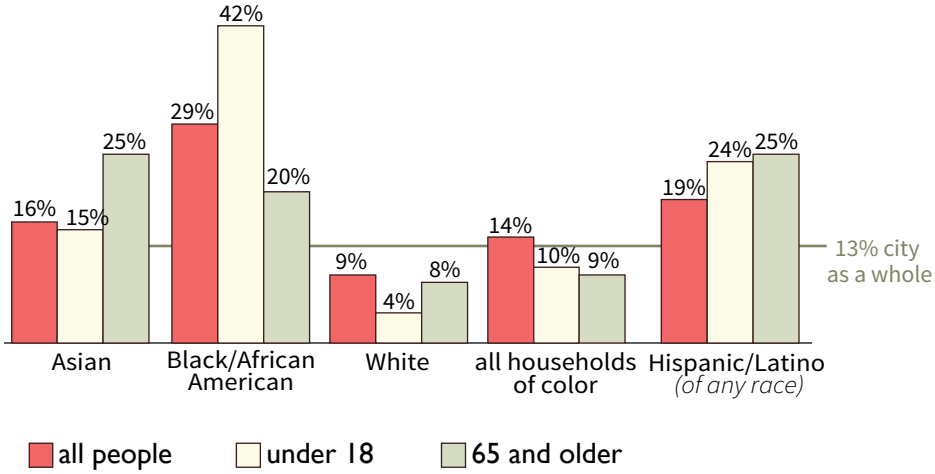
2010 median income

by major racial category and Hispanic/Latino ethnicity



2010 poverty rates

by major racial category and Hispanic/Latino ethnicity



How we get around

Coordinating population growth and transit service is fundamental to comprehensive planning. As a result, people in Seattle are increasingly walking, biking, and taking transit to travel in the city. Based on 2012 estimates, just over half commuted to work by means other than driving alone. The following pages describe recent investments in transit service and outline some of the major plans and policies that help make it easier for people to walk, bike, and ride transit.

Fewer people drive to work alone

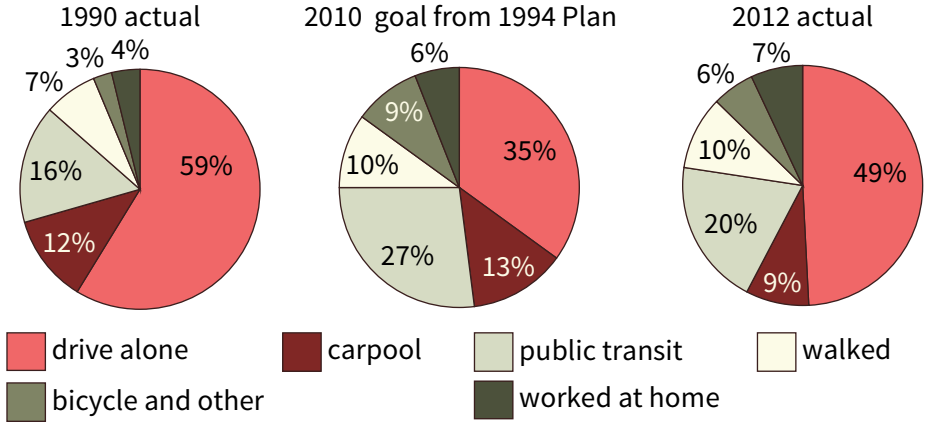
Workers in Seattle are less likely to drive alone and more likely to walk or bike than workers in the U.S. or King County. Men are twice as likely to be bike commuters as women, though only 4% of people in Seattle commute by bike. 20% ride transit, 10% walk, 9% carpool, 7% work at home, and less than 2% use other means like motorcycles, scooters, and taxis.

The proportion of Seattle residents who commute to work by driving alone to work has decreased since 1990, but not as quickly as envisioned by the goals of the 1994 Plan. The initial goal was that only 35% of workers would drive to work alone by 2010. In 2004, the goal for 2010 was revised such that 42% of workers would drive to work alone. 2012 was the first year that the proportion of workers driving alone was under 50%.

Where people live influences their commute...

People who work downtown are much less likely to drive alone (34%) and more likely to take transit (43%). In contrast, people who live in southwest Seattle are more likely to drive alone (64%) and less likely to take transit (14%). Many people who work downtown live outside Seattle, and they are less likely to walk or bike than workers who live in Seattle.

how Seattle residents commute to work



And how many cars they own

Almost 50% of downtown households do not have a car compared with households in some other districts, where fewer than 10% of households do not have cars.

Existing and planned transit service

light rail: *existing service from dowtown Seattle to SeaTac Airport; service to Capitol Hill and the University of Washington will begin in 2016; service to Northgate and Redmond should begin in 2021*
17 stops; 2 routes
5 minute peak headways

other rapid transit: *existing South Lake Union Streetcar and RapidRide service from downtown Seattle to Ballard, Shoreline, and West Seattle; additional rapid transit planned to Ballard, the University District, and along Madison*
100+ stops; 7 routes
6-12 minute peak headways

commuter rail: *one route north to Everett and one south to Lakewood*
3 stops; 2 routes
30 minute peak headways

additional frequent transit service
buses with 15 minute headways

ferries & water taxies: *existing ferry service from downtown Seattle to Bainbridge Island and Bremerton and Fauntleroy to Vashon Island and Southworth; existing water taxies from downtown Seattle to West Seattle and Vashon Island*
5 stops; 5 routes
variable headways

urban centers

manufacturing / industrial centers

hub urban villages

residential urban villages

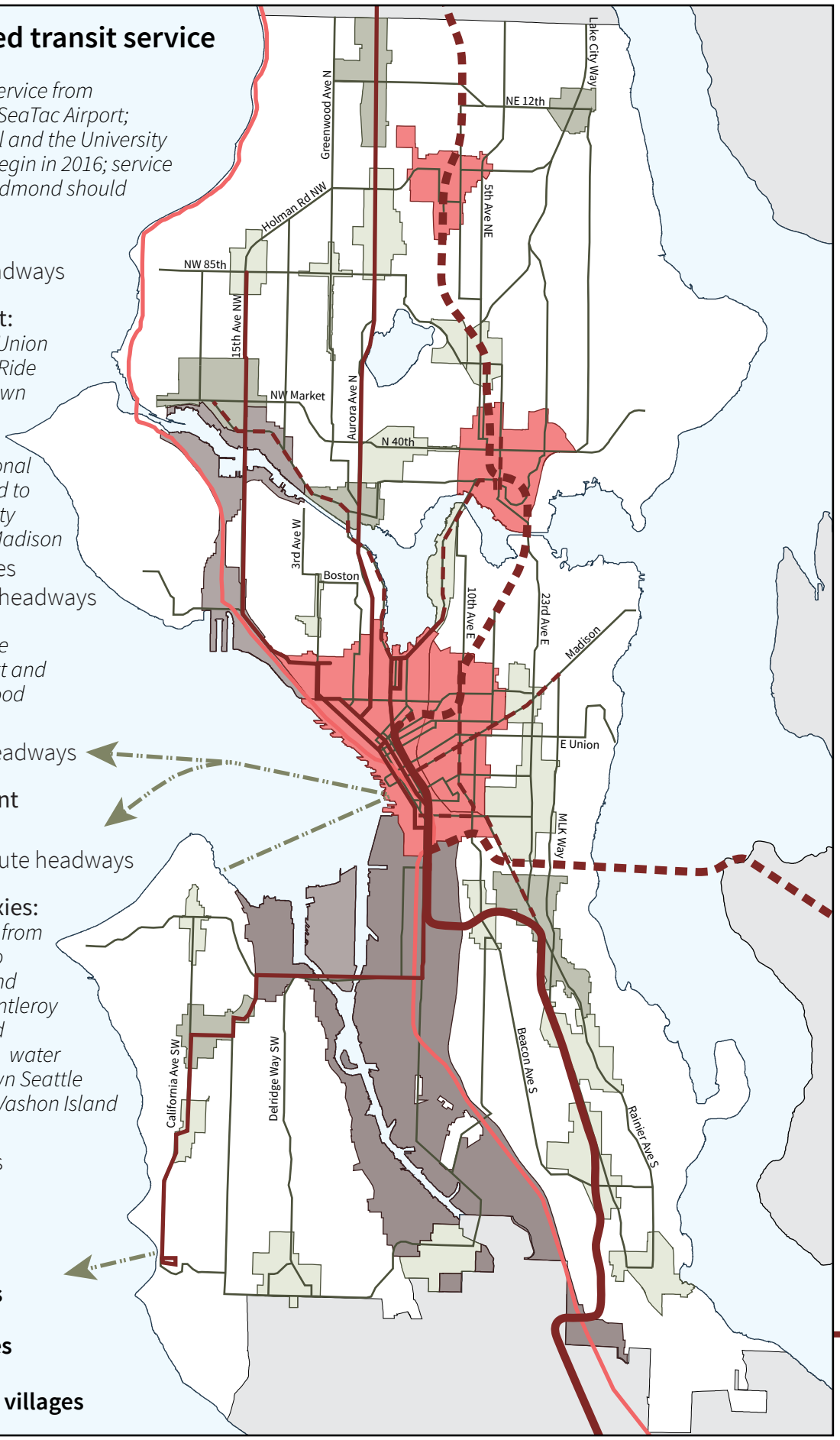


Photo by Keith Brofsky

More transportation options

Regional light rail service began from Downtown Seattle to the airport in 2009. Construction is underway for stations in Capitol Hill and the University of Washington with service expected to begin in 2016. Service to Northgate and Redmond is scheduled to begin in 2021. The existing light rail line and commuter rail serve approximately 40,000 riders per day.

King County Metro transit boardings in Seattle grew approximately 22% between 2001 and 2013, even though the number of bus service hours increased by only about 6% in this time period.

"Complete streets"

In 2007, the City adopted a "complete streets" ordinance that balances the needs of all people who use our streets—whether walking, biking, driving, or transporting freight—rather than prioritizing automobiles. The policy evaluates our streets as a network and allows for different types of streets to accommodate different modes of travel in different ways.

This policy is implemented through our plans for transit, pedestrians, and bicycles and also considers the goals and policies within the Plan.

Transit master plan

After the Plan was initially adopted, the City established the Urban Village Transit Network that directed the majority of transit investments toward our urban centers and villages. In 2012, the City adopted a new Transit Master Plan (TMP) that establishes a long-range vision for Seattle's high-capacity transit network to make it easier for people to use transit for trips between urban villages and to locations outside of Seattle.

The TMP also establishes performance standards for transit service. Two of the priority corridors that are currently being analyzed are the Center City Connector, and the Ballard-to-Downtown corridor.

Pedestrian master plan

The Pedestrian Master Plan (PMP) was adopted in 2009 with the intention of making Seattle the most walkable city in the country. It included a thorough analysis of the state of the pedestrian environment, including maps of existing conditions such as sidewalk condition, transit stops, arterial types, and demographics. The PMP identified high-priority areas by creating a potential pedestrian demand map based on these existing conditions, including corridor function, and social equity factors that consider where people have the greatest needs.

Bicycle master plan

In 2007 the City adopted our first Bicycle Master Plan (BMP), which is currently being updated. This plan aims to make it easier and safer for everyone to ride bicycles. Since the first BMP was adopted, more than 100 miles of bike lanes and sharrows have been included on our streets, cycle-tracks are being built downtown and on Capitol Hill, more than 2,000 bicycle parking spaces have been built, and new buildings are required to have more bike parking too.

The updated plan will identify potential locations for new facilities including cycle tracks and neighborhood greenways as well as areas of the greatest need and highest priority for bicycle facilities.

Upcoming freight master plan

Although a freight master plan has yet to be developed, the Freight Mobility Program coordinates improvements to freight mobility and safety with the other modal plans. Work to develop a freight master plan will begin in 2014.

Investing in our communities

The Plan has directed significant investments to urban centers and villages and established many programs aimed at maintaining a high quality of life for Seattle's residents. Levies were passed for affordable housing, libraries, community centers, and parks. The Plan helps guide investments in our neighborhood business districts, updates our codes and regulations, and also sparked community-based planning that created neighborhood plans, design guidelines, urban design frameworks, and streetscape concept plans.

Building more affordable housing...

The City funds almost 12,000 apartments that are affordable to households including seniors, families with children, and formerly homeless people. Seattle residents first approved funding for these homes through a levy that was passed by voters in 1981. The levy was most recently renewed in 2009 and will provide $145million over seven years to preserve or produce almost 2,000 affordable housing units and to assist almost 3,500 households.

The Office of Housing uses funds from the levy to "create and preserve affordable rental housing, assist first-time homebuyers to purchase a home, and provide rental assistance to prevent homelessness."

More libraries

A $290.7 million "Libraries for All" levy, approved by Seattle voters in 1998, built four new libraries in Delridge, Chinatown/International District, Northgate, and South Park. Libraries in 22 other neighborhoods were replaced or renovated.

The Central Library was also transformed into an iconic building with more than 400 free public computers and numerous programs for people of all ages and abilities.

In 2012 voters approved a new $123 million levy that continues support for Seattle's libraries with more service hours, books and electronic materials, and improvements to computers and on-line services.

More community centers

In 1999, voters approved a renewal of the 1991 Seattle Center and Community Centers Levy. Combined, the levies created nine new community centers and renovated or expanded five more throughout the city. These improvements provide more program space, offer venues for community gatherings and festivals, and make the structures physically accessible to all users.

The Rainier Beach Community Center and Pool was recently opened in September 2013. The City's partnership with community organizations to design the new building and provide services is an example of how goals and policies from the Plan are being implemented in specific neighborhoods.

More parks

Seattle has more than 465 parks on over 6,200 acres of land. In 2000, the Pro Parks levy invested almost $200 million into more than 100 projects around the city, like lidding the reservoir at Cal Anderson Park in Capitol Hill, redesigning Bergen Place Park in Ballard, a new park in Morgan Junction, and Albert Davis Park at the renovated library in Lake City.

In 2008, the six-year, $146 million Parks and Green Spaces levy was approved and continues to fund the acquisition and development of parks throughout Seattle. The Parks Legacy Plan is currently being developed to establish a strategic plan for the future of Seattle's parks.

Strengthening neighborhoods

Seattle has a long history of planning for neighborhoods dating back to our city's early history. In the 1990s, 38 neighborhood plans were developed to guide investments in the urban villages that were identified in the Plan. Since that time, neighborhood planning has continued through development of urban design guidelines, streetscape concept plans, and other plan documents that help shape new development and focus attention on neighborhood priorities.

The Neighborhood Matching Fund has supported more than 4,000 projects with more than $49 million since the program began in 1988. Many of these projects were identified in neighborhood plans—from small grants to replace neighborhood watch signs to major renovations of parks and community art.

Neighborhood plans also called for more pedestrian friendly and active streets. The City's Land Use Code has been amended multiple times over the past 20 years to encourage more mixed-use buildings and more active streetfronts, rather than surface parking lots. Neighborhood-specific design guidelines have also been adopted, which inform our design review process and allow people to help shape the design of large new buildings in their neighborhoods.

Photo of the Ballard Farmers Market by TSparks

Photo of a University District street fair by javacolleen

Improving business districts

Since the Only in Seattle Initiative (OIS) began in 2010, more than $3.8 million has been invested in 19 business districts. OIS has helped Pioneer Square and the University District by strengthening partnerships between the City, business groups, and other community members in order to create more vibrant neighborhoods and more successful businesses.

OIS also supports Business Improvement Areas at Broadway, the Chinatown/International District, Columbia City, and the West Seattle Junction.

Creating more healthy and equitable communities

Over the past 20 years, more and more research shows that where people live can impact their health in a variety of ways, from life expectancy to rates of diabetes and obesity. It is also correlated with educational attainment, employment status, income, and poverty rates.

In recent years, numerous government agencies and other organizations have established a variety of indicators and metrics that attempt to help measure equity and access to community assets such as Opportunity Mapping from the Kirwan Institute, Walkscore, and the Housing + Transportation Affordability Index. Seattle is currently participating in the pilot STAR Communities program, which will include an assessment of eight Seattle neighborhoods. Another indicator program, the Healthy Living Assessment, has been used to evaluate equity as part of recent planning efforts in the Rainier Valley.

Eliminating racial disparities

Seattle's Race and Social Justice Initiative began in 2006 to recognize that race-based disparities persist—in education, access to housing and employment. Institutionalized racism continues to shape public policy, often unintentionally. Using a variety of tools that build on the work of the civil rights movement, City staff work with other individuals and organizations to advance equity in City policy and actions.

Photo of Bike Works in Columbia City by Jeff Younstrom

More inclusive outreach and engagement

One aspect of advancing equity relies on creating more inclusive outreach and engagement programs for all aspects of City planning and programming. In 2008, the Department of Neighborhoods created the Planning Outreach and Engagement Liaison (POEL) program that uses trusted advocates to engage with traditionally underrepresented communities.

In 2009, outreach and engagement efforts related to neighborhood planning used POELs and on-line tools to greatly increase participation. These efforts earned the Governor's Smart Communities Award.

Increasing access to healthy food

Access to healthy food is essential for healthy communities. Since the Plan was adopted, numerous farmers markets have opened in neighborhoods throughout the city; more P-patches have been started; codes and regulations have been updated to encourage more urban agriculture, including backyard chickens and goats. Other urban farming opportunities, such as the Beacon Hill Food Forest, have been created. Community-supported agriculture programs have also flourished and strengthen a key tenant of the State's Growth Management Act—preserving our region's farms.

In 2012, the Seattle Food Action Plan was adopted and provides more guidance on how to continue to improve access to healthy food.

Preserving single family neighborhoods

Single-family zones have experienced very little growth over the past few decades. Changes to the Land Use Code now provide another option for affordable housing in areas that retain their single-family character: backyard cottages. Backyard cottages can be built in limited circumstances. Extensive polling tells us that most neighbors of cottages have relatively positive opinions about the new buildings in their neighborhoods.

The natural environment

Reducing impacts on the environment is fundamental to the Growth Management Act and Seattle's Comprehensive Plan. While some aspects of resource conservation have been underway for decades, many new plans and programs help reduce our impact on local waterways and habitats as well as global climate change.

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions

Greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) contribute to global climate change, which leads to rising sea levels and more extreme weather—larger, more frequent storms, increased wildfires, and more extreme droughts. In 2005, Seattle committed the City to meeting the Kyoto Protocol of a 7% reduction in GHG emissions from 1990 levels by 2012 and encouraged other U.S. cities to do the same. More than 1,000 jurisdictions have joined Seattle in this commitment.

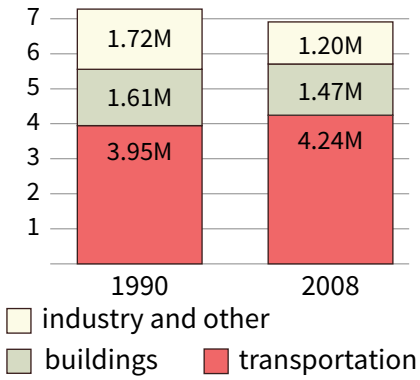
Seattle updated its Climate Action Plan in 2013. The current goal is to reach zero net GHG emissions by 2050.

Transportation accounts for the largest source of GHG emissions in Seattle and is the only sector where emissions increased from 1990 to 2008. Emissions in this sector increased by 7% while emissions from buildings decreased by 9% and from industry and other sources by 30%.

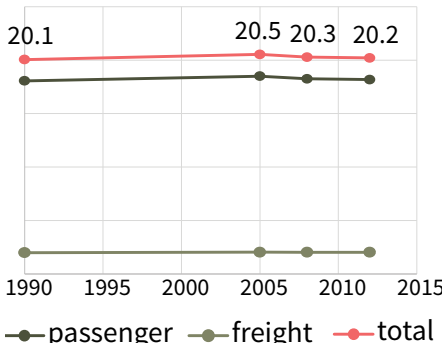
Driving cars and trucks accounted for almost 40% of all GHG emissions generated in Seattle. Despite increasing fuel efficiency, per capita vehicle miles traveled has remained almost the same since 1990, at just over 20 vehicle miles per person, per day.

In order to meet our GHG goals, the climate action plan recommends growth in compact neighborhoods that are well connected by transit and complete streets that make it easy for people to walk, bike, and ride transit to accomplish most daily tasks.

Seattle's annual GHG emissions by major sector in millions of metric tons

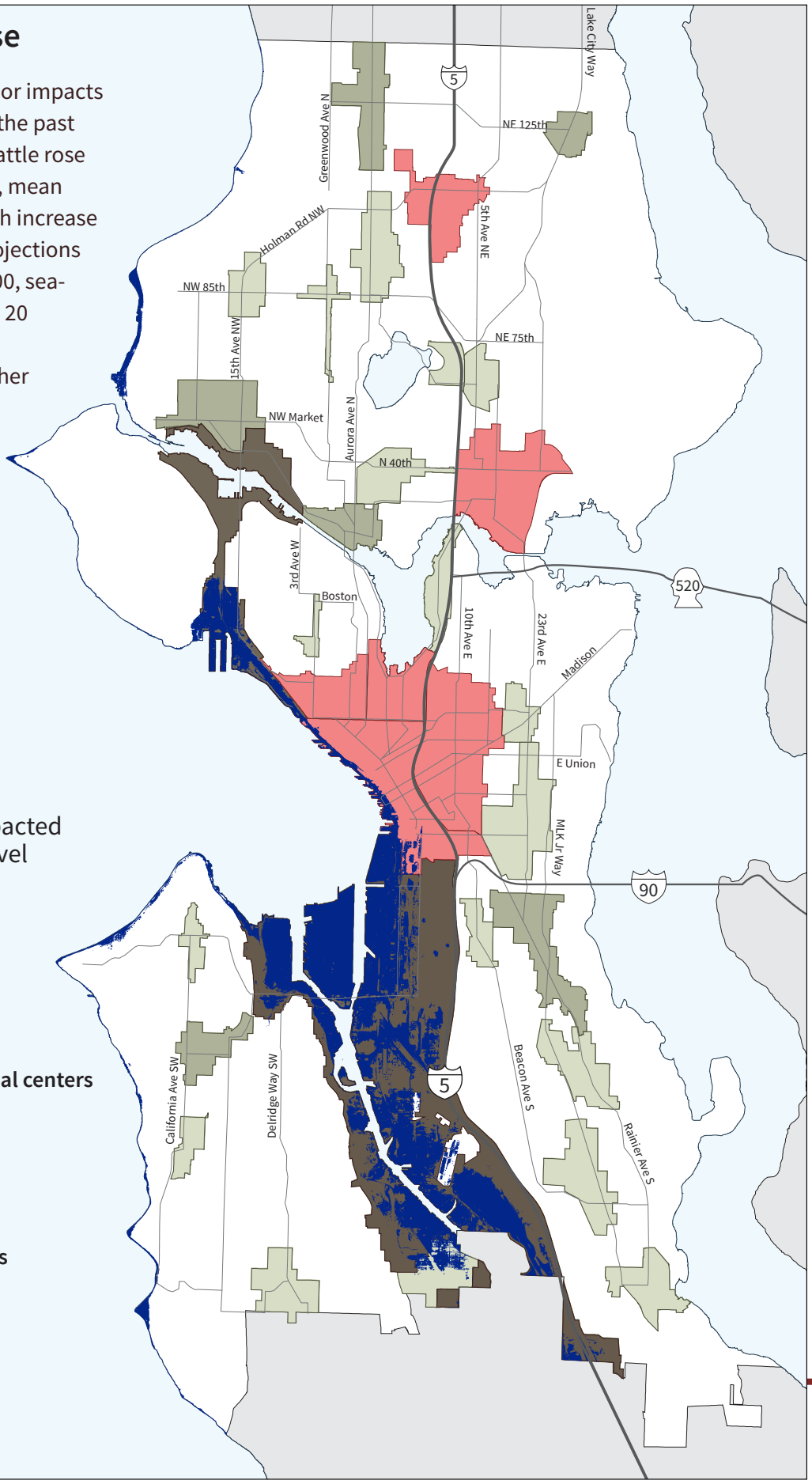


Average daily vehicle miles traveled per person in Seattle



Projected sea-level rise

Rising sea-level is one of the major impacts of our changing climate. During the past century, the sea level around Seattle rose approximately 6 inches. By 2050, mean projections are for another 7-inch increase in sea-level while the highest projections are for a 19-inch increase. By 2100, sea-level is expected to rise between 20 and 56 inches. Seattle's Office of Sustainability is working with other City departments to prepare for the various impacts of global climate change, including rising sea levels. Find out more at http://www.seattle.gov/environment/prepare.htm



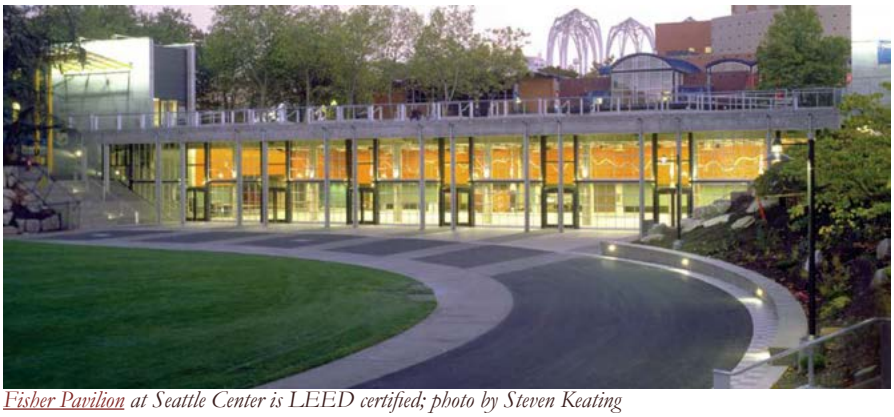
areas potentially impacted by a 17" rise in sea level

urban centers

manufacturing / industrial centers

hub urban villages

residential urban villages



Fisher Pavilion at Seattle Center is LEED certified; photo by Steven Keating

Green Factor elements along the sidewalk at the Joule Apartments

Using less electricity

Conservation has been an important consideration for Seattle City Light for decades. After a major drought in 1977 that affected its hydropower sources, the utility began focusing on programs that reduce electricity consumption, including rebates on energy-efficient products and credits for recycling old appliances. Demand from new residents and businesses will mostly be met through conservation measures.

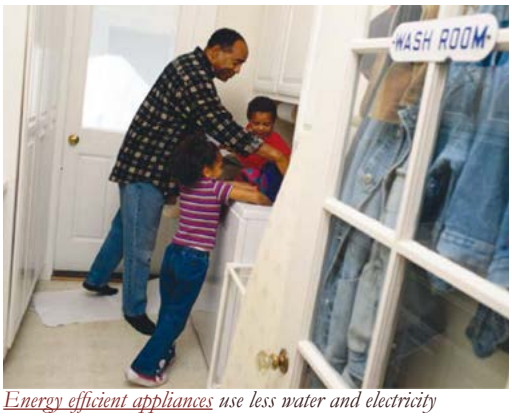
Most of Seattle's electricity comes from hydroelectric dams, which are not a significant source of GHG emissions. Starting in 2005, City Light began purchasing GHG emission offsets to become the first carbon neutral public electricity utility in the country.

Building better landscapes

In addition to updating codes for buildings, the Seattle Green Factor requires new development to provide landscaping that improves the environment in multiple ways. Trees and other plants help reduce stormwater runoff and provide other environmental benefits as well as improve neighborhood appearance. Seattle Green Factor features include street trees, rain gardens, green roofs, and food gardens.

Adopting green codes and regulations

Buildings also account for a significant source of GHG emissions—both in how the materials used for their construction and the amount of energy used. In 2000, the City began requiring that all new municipal buildings meet green building standards. The next year, an incentive program was established for private buildings to meet Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards, a third party verification system of green buildings. Energy-efficient buildings are now the norm rather than the exception, in part because building codes are regularly updated to encourage increased energy efficiency.



Energy efficient appliances use less water and electricity

photo by Seattle Public Utilities

Reducing water consumption

Although Seattle's population has steadily increased since 1990, total water consumption has declined. In 2000, Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) established a partnership to meet water demand through conservation, reducing per capita consumption by 10% over ten years. By 2010, regional water consumption was at its lowest level in 50 years.

There are four main ways SPU has been able to decrease water consumption: conservation programs, operational improvements, more efficient building codes and appliance standards, and water rates that discourage waste.

Preserving trees

Since the last Plan update, the City has taken steps to improve the health of the urban forest, with canopy analyses, a city-wide Urban Forestry Stewardship Plan, and updated regulations. Tree canopy cover appears to have increased slightly between 2003 and 2007 from 22.5% to 22.9%. However, lack of long-term data and the relative newness of assessment technologies makes it difficult to know if we are on track toward meeting our goal of increasing canopy cover to 30% by 2037.

Recycling

Solid waste accounts for a small portion of Seattle's total greenhouse gas emissions (GHG). Seattle is on track to have a 60% recycling rate by 2015; the rate was 55.7% in 2012. There has been a 28% reduction in the amount of garbage sent to landfills since 2007. GHG from waste have increased slightly since 1990, in large part because the City now sends solid waste to a landfill in eastern Oregon rather than the King County Cedar Hills landfill, which has been closed.

In addition to recycling, Seattle now has composting programs for food and yard waste, which accounts for more than one-third of residential garbage. Cedar Grove transforms the waste into compost used by home gardeners and farmers to grow more food.

Next Steps

This report marks the beginning of a new phase of updating the City's Comprehensive Plan. By describing changes that have occurred over the past 20 years and the current status of some key aspects of the urban environment, it provides a sense of where we are as we face the challenges that remain.

Early in 2014, the City will begin work on an environmental impact statement that will examine alternative ways of distributing the expected growth across the city. During that process, the City will ask the public for their thoughts on those alternatives, as well as on environmental factors that should be considered.

Throughout 2014 the City will also prepare a draft version of the updated Plan for public review. The City Council will review a final version of the Plan in early 2015 in order to meet the GMA deadline of June 2015 for adoption of the revised Plan.

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A few notes about the data and terms used in this report

Growth Projections

Every five years, the state provides forecasts of population growth for each county. In King County, the population forecast is converted to housing units because local governments can more reliably track them on a frequent basis. In 2010, the King County Growth Management Planning Council, a group of elected officials representing all the jurisdictions in the county, approved 25-year housing growth estimates for all jurisdictions in the county. For Seattle, the 25-year estimate was 86,000 housing units and 146,700 jobs. Because the City's Comprehensive Plan covers a 20-year period, we calculated a 20-year estimate of 70,000 housing units and 115,000 jobs.

Employment

The report includes jobs data that represents "covered" rather than total employment. As described by the Washington State Employment Security Department "Covered Employment" refers to positions covered by the Washington Unemployment Insurance Act. The Act exempts the self-employed, proprietors and corporate officers, military personnel, and railroad workers, so those categories are not included in the dataset. Covered Employment accounts for approximately 85-90% of all employment.

U.S. Census Bureau Data

We have tried to use the most current and reliable data available for this report. Demographic data (e.g., income, household size, and travel-to-work) comes from the American Community Survey (ACS). It uses relatively small sample sizes collected over one to five-year periods. The result is a higher margin of error than with decennial Census data. Generally, in this report, data for the year 2011 was taken from the ACS.

We also use terms from the Census and American Community Survey to describe race and ethnicity, which have changed over time. The 2000 and 2010 Census track Hispanic/Latino ethnicity as separate categories. We typically combine the two and illustrate the major racial categories for people who identify as one race alone and not of Hispanic/Latino ethnicity and people who identify as Hispanic/Latino ethnicity of any race. We recognize this is imperfect, but have found it to be an acceptable compromise for this type of report, which attempts to present a very broad overview of racial disparities.

The terms households and housing units are sometimes used interchangeably when talking very generally about where people live, but the specific meanings have important distinctions. Households, the individuals or groups of people who live within a single home, have characteristics that are tracked by the Census Bureau and reported through the American Community Survey. Seattle's Department of Planning and Development provides permits for new housing units, so we have specific data about where individual units have been constructed, as mentioned above.

City of Seattle Department of Planning and Development
2035.seattle.gov
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