



THE GOVERNANCE OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION IN THURSTON COUNTY May 20, 2026

The following is a historical perspective on the governance of public transportation in Thurston County, as background for the May 20, 2026, Interjurisdictional Conference.

Public transportation existed in Thurston County since the late 1800's, when streetcars connected downtown Olympia with Tumwater, West Olympia and the eastside. Transit service was provided by the Olympia Traction Company, and later, after buses replaced streetcars, by the Olympia Transit Company. In the late 1960's, the private operator announced its intention to discontinue service unless local government was willing to help subsidize the operation.

In 1969, the leaders of the cities of Olympia, Lacey, and Tumwater decided local bus service was of sufficient value to warrant public assistance. The three cities joined together under the Interlocal Cooperation Act and formed the Intercity Transit Commission to oversee the taxpayer subsidized bus service.

The Intercity Transit Commission was comprised of seven members – one elected official and one citizen representative from each of the three cities, plus one citizen representative chosen at-large by the Commission. The Intercity Transit Commission governed public transit for twelve years, first overseeing the private operator, and after 1972, actually operating the bus service itself.

In the mid 1970's, the state legislature passed legislation allowing the formation of Public Transportation Benefit Area (PTBA) Authorities to provide transit services to areas of the state. Under this legislation, the PTBAs were given access to Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (MVET) as a funding source that would match a local sales tax. The cities and Thurston County decided in 1980 to form the Thurston County Public Transportation Benefit Area Authority. Voters approved the sales tax of 0.3% in the fall of 1980. On January 1, 1981, Intercity Transit began operation as a PTBA.

The PTBA governing board was originally comprised of four members – one elected official from each of the three cities and one County Commissioner. The original PTBA legislation allowed only elected officials to serve. The Intercity Transit Authority proposed legislation allowing those PTBAs that had formerly had community (citizen) board members to continue having them. This legislation passed in 1983. The Intercity Transit Authority appointed three members selected at large from the public to serve three-year staggered terms. In 1987, this composition and the selection process were codified in the Authority bylaws.

In May 1992, through a vote of the citizens of Thurston County not included in the original PTBA, service was expanded county-wide. On August 3, 1993, an interjurisdictional conference

was held to establish the new board composition which expanded the board to nine members (six elected officials and three community (citizen) representatives. Membership was expanded to give south county jurisdictions a shared seat on the board.

Thurston County Commissioner	(1)
City of Olympia Councilmember	(1)
City of Lacey Councilmember	(1)
City of Tumwater Councilmember	(1)
City of Yelm Councilmember	(1)
Cities of Tenino, Bucoda & Rainier	(1)
Community Representatives	(3)
TOTAL	9

In November 1999, the voters of the State of Washington passed Initiative 695 which eliminated Motor Vehicle Sales Tax, which comprised 42% of the operating revenues for Intercity Transit. Intercity Transit asked the County Commissioners to consider calling a Transportation Improvement Conference to consider the boundaries of the PTBA. A public hearing was scheduled for March 28, 2002. A continuation of the conference was held April 4, 2002, at which time the members of the Public Transportation Improvement Conference approved a reduction in the boundaries of the Public Transportation Benefit Area.

An interjurisdictional meeting was held April 30, 2002, to review the nine-member board composition of the governing body. The jurisdictional representatives approved a new eight-member composition for the governing body of Intercity Transit. At the April 5, 2010, Interjurisdictional Meeting, the jurisdictions approved the same structure as in 2002.

In 2010, the state Legislature amended RCW 36.57A.050 to add a nonvoting labor representative to the governing bodies of public transportation areas and certain other entities. The current composition includes the addition of a Labor Representative position:

Thurston County Commissioner	(1)
City of Olympia Councilmember	(1)
City of Lacey Councilmember	(1)
City of Tumwater Councilmember	(1)
City of Yelm Councilmember	(1)
Community Representatives	(3)
Labor Representative	(1)
TOTAL	9