

RGS State of the Region Report

Executive Summary



The Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) is an agreement, developed and approved by the Regional Board and the member municipalities in partnership, on region-wide goals and priority actions. Its purpose, as established through the guiding provincial legislation, is to *promote human settlement that is socially, economically and environmentally healthy and makes efficient use of public facilities and services, land and other resources.*

The RGS serves to facilitate the coordination and cooperation among the local jurisdictions within the Capital Region on issues of shared interest and concern.

At the time the RGS was adopted in 2003, the regional population was 318,000 and was projected to increase by 90,000 people to 408,000 by 2026. While the projected growth rate is modest, the form this growth takes over time can affect the overall quality of life including traffic congestion, land consumption and housing affordability.

The provincial legislation requires the regional district to develop a program for monitoring the progress of the Regional Growth Strategy. In addition to the annual progress reports, the RGS monitoring program calls for the development of a more comprehensive report, the *RGS State of the Region*, to be produced every five years. This full report will be released in August 2008 and will include detailed indicators, maps, and interpretive information on the RGS data.

The Regional Growth Strategy is implemented through a number of means. Most significant is the Regional Context Statement which forms part of a member municipality's Official Community Plan (OCP), and indicates how local planning will work toward the provisions of the Regional Growth Strategy. While the RGS is not binding on a municipality, the Regional Context Statement is. Other implementation mechanisms include: implementation agreements, protocol agreements, CRD programs and initiatives (e.g. the Housing Trust Fund), inter-jurisdictional projects, planning policies and zoning bylaws and development permits.

The RGS contains eight strategic initiatives which provide the organizational structure for the monitoring program. They include:

1. Keep urban settlement compact
2. Protect the integrity of rural communities
3. Protect regional green/blue spaces
4. Manage natural resources and the environment sustainably
5. Build more complete communities
6. Improve housing affordability
7. Increase transportation choice
8. Strengthen the regional economy



SUMMARY OF INDICATORS

1. Keep Urban Settlement Compact

A key objective of the RGS is to keep urban areas compact and largely contained within a Regional Urban Containment and Servicing Policy Area (RUCSPA). To accomplish this, the Strategy promotes an urban structure pattern comprised of mixed-used centres, transit-oriented corridors, and compact form with a range of housing options within the boundary, reinforced by rural development, resource lands, regional parks, and protected areas beyond the urban boundary.

The RGS establishes a target for net new dwelling units built between 2001 and 2006 within the City of Victoria of 15%. The City has remained above this target since the baseline year in 2001. In 2006, the City had 24% of the new dwelling units. This indicates that the construction of significant numbers of new dwelling units are contributing to a more compact urban form, and making efficient use of infrastructure, facilities and services, reducing automobile dependency.

2. Protect the Integrity of Rural Communities

This section of the RGS is concerned with protecting the character and quality of rural communities. It does this by designating for protection the region's natural assets, including parks, ecologically sensitive areas, wildlife habitat areas, forests, farmlands and watersheds identified in the Regional Green/Blue Spaces Strategy as the region's "green infrastructure". The RGS includes two regional land use policy areas which are to be reflected in municipal OCPs: Capital Green Lands Policy Area, and Renewable Resource Lands Policy Area. The RGS includes direction to local governments and the Province to take the necessary steps to protect lands within the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) and the Forest Land Reserve (FLR).

The ALR has been continually decreasing since it was set in place in 1972. Nearly 1,500 hectares have been excluded in the 36 years the ALR has existed, succumbing to pressures of urban development. Since the baseline year in 2001, 281 hectares were removed, the largest losses taking place between 2001–2004. The FLR was abolished by the Province in 2003. Since that time the Province has approved the removal of 28,000 hectares of forest land from the designated renewable resource land area in the Juan de Fuca Electoral Area.

3. Protect Regional Green and Blue Space

The RGS supports the protection of the region's landscape character, ecological heritage and biodiversity through such means as park planning and trail development, parkland acquisition, and municipal development permit areas. In addition to the Capital Green Lands Policy Area, the RGS includes an Unprotected Green Space Policy Area, to be reflected in municipal OCPs. An important element within the RGS is the Regional Green/Blue Spaces Strategy which includes a commitment to protect the "Sea-to-Sea" green/blue belt running from Saanich Inlet south to the Juan de Fuca Strait, as well as an integrated system of parks and trails throughout the region.

In 2007, the CRD Regional Parks acquired a 932 hectare parcel near the Sooke Potholes as part of the Sea-to-Sea Green/Blue Belt (SSGGB). This has brought the total cumulative (Regional, Provincial and Federal Parks) parkland in the Growth Management Planning Area (GMPA) to just over 16,000 hectares. The Unprotected Greenspace Policy Area covers approximately 7,800 hectares, yet only 1% of the cumulative percentage has been acquired as parkland since the baseline year in 2001. Approximately 80 hectares were added between 2001 and 2005.

4. Manage Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability

This section of the RGS includes direction on linking sustainability principles with land and resource management. It also establishes a commitment to monitor air quality, resource consumption, waste production, environmental contaminants and energy efficiency as part of the RGS monitoring program.

Greenhouse gas emissions		Per Capita Daily Disposal of Solid Waste	
1995	1.72 million tonnes	2005	448 kg/year/person
2004	1.50 million tonnes	2006	446 kg/year/person

Total Annual Water Demand	
2004	58,818,000 m ³
2005	56,544,000 m ³
2006	57,788,000 m ³

5. Build Complete Communities

This section of the RGS establishes criteria for the development of complete communities. These include proximity to major centres, to commercial and neighbourhood centres and to transit, with a balance of jobs and population to provide options for people to live, work and play without having to commute long distances.

The job-to-population ratio in the West Shore saw minimal change from 2001 to 2006. While the percentage of labour force living and working in the same subregion increased substantially in the West Shore, shifting from 30% in 2001 to 49% in 2006, the Peninsula decreased from 50% in 2001 to 32% in 2006.



6. Improve Housing Affordability

The RGS provided direction for the creation of the Regional Housing Affordability Strategy (RHAS) which was adopted by the Board in 2007. In order to implement the recommendations of the RHAS, the Board approved the formation of the Housing Secretariat. The Board also supports affordability through the work of the Capital Regional Housing Corporation, and supports the efforts of the Committee to End Homelessness.

The average price of a starter home in the Victoria Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) more than doubled between 2000 and 2006, increasing to \$554,000. The required income to buy the average starter home rose by 42% over the same time period while the actual average household income rose only 22%. The affordability gap is now \$75,000, the largest difference since recording began in 2001.

Rental Vacancy in the Victoria CMA continues to be an issue, with the apartment vacancy rate at just 0.5%. The number of row-houses and apartments fell dramatically this year with nearly 200 apartment units and 10 row-housing units lost between 2006 and 2007. This trend is moving in the opposite direction to the target of a 10% annual increase in the production of new rental units of all types by 2011.

In addition to housing, homelessness continues to be a key issue: in 2007, the number of observed homeless or nearly homeless was 1,242. Over half of those surveyed had been in unstable housing situations for two years or longer. This is a sizable increase from the 700 observed homeless in the 2005 homeless count.

7. Increase Transportation Choice

The TravelChoices Strategy was developed and adopted as a RGS sub-strategy. A key objective of this strategy is to manage the demand for trips resulting from the projected growth in a manner that minimized the need for additional road capacity. This requires increased service levels for transit, improved cycling infrastructure, more walkable communities and centres.

Some trends in travel behavior in the CRD indicate an increasing demand for facilities and services supporting sustainable modes of transportation. Overall, annual public transit ridership increased from 19.6 to 21.1 million between 2005

and 2006. Public transit rides per capita rose from 52.1 to 62.2 between 1994 and 2006.

The share of non-automobile modes of travel (public transit, bike and walk) to, from and within the Central Business District in the pm peak period increased from 37% in 2001 to 38% in 2006, remaining slightly below the RGS target of 40%.

In 2006, 72% of the 157,000 employed persons in the Victoria CMA used a car, truck, or van to commute to work (as a passenger or driver), 10% used public transit, 10% walked and 6% cycled.

8. Strengthen Regional Economy

The RGS includes direction for promoting a more sustainable economy and establishes criteria and targets associated with that objective. A key action item of this section of the RGS was the development of Regional Economic Development Strategy to be prepared by a consortium of business representatives in the region, however, their report and recommendations were not approved by the Board.

In 2006, the annual unemployment rate for the Victoria CMA fell to 3.7%, down from 4.5% in 2005. These numbers are well below the Canadian unemployment rate which continues to hover between 6% and 7%. The unemployment rate in Victoria is at its lowest value since 1987, when the rate was 11%.

The City of Victoria captured 43% of the total employment in the Victoria CMA in 2006, 4% lower than in 2001. This occurred despite an increase of 2,060 jobs. The West Shore increased to a 9% share, a 1% rise in employment, while the Peninsula kept its 11% share of the total employment in the Victoria CMA.

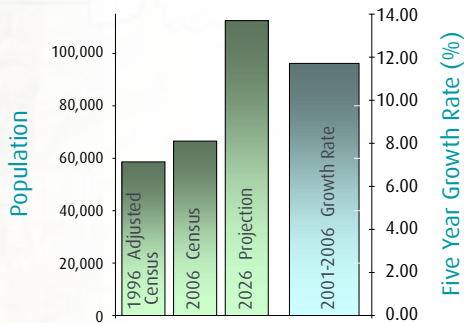
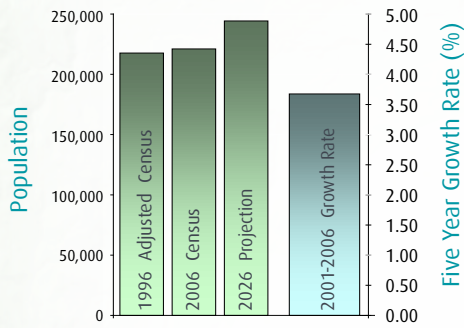
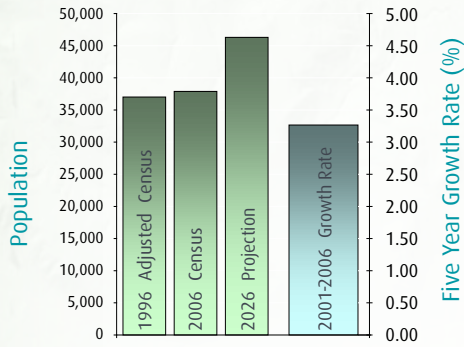
Housing & Homelessness **	
Number of rental units in Census Metropolitan Area	24,069
Average house price (2007 CMHC)	\$554,092
Required income to purchase average priced house (or starter home)	\$146,679
Affordability gap	\$75,000
Rental vacancy rate	0.5%
Number of apartment units lost	204
Observed number of homeless	1,242

Land Use Changes †	
Amount of land within ALR (2007 total)	10,624 ha
Amount of land removed from ALR since 2001	1,461 ha
Amount of land previously under FLR designation (approx.)	120,000 ha
Amount of forest land removed by Province from resource designation	28,000 ha
Amount of land with parkland status	16,141 ha
Amount of parkland acquired	932 ha
Land area under Unprotected Greenspace Policy Area	7,800 ha
Amount of Unprotected Greenspace acquired for park	80 ha

Urban Containment	
Total CRD population ‡	343,612
Total CRD land area ‡	197,600 ha
Land area within RUCSPA ‡	16,420 ha
Share of population growth within RUCSPA Δ	87%
Share of new dwelling units within RUCSPA Δ	90%
Net new dwelling units outside of RUCSPA (total) †	1,207
% of dwelling units within 400m of a transit stop †	85%

Travel Characteristics *	
Total # of daily trips Victoria CMA	1,190,187
% made by car	78%
% made by transit	6%
TravelChoices target for transit	10%
Transit rides per capita	62.2
% made by walking & cycling	13%
TravelChoices target for walking & cycling	15%

SUB-REGIONAL SUMMARIES



Peninsula	
Population (2006 Census)	40,460
Average annual growth rate (2001-2006)	0.7%
Employed (2006 Census)	17,335
Rental vacancy (excludes Central Saanich)	0%
Share of daily trips by car	66%
Share of daily trips by transit	2%
Share of daily trips by walking and cycling	9%
Net new dwelling units outside of the RUCSPA (2001-2007)	352

Urban Core	
Population (2006 Census)	231,481
Average annual growth rate (2001-2006)	1%
Employed (2006 Census)	125,005
Rental Vacancy	0.5%
Share of daily trips by car	57%
Share of daily trips by transit	8%
Share of daily trips by walking and cycling	16%
Net new dwelling units outside of the RUCSPA (2001-2007)	93

West Shore	
Population (2006 Census)	58,147
Average annual growth rate (2001-2006)	2.4%
Employed (2006 Census)	15,185
Rental Vacancy	1.4%
Share of daily trips by car	62%
Share of daily trips by transit	3%
Share of daily trips by walking and cycling	6%
Net new dwelling units outside of the RUCSPA (2001-2007)	480

