Executive Summary

Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest (MBSNF or the Forest) is located in close proximity to the Puget Sound metropolitan area in western Washington State. The Forest is facing a number of transportation issues, such as increasing congestion and decreasing availability of parking, which may negatively impact resources and visitors. In 2008, the Forest received a Federal Transit Administration (FTA) planning grant to examine these issues by conducting an alternative transportation study. This report is the result of the first of two phases of the study, which was conducted from May 2011 to January 2012.

What is alternative transportation and how did the study come about?

Alternative transportation encompasses a broad array of modes and strategies, including infrastructure for pedestrian, bicycle, and transit options and supporting information technology and management policies. Alternative transportation studies can vary in scope – in terms of geographic scale, topic, and participation – but typically follow the planning process and result in the identification of management considerations and next steps toward pursuing implementation projects.

Federal land management agencies, in particular the National Park Service, have been considering alternative transportation and conducting alternative transportation studies for decades. However, since 2005, there has been a specific federal funding source for alternative transportation studies and projects. The FTA's Paul S. Sarbanes Transit in Parks (TRIP) Program is an annual competitive grant program that distributes grants to parks and public lands for planning and implementation of alternative transportation systems.

What is the study and what are its phases?

The study is intended to assess transportation issues, and evaluate solutions for those issues, on and along the four major highway corridors through the MBSNF: State Route (SR) 542, U.S. Route 2 (US-2), Interstate 90 (I-90), and SR 410. All of these four corridors offer winter and summer recreational opportunities and provide direct access to a specific ski area. Other significant corridors, such as the Mountain Loop Scenic Highway (Forest Road 20 / SR 9, 92 and 530), which is used primarily in summer, and SR 20 (North Cascade Highway), which primarily serves North Cascades National Park, are not included within the scope of this study but are considered important by the Forest for future consideration.

Due to the study's large regional scope and multi-modal approach, the limited availability of funding, and the desire to lead to specific implementation projects, the Forest, working with Western Federal Lands Highway Division (WFLHD), determined the study would be divided into two phases. Phase I was the scoping phase and was intended to identify how the remainder of the funding could be best used, given the multiple corridors and issues and limited resources. Its approach and findings are described below. Phase II will be based on the recommendations from Phase I and will take place from 2012 to 2013.

Phase I Results

Phase I consisted of goal identification, data assessment, stakeholder meetings, and development of a statement of work for Phase II.

Goal Identification

Phase I defined goals for both transportation on the Forest and specifically for this study. As a result of reviewing key federal, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Department of Transportation, and Forest management documents, the scoping team identified the following goal areas for transportation in the context of the Forest: visitor experience; resource protection; access to all; partnership and community support; safe, economically and environmentally sound transportation system; and coordination with others. For goals for this study, Forest staff identified the following:

- Examine visitor use trends and transportation issues;
- Engage stakeholders and explore partnership opportunities for alternative transportation implementation;
- Improve travel options and information about travel options; and
- Identify options for additional alternative transportation planning or implementation projects.

Stakeholder Involvement

Phase I consisted of targeted stakeholder outreach that included an email distribution list, in-person meetings, and development of a website. The purpose of the stakeholder involvement was to provide information on the study, solicit feedback on corridor characteristics, issues, and data gaps, and identify partners and potential solutions for addressing those issues and data gaps.

Data Assessment

The data assessment focused on compiling previous and ongoing studies and initiatives, identifying characteristics, issues, and data gaps common to the Forest and specific to each corridor, but also began to document potential strategies. The assessment was completed by reviewing relevant materials, conducting the stakeholder outreach described above, and completing a site visit and meetings with Forest staff.

Characteristics identified include corridor designations and previous or ongoing plans; visitation and important origins and destinations for summer and winter); and alternative transportation characteristics. Issues, data gaps, and potential strategies to address both were identified at both the regional level and for each corridor individually and are summarized in the table below.

Types of Issues/Data Gaps	Types of Potential Strategies
• Visitation management • Visitor demographics and preferences • Bicycle and pedestrian access and use • Safety • Roadway congestion and parking demand • Traveler information / travel demand management • Transit	• Data collection • Research • Transit feasibility studies • Off-road bicycle facility feasibility studies • Bicycle signage plans • Pedestrian improvement studies • Traveler information study

Recommendations for Phase II

The goals and results from the data assessment and stakeholder meetings informed the prioritization and recommendation of potential tasks for Phase II. The scoping team determined that it is important for actions to be taken for each corridor included in the study but that Phase II would not able to sufficiently address all four corridors or address all the potential strategies identified. Corridors and strategies were prioritized based on anticipated impact on Forest visitation and use, available partnerships and resources, and severity of issues and data gaps addressed. In addition, corridors were assessed based on impact on goals and strategies were assessed based on cost and feasibility.

The table below lists the four recommended tasks for Phase II and the corridors addressed by each.

Tasks / Corridors	SR-542	US-2	I-90	SR-410
1) Stakeholder and Public Outreach Strategy	X	X	X	X
2) Data Collection & Analysis	Limited	Limited	X	
3) Traveler Information Assessment	X	X	X	X
4) Transit Feasibility Assessment			X	

The findings and recommendations of Phase I were presented to the Forest Leadership Team in January 2012 for their consideration and critique and to the Forest Supervisor for approval. The report was revised accordingly. With the completion of this report, the next step will be to devise a detailed work plan and schedule for the recommended tasks and begin coordination of the Phase II team. The Forest has selected the Volpe Center to conduct Phase II, with assistance from WFLHD and West Virginia University.