



# FLAGSHIPS

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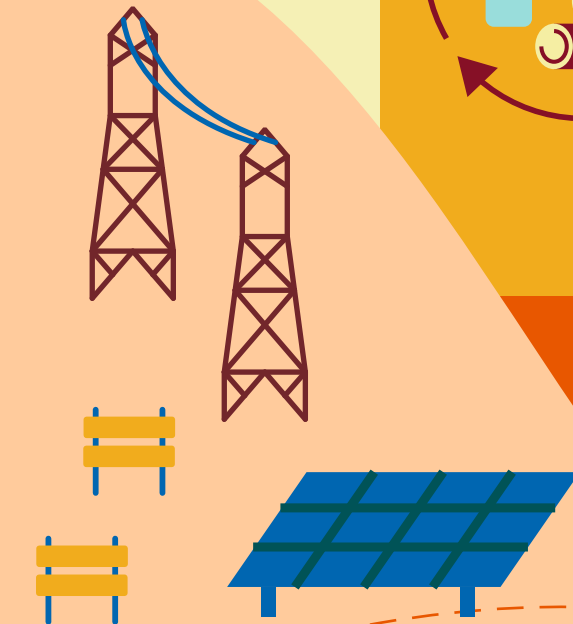
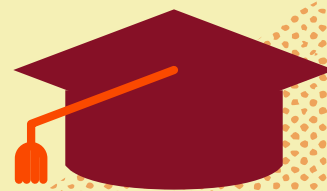
1 Put frontline communities first



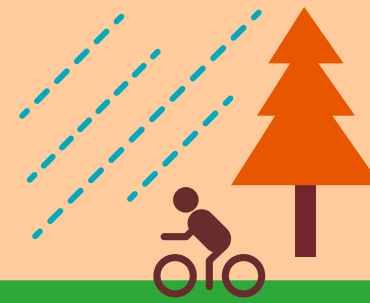
2 Safe, healthy, and climate-ready buildings



4 Economic mobility and career opportunities



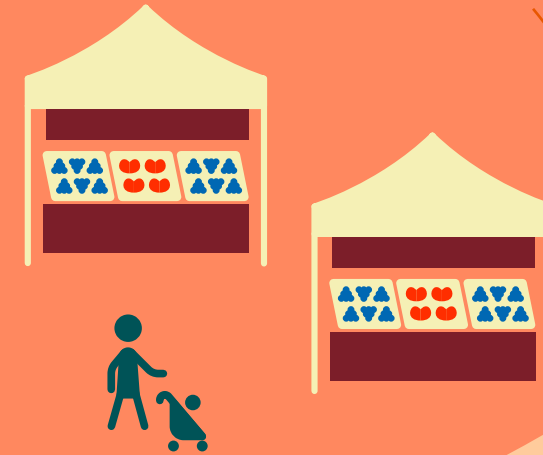
3 Connected and accessible transportation



6 Designing out waste



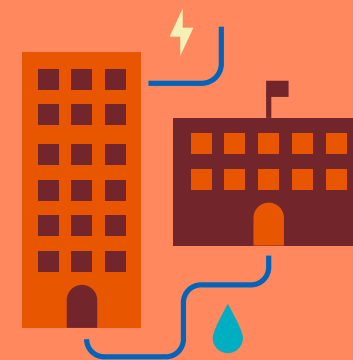
5 Fresh, local food for everyone



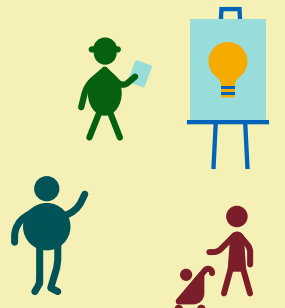
7 Clean air, water, and healthy ecosystems



8 Reliable and future-ready infrastructure



9 Collective leadership and community-led solutions



The Strategic Climate Action Plan (SCAP) translates King County’s bold vision for climate action into nine flagship outcomes that drive real impact across our communities. Each outcome reflects our commitment to tackling the climate crisis while addressing the unique needs of our diverse communities. Together, they represent a comprehensive approach—one that cuts greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, builds climate resilience, and ensures that every investment we make contributes to a sustainable and equitable King County. These outcomes are more than goals; they are a commitment to create lasting change that benefits everyone.



## 1. PUT COMMUNITIES FIRST

### PRIORITIZING AND EMPOWERING THOSE MOST IMPACTED BY CLIMATE CHANGE

Frontline communities—those with increased sensitivity to climate risks—are often the first to feel the impacts of a warming planet, yet the last to receive resources or representation in decision-making. In King County, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), immigrant and refugee populations, low-income residents, outdoor workers, and people with pre-existing health conditions face overlapping vulnerabilities—such as inadequate housing, food insecurity, and limited access to healthcare—that magnify the effects of extreme heat, air pollution, flooding, and rising costs.

Prioritizing these communities is the foundation of a stronger, more resilient region. Frontline community members not only bear the greatest costs of climate change, they also bring deep knowledge of environmental stewardship, mutual aid, and resilience strategies. When communities most at risk are equipped with the resources, decision-making power, and long-term investments they need, they become leaders in shaping solutions that benefit everyone. Building resilience from the ground up ensures that no one is left behind—and creates a healthier, more just future for all.

## EQUITY IMPACTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

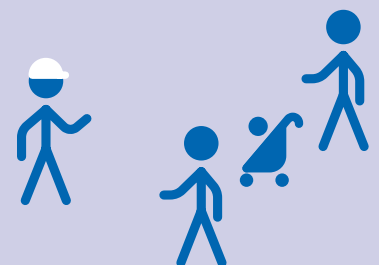
When extreme heat, wildfire smoke, or flooding hit King County, the risks aren't felt equally. Frontline communities—including low-income households, seniors, people with pre-existing health conditions, and outdoor workers—face disproportionate exposure to dangerous temperatures and poor air quality, often without access to safe housing, cooling systems, or healthcare.<sup>1</sup> During the 2021 heat wave, temperatures soared past 100 degrees for three consecutive days, contributing to at least 34 heat-related deaths in King County. Many of those who died were seniors living alone, people with chronic illnesses, or individuals without air conditioning—highlighting how systemic inequities leave certain communities far more vulnerable.

Recent investments show how long-term, community-driven solutions can close these gaps. In 2024, King County partnered with community-based organizations to install energy-efficient heat

pumps in adult family homes—small, residential care homes that serve seniors and people with disabilities, many of whom have fixed incomes and limited mobility. These homes often lack adequate cooling or heating systems, leaving residents especially at risk during extreme weather events. By working directly with frontline communities to design and implement these programs, the County is expanding access to life-saving technology, lowering household energy costs, and cutting GHG emissions—all at once. The same approach is needed across other sectors: whether it's ensuring multilingual emergency communication during disasters or making clean transportation options affordable and accessible. Prioritizing investments that are shaped by and serve the communities most at risk builds lasting resilience and ensures no one is left behind as the climate changes.

## CO-BENEFITS

- Advances climate equity by prioritizing communities most at risk
- Improves community health by expanding access to clean air, safe spaces, and climate education
- Lowers climate risks through preparedness, emergency response, and local partnerships
- Reduces greenhouse gas emissions by implementing lower-emission solutions



## LEARN MORE

The SCAP outlines a series of commitments that will prioritize frontline communities to strengthen public health, enhance emergency preparedness, and build community resilience in the face of climate change.



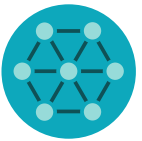
### Community Leadership and Community-Driven Policymaking

These actions support partnerships with frontline community leaders, cultivate pathways for emerging leaders, and invest in community-led climate action.



### Extreme Heat Adaptation

These actions mitigate extreme heat impacts by expanding nature-based solutions, strengthening community resilience, and enhancing emergency response.



### Regional Capacity Across Climate Hazards

These actions strengthen climate preparedness across King County and the Puget Sound region through internal and external collaborations.

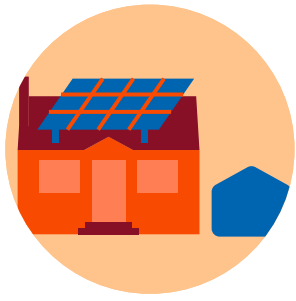


### Wildfire Risk Reduction

These actions enhance wildfire resilience through proactive forest management, collaboration, and strategic investments to reduce risks in fire-prone areas.



Classrooms without air conditioning can get uncomfortably hot during heat events—affecting student learning and health. The “Cool Schools” initiative takes a multi-faceted, partnership-based approach to heat mitigation.



## 2. SAFE, HEALTHY, AND CLIMATE-READY BUILDINGS

### ENSURING EVERY HOME AND WORKPLACE IS ENERGY EFFICIENT AND RESILIENT

As climate change reshapes our environment, the link between buildings and resilience is clear. Decisions about where and how homes and workplaces are built can shape vulnerability to climate risks such as extreme heat, wildfire, and flooding. For example, structures that are elevated are likely to be less damaged by flooding and homes that are properly insulated provide better protection against wildfire smoke and extreme heat.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, buildings are the second largest source of climate pollution in King County: residential, commercial,

and industrial buildings account for 43 percent of King County’s greenhouse gas emissions. Combustion of fossil fuels for heating and cooking also worsens indoor air quality.<sup>3</sup> Ensuring every home and workplace is safe, healthy, and climate-ready means delivering energy-efficient, disaster-resilient buildings equipped with clean, affordable utilities—especially for communities facing disproportionate risks. Investing in equitable building improvements strengthens our collective ability to withstand climate impacts while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

### CO-BENEFITS

- Reduces greenhouse gas emissions by improving energy efficiency and reducing reliance on fossil fuels
- Protects public health by improving indoor air quality and reducing heat-related illnesses
- Increases climate resilience by strengthening homes and workplaces against climate hazards
- Prevents displacement by ensuring that climate upgrades do not drive up housing costs or force renters out of their homes
- Lowers energy costs over time by investing in high-efficiency appliances, weatherization, and renewable energy solutions

### EQUITY IMPACTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

For many King County residents, an energy-efficient, climate-resilient home remains financially out of reach. This lack of access can increase climate risks and affect the health and wellbeing of residents and communities. In areas where wildfire is a concern, for example, residents understand the importance of preparing their homes—clearing vegetation, changing roofing materials, properly sealing vents—but these improvements come with high upfront costs. Installing air filtration may also be needed. Wildfire smoke poses serious health risks to children, seniors, and people with respiratory conditions who lack proper air filtration.

Costs can also be a barrier to installing or using energy-efficient air conditioning systems to stay cool and safe as summer temperatures get hotter. Most King County homes, particularly multi-family units, lack air conditioning, leaving low-income renters and homeowners with few options when it is smoky and/or during extreme heat events. Opening windows may offer temporary relief, but when smoke fills the air, residents are forced to choose between hazardous air quality and hot indoor temperatures.<sup>4</sup> Renters are particularly vulnerable. Even when landlords invest in long-term upgrades, the costs are often passed down to tenants through higher rents and utility bills. Without protections in place, well-intentioned climate improvements can unintentionally widen existing inequities.

Programs like King County's *Energize* show how climate upgrades can be paired with housing stability. Through *Energize* the County partnered with building owners to install energy-efficient heat pumps, providing cooling and cleaner air during extreme heat and wildfire smoke events while also reducing GHG emissions. In return, building owners agreed to keep rents stable for at least seven years, ensuring tenants benefit from healthier, more comfortable homes without facing rising housing costs. This model demonstrates how public investment and clear tenant protections can deliver both immediate benefits and long-term stability. By expanding programs like *Energize* and focusing resources on communities facing the greatest climate risks, King County can ensure that the transition to resilient, energy-efficient housing is equitable and inclusive.



King County's *Energize* Heat Pump Program installs heat pumps and other clean technology to help low and moderate-income homes in King County.

## LEARN MORE

The SCAP outlines a series of commitments that will strengthen public health, enhance emergency preparedness, and build community resilience through:



### **Building Energy and Green Building**

These actions improve energy efficiency, reduce utility costs, and enhance well-being for all residents, with a focus on low- to moderate-income households and frontline communities.



### **Housing Security and Anti-Displacement**

These actions strengthen County and community partnerships to support community-driven equitable development and prevent displacement.



### **Sea Level Rise Preparedness**

These actions prepare for rising sea levels to minimize economic and environmental impacts, protect shoreline habitats, and reduce risks to public health and safety.



### **Wildfire Risk Reduction**

These actions enhance wildfire resilience through proactive forest management, collaboration, and strategic investments to reduce risks in areas where wildfire is a concern.



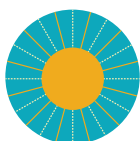
### **Climate Ready Capital Projects**

These actions reduce energy use, lower greenhouse gas emissions, generate clean energy, and stimulate economic growth in the clean energy sector.



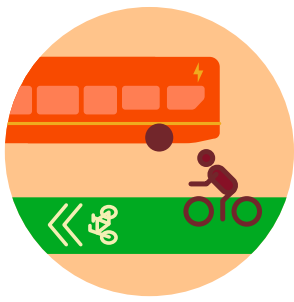
### **Countywide Greenhouse Gas Policy and Leadership**

These actions support regional coordination by partnering with cities and jurisdictions to align state legislative advocacy, share resources, and amplify local successes to drive broader national and global climate action.



### **Extreme Heat Mitigation**

These actions mitigate extreme heat impacts by expanding nature-based solutions, strengthening community resilience, and enhancing emergency response.



# 3. CONNECTED AND ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION

## MAKING IT EASY TO GET WHERE YOU NEED TO GO

With King County’s population projected to grow by 30 percent in the next 25 years, the way we invest in transportation today will shape both our region’s future and our ability to meet climate goals. Transportation is the largest source of climate pollution in King County, responsible for nearly half of all greenhouse gas emissions—totaling 44 percent from on-road vehicles, aviation, marine vessels and off-road equipment.<sup>5</sup> Expanding high-capacity transit, improving walkability and bike infrastructure, and integrating affordable

housing near transit hubs will reduce reliance on personal vehicles and lower transportation costs, while providing all residents—especially those historically underserved—with easier access to jobs, schools, services, and emergency resources such as cooling centers and evacuation routes. Prioritizing multimodal, low-carbon transportation options not only cuts emissions and improves air quality but also strengthens community resilience, well-being, and affordability as King County continues to grow.

### CO-BENEFITS

- Reduces greenhouse gas emissions by increasing transit ridership and walkability
- Improves public health by cutting air pollution in frontline communities
- Strengthens community resilience by ensuring affordable, reliable mobility options
- Creates safer, more walkable neighborhoods that reduce dependence on cars
- Reduces transportation costs by expanding affordable transit and clean mobility options

### EQUITY IMPACTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Transportation is one of the clearest examples of how infrastructure decisions can deepen or reduce inequities.<sup>6</sup> Many BIPOC, immigrant, and low-income neighborhoods in King County continue to face the legacy of redlining and disinvestment, with limited access to reliable, affordable transit options. Transit services and facilities need to improve to serve more people especially in these areas of historic underinvestment. More frequent service, better bus stops, improved technology and better multi-lingual resources could make the system more accessible for working families, non-English speakers, people with disabilities, and communities throughout King County. Meanwhile, residents in these same communities often live



Sidewalks, bike lanes, and frequent transit make it easy to get where you need to go.

near high-traffic corridors, where exposure to air pollution and traffic noise contributes to higher rates of asthma and other health conditions. Without deliberate protections, transit-oriented development intended to increase the number of households that live near high-capacity transit can also drive displacement, pricing out the very residents who rely on transit the most.

The transition to a lower-emission transportation system presents a critical opportunity to correct these inequities. By focusing investments on communities historically overburdened by pollution and limited mobility options, King County can ensure that clean transportation benefits are shared equitably. This includes expanding public EV charging stations in neighborhoods identified

through the state’s Healthy Environment for All (HEAL) Act framework—particularly in areas where the private sector is less likely to invest. It also means prioritizing deploying zero-emission buses that reduce both greenhouse gas emissions and harmful air pollution first in frontline communities of South King County, improving daily conditions for riders and nearby residents. Supporting mixed-use, transit-connected neighborhoods—with strong housing protections—further strengthens affordability and access while preventing displacement. Centering equity in every step of the transition will help build a transportation system that is accessible, affordable, and resilient for all communities.

## LEARN MORE

By prioritizing equitable, accessible, and climate-friendly transportation investments, King County can ensure that every resident benefits from a cleaner, more efficient transit system. The SCAP outlines a series of commitments to strengthen public health, advance transportation equity, and build climate resilience:



### Transit and Transportation

These actions reduce reliance on private vehicles, enhance public transit, and minimize traffic congestion in areas with high population and job density.



### Transportation Access and Equity

These actions ensure equitable transit planning and expand reliable, accessible transportation options in partnership with frontline communities.



### Zero-Emission County Fleets

These actions transition King County's fleet of over 6,000 vehicles—including buses, patrol units, and service vehicles—to zero-emission alternatives to reduce carbon pollution.



### Countywide Greenhouse Gas Policy and Leadership

These actions support regional coordination by partnering with cities and jurisdictions to align state legislative advocacy, share resources, and amplify local successes to drive broader national and global climate action.



The King County Parks Levy funded the construction of the White River Bridge, connecting King and Pierce counties via the Foothills Trail.



## 4. ECONOMIC MOBILITY AND CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

### CONNECTING CLIMATE ACTION AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

The transition to a clean energy economy is not just about reducing emissions—it's about creating lasting opportunity. As King County invests in renewable energy, sustainable infrastructure, and energy-efficient buildings, this shift presents a once-in-a-generation chance to stimulate regional economic growth, create high-quality jobs, and ensure prosperity reaches all communities—not just those already positioned to benefit. Meeting the workforce demands of this transition requires urgent action and sustained efforts. The 2024 Washington

State Residential Energy Workforce Gap Analysis identified a need for over 550 new electricians focused on residential energy efficiency projects by the end of the decade, in addition to more than 1,100 electricians needed across other sectors. By embedding workforce development into climate action, expanding support for local businesses, and prioritizing access to financial incentives, King County is advancing a clean energy transition that supports both economic mobility and climate goals.

### CO-BENEFITS

- Adapts and accelerates investment and outreach for local clean energy needs
- Demonstrates the economic benefit of the clean energy transition within frontline communities and local businesses
- Expands economic opportunity through increased access to living-wage jobs, building a skilled and diverse workforce
- Promotes sustainable business models that reduce waste and lower costs



King County JumpStart participant completing 240-hours of paid work-based learning at contractor host site.

## EQUITY IMPACTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

For too many frontline communities, economic opportunity hasn't been evenly distributed. High-paying jobs in the clean energy sector are growing rapidly, but systemic barriers—such as limited access to training, lack of exposure to career pathways, and weak connections to employers—continue to prevent many BIPOC, immigrant, and low-income residents from accessing them.<sup>7</sup> Programs like King County's *JumpStart*, which serves 86 percent Black and Latino youth, are already making an impact by connecting young adults to career opportunities in electrical work, HVAC, solar installation, and project management. Yet many job seekers, including youth from low-income households, struggle to envision themselves in these industries without early exposure, mentorship, and culturally relevant outreach.<sup>8,9</sup> Without deliberate investment, the clean energy transition risks reinforcing existing inequities, excluding the very communities most impacted by climate change.

This shift presents a powerful opportunity to close long-standing gaps in economic mobility and wealth-building. Partnerships like King

County's Climate Equity Capital Pool Project show how public investments can deliver multiple benefits—by requiring sewer districts receiving County grants to offer paid work-based learning, the County helped pre-apprenticeship graduates gain hands-on experience and secure full-time employment in climate-related careers. Beyond new job opportunities, King County can build pathways to ensure that frontline communities also share in profits and leadership opportunities as business owners, contractors, and decision-makers. Programs like *C-PACER*, which increases affordability for building retrofits, and *Energize*, which contracts directly with local companies for heat pump installations for low to moderate income households, are designed to channel economic benefits to local businesses—particularly minority- and women-owned enterprises (MWBs). Through intentional engagement, expanded internships, certifications, leadership development, and sustained support for local businesses, King County is committed to building a green economy by and for the communities it aims to serve.



King County Metro employees graduate from the Green Custodial Health program, facilitated by the U.S. Green Building Council.

## LEARN MORE

By aligning climate action with economic opportunity, King County can create a future where sustainability drives both prosperity and equity—ensuring that every community has the chance to build wealth in the clean energy economy. The SCAP outlines the following commitments to ensure an inclusive and equitable clean energy future:



### **Climate and Economic Opportunity**

These actions integrate climate-informed workforce development into capital projects, expand outreach and engagement, strengthen regional partnerships, and implement the 2025 Climate and Workforce Strategy



### **Building Capacity with Frontline Communities and Youth**

These actions strengthen County staff capacity to embed climate equity while supporting frontline communities and youth in developing just, community-driven climate solutions



### **Energy Justice and Utilities Affordability**

These actions reduce energy burdens on frontline communities and strengthen community leadership in shaping energy justice policies and programs



### **Circular Economy**

These actions minimize landfill waste, expand recycling and reuse programs, and strengthen community partnerships to create new markets and economic opportunities for a more sustainable waste system



Youth in VR headset explores virtual solar installation training module at 2024 Green Jobs, Green Futures Summit.



## 5. FRESH, LOCAL FOOD FOR EVERYONE

### SUPPORTING FARMS, FARMERS, AND ACCESS TO NUTRITIOUS FOOD

Food systems are the backbone of healthy, resilient communities—but climate change is putting them under growing strain. Food is the second-largest source of King County’s consumption-based GHG emissions, after transportation, driven by the environmental impact of how food is processed, distributed, and wasted.<sup>10</sup> Industrial farming has expanded global food production, often at the expense of long-term sustainability. These systems rely on monocultures and heavy chemical inputs that degrade soil, deplete water resources, and reduce biodiversity—making farms more vulnerable to

drought, floods, pests, and disease. In King County, local farmers, fisheries, and food businesses are facing growing challenges, from extreme weather to rising production costs and supply chain disruptions. Meanwhile, 30–40 percent of food produced goes uneaten, highlighting deep inefficiencies in the current system.<sup>11</sup> Building a more resilient, sustainable food system is essential—not only to reduce emissions and protect farmers’ livelihoods, but to ensure fresh, affordable food remains accessible to every community.

### CO-BENEFITS

- Advances climate equity by prioritizing communities most at risk
- Improves food security by making fresh, local food more affordable and accessible
- Reduces waste and emissions by strengthening local food supply chains and recovery programs

### EQUITY IMPACTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

For many residents in King County, accessing fresh, affordable food is becoming increasingly difficult. Climate change and global disruptions are driving up food costs, disproportionately affecting low-income households and BIPOC communities. This includes access to culturally significant foods like salmon and shellfish, which are vital to Indigenous diets and coastal economies. Immigrant farmers across the region face additional barriers as they work to gain and preserve access to farmland and grow culturally relevant crops that connect communities to their traditions.

These challenges expose deeper inefficiencies and inequities in the current system. While low-income families struggle to afford fresh, nutritious food and producers contend with extreme weather and rising costs, an estimated 30–40 percent of food goes uneaten—generating methane emissions and wasting valuable resources. King County has an opportunity to create a more resilient and equitable food system by strengthening networks that connect small and underrepresented farmers—including immigrant and Indigenous growers—to institutional markets like schools, food

banks, and farmers markets. Expanding access to land, improving distribution infrastructure, and investing in food recovery efforts can boost regional food economies while ensuring fresh, culturally relevant food reaches the communities who need it most. By aligning climate action with food security, waste reduction, and local agricultural support, King County can reduce emissions, stabilize food access, and safeguard farmers, fisheries, and food traditions for future generations.



King County’s annual CHOMP! festival highlights the regional food ecosystem—local farms, farmers, chefs, restaurants and organizations.

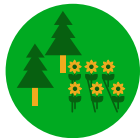
## LEARN MORE

A resilient food system does more than withstand crises—it strengthens economy and well-being, supports farmers, and ensures that every resident has access to fresh, local food. The SCAP outlines a series of commitments to strengthen food security and sustainability:



### **Food Systems and Food Security**

These actions invest in farmer economic viability, enhance food rescue coordination, increase food access, and integrate food system goals into broader policy efforts.



### **Forest and Agriculture**

These actions protect and restore high-value forests and farmland by improving forest management and advancing sustainable agricultural practices.



### **Extreme Precipitation and Drought Mitigation**

These actions improve stormwater management, support water quality, and expand recycled water and water conservation in response to changing hydrologic extremes.



### **Circular Economy**

These actions minimize landfill waste, expand recycling and reuse programs, and strengthen community partnerships to create new markets and economic opportunities for a more sustainable waste system.



### **Countywide Greenhouse Gas Policy and Leadership**

Includes action to support regional coordination by partnering with cities and jurisdictions to uphold the Urban Growth Boundary, which protects key forest and agricultural lands from development.



## 6. DESIGN OUT WASTE

### REDUCING CONSUMPTION, PREVENTING WASTE, AND REUSING VALUABLE MATERIALS

Every day, over 100 trucks deliver tons of discarded materials—everything from half-eaten meals to plastic packaging to perfectly good wood—to King County’s Cedar Hills landfill. It’s the result of a “throwaway economy,” where goods are designed to be cheap, short-lived, and disposable. This system wastes valuable resources, pollutes the environment, and fuels climate change—so much so that the emissions tied to the goods and services we consume are more than double the emissions generated within the County itself. It’s not just single-use plastics: everything from clothing to electronics

to construction materials often ends up in the landfill far too soon. In fact, up to 70 percent of what we send to the landfill could be reused, recycled, or composted. As our population grows and our current landfill nears capacity, King County must rethink how we reduce, reuse, and manage waste. Shifting to a circular economy—where we use less, waste less, and keep materials in circulation—means cutting emissions, creating local jobs, and reducing pollution, while protecting our forests, waterways, and communities most burdened by waste.

### CO-BENEFITS

- Reduces greenhouse gas emissions by reducing resources used and the impact of what we do consume
- Advances climate equity by shifting power to frontline communities, ensuring they shape policies, funding, and decision-making
- Supports economic stability by investing in job-creating infrastructure and system changes
- Reduces food waste by strengthening local food supply chains and recovery programs
- Promotes sustainable business models that reduce waste and lower costs
- Expands economic opportunity through increased access to living-wage jobs, building a skilled and diverse workforce



A King County employee sorting mercury-containing bulbs at the Factoria household hazardous waste drop-off site.



Re+ engages community members to reimagine a waste-free King County.

## EQUITY IMPACTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Historically, low-income neighborhoods, immigrants, and communities of color have borne the brunt of pollution throughout the entire lifecycle of materials—beginning with the extraction of raw resources, through the production and manufacturing of goods, and continuing into our throwaway systems. The production of new materials often results in air and water pollution near manufacturing hubs, which are frequently located near frontline communities, both locally and globally.<sup>12</sup> In King County, many manufacturing and waste facilities are often located near historically underserved neighborhoods, while illegal dumping of construction debris, appliances, and hazardous materials disproportionately impacts these residents. Additionally, the costs for waste disposal can also leave many households without affordable, convenient options to manage their waste sustainably, compounding these inequities.

Yet many of these same communities have long practiced low-waste, circular economy approaches—stretching meals and not wasting food, sharing tools, and repairing items rather than discarding them. King County’s Re+ Community Panel ensures these lived experiences help shape waste policies, programs, and funding decisions. The transition to a circular economy presents an opportunity to correct past imbalances by making recycling, composting, reuse, and repair more accessible and affordable. Efforts like Cleanup LIFT lower disposal costs for low-income households, while Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) policies shift accountability to manufacturers, reducing waste at the source. These changes, alongside investments in local recycling, repair, and composting industries, can ensure that the benefits of a zero-waste future are shared equitably—and no community is left managing more than its fair share of the burden.

## LEARN MORE

The SCAP outlines a series of commitments to reduce consumption impacts and accelerate the shift to a circular economy where we waste less and reduce our footprint—equitably, sustainably, and reliably.



### **Circular Economy**

These actions minimize landfill waste, expand recycling, composting, and reuse programs, and strengthen community partnerships to build a more sustainable waste system.



### **Climate and Economic Opportunity**

These actions integrate climate-informed workforce development into capital projects, expand outreach and engagement, strengthen regional partnerships, and implement the 2025 Climate and Workforce Strategy.



### **Building Energy and Green Building**

These actions improve energy efficiency, reduce utility costs, and enhance well-being for all residents, with a focus on low- to moderate-income households and frontline communities.



### **Sustainable County Infrastructure**

These actions reduce energy use, lower GHG emissions, generate clean energy, and stimulate economic growth in the clean energy sector.



### **Community Leadership and Community-Driven Policymaking**

These actions support partnerships with frontline community leaders, cultivate pathways for emerging leaders, and invest in community-led climate action.



### **Countywide Greenhouse Gas Policy and Leadership**

These actions support regional coordination by partnering with cities and jurisdictions to align state legislative advocacy, share resources, and amplify local successes to drive broader national and global climate action.



## 7. CLEAN AIR, WATER, AND HEALTHY ECOSYSTEMS

### PROTECTING OUR ENVIRONMENT FOR HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES AND RESILIENT ECOSYSTEMS

The forests, rivers, and coastlines of King County are more than just landscapes—they are the lungs that clean our air, the waters that nourish our communities, and the habitats that sustain species and our way of life. These natural systems protect public health and strengthen local economies, yet decades of pollution, development, and climate change have left them vulnerable. From committing \$9 billion in the next decade toward protecting water quality and clean habitats to partnering to conserve 65,000 acres of land over the next 30 years, King County has worked for decades to honor our commitments to Tribes and the

County's 2.3 million residents. Decisive action is needed to ensure work continues and expands, from restoring habitats to prioritizing green spaces in historically underserved areas. Habitat restoration, urban greening, and multijurisdictional efforts require strong partnerships—with Tribal governments, federal and state agencies, and frontline communities. By implementing nature-based solutions, restoring degraded lands, and making environmental benefits accessible to all, we can ensure that clean air, clean water, and thriving ecosystems remain part of King County's future.



Cougar Mountain Park is part of King County's 30,000-acre park system. Located in the "Issaquah Alps," Cougar Mountain Park preserves important wildlife habitat while offering ample opportunities for recreation.

## CO-BENEFITS

- Advances climate equity by prioritizing communities most at risk
- Reduces greenhouse gas emissions by removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere
- Improves public health by reducing air pollution and expanding access to clean water and forests for recreation
- Strengthens climate resilience through tree cover, clean waterways, and ecosystem restoration
- Protects biodiversity by restoring and connecting habitats for salmon and other species



Children and families volunteer at trail work party at North Shorewood Park hosted by King County Parks and the Washington Trails Association.

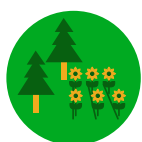
## EQUITY IMPACTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

For generations, the health of King County’s lands and waters has been shaped by decisions that prioritized development over the wellbeing of ecosystems and the people who depend on them. But the consequences of those choices haven’t been felt equally. For tribes, the decline of salmon is not just an environmental loss—it’s a violation of treaty rights and a threat to cultural survival. Habitat destruction and polluted waterways are also affecting the health and wellbeing of residents in urbanized areas. Along the Duwamish River, for example, low-income families and tribes alike live with the legacy of industrial pollution, facing higher rates of asthma, cancer, and other chronic diseases.<sup>13</sup> These burdens didn’t happen by accident; they are the result of decades of disinvestment and exclusion from the decisions that shape the landscape—leaving certain communities to carry the heaviest costs.

Restoration efforts across King County offer powerful opportunities to reverse this harm and build a more equitable future. The resurgence of kokanee salmon in 2024—following years of collaboration led by the Snoqualmie Tribe—proves that recovery is possible when tribal leadership and knowledge are prioritized. Similarly, while federal agencies lead the cleanup of the Duwamish Superfund site, King County plays a vital role in restoring habitat, supporting public health, and ensuring that both tribal and immigrant communities share in the river’s recovery. Beyond waterways, urban neighborhoods also face their own inequities. King County’s urban tree canopy is a key defense against extreme heat, air pollution, and stormwater runoff. Historically redlined and low-income areas, however, often lack robust tree canopy—leaving them more vulnerable to extreme heat and pollution. By investing in habitat restoration, tree planting, and community-led solutions, King County can honor treaty rights, reduce environmental health disparities, and reconnect people to the land and waters that sustain them.

## LEARN MORE

Restoring healthy ecosystems and protecting community wellbeing requires partnership at every level—from tribal governments to local governments to federal agencies and community leaders. By scaling up and accelerating habitat restoration, pollution cleanup, and urban greening efforts, King County can ensure that clean air, clean water, and thriving ecosystems remain part of our future. The SCAP outlines a series of commitments to protect ecosystems and community health:



### Forest and Agriculture

These actions protect and restore high-value forest and farmland by improving forest management and advancing sustainable agricultural practices.



### Forest Resilience and Urban Tree Canopy Expansion

These actions invest in forest resilience and support a more robust urban tree canopy, especially in mapped heat islands.



### Extreme Precipitation and Drought Mitigation

These actions improve stormwater management, support water quality, and expand recycled water and water conservation in response to changing hydrologic extremes.



### River Flood Management

These actions preserve and restore river floodplains to reduce flood risks while enhancing habitat and strengthening climate resilience.



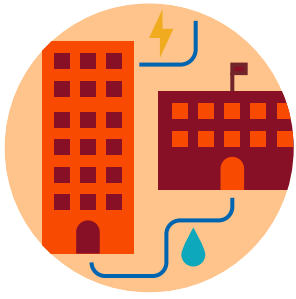
### Salmon Recovery and Habitat Connectivity

These actions improve habitat to support native salmon populations and promote habitat connectivity, strengthening ecosystem and species resilience.



### Sea Level Rise Preparedness

These actions prepare for rising sea levels to minimize economic and environmental impacts, protect shoreline habitats, and reduce risks to public health and safety.



## 8. RELIABLE AND FUTURE-READY INFRASTRUCTURE

### BUILDING AND MAINTAINING ROADS, UTILITIES, AND SERVICES THAT WORK NOW AND IN THE FUTURE

Bridges, roads, stormwater systems, and public transit infrastructure are the backbone of daily life in King County but many of these assets weren't built for the pressures of a rapidly changing climate. Climate change increases the potential for more extreme events, adding further stress to aging infrastructure and increasing the risk of service disruptions, costly damage, and community harm. Meeting the climate crisis head-on requires rethinking how we design, build, and maintain the systems that move

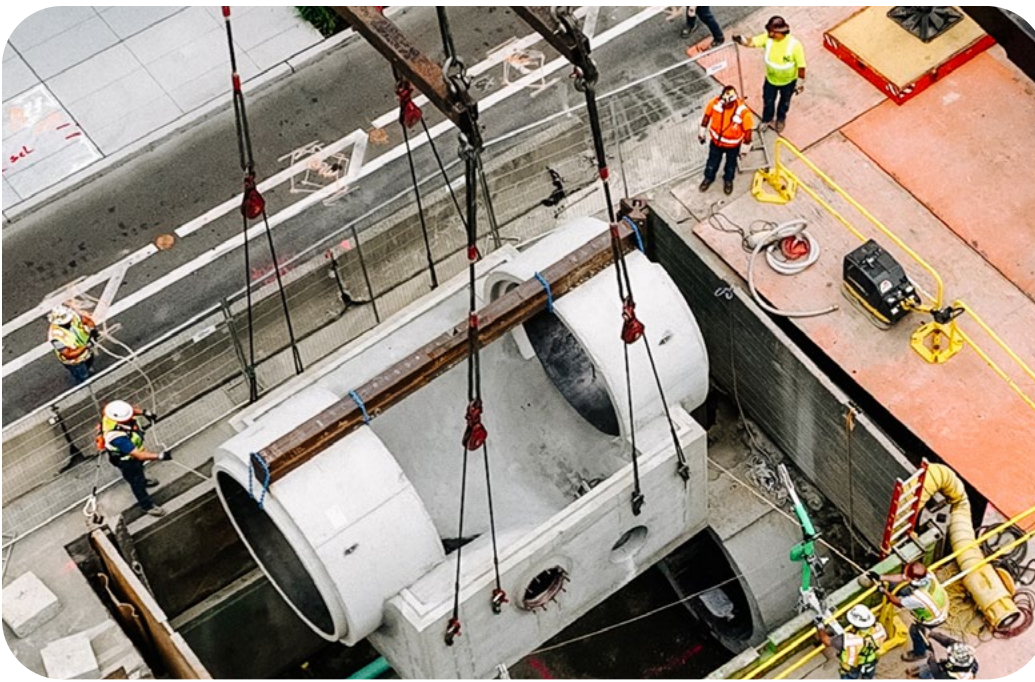
people, deliver power, convey water and wastewater, and provide essential services. Meeting the climate crisis also requires bold action to reduce emissions from transportation and building infrastructure, the County's largest contributors to GHG emissions. To create a climate-ready future, King County must invest in infrastructure that can withstand climate shocks, reduce emissions, and reliably serve every community for decades to come.

### CO-BENEFITS

- Enhances public safety by ensuring that infrastructure can function well in a changing climate
- Protects and improves public health through cleaner air, walkable and accessible neighborhoods, reliable sanitation, and reduced exposure to pollutants
- Lowers climate risks by making infrastructure adaptable to extreme weather and future demands
- Supports economic stability by reducing service disruptions, lowering long-term costs and creating local jobs through infrastructure improvements



Replacing culverts that block access to high quality stream habitat is important to helping salmon survive and thrive in a changing climate.



King County Wastewater Treatment Division is one of the first wastewater utilities in the nation — and the first in Washington state — to offer sewer heat recovery. Private commercial property owners and developers can recover renewable heat energy from sewer pipes for heating or cooling their buildings.

## EQUITY IMPACTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

In November 2024, a bomb cyclone tore through the Puget Sound region, leaving behind more than \$11 million in losses in King County that included damaged homes and businesses, collapsed roofs, and widespread power outages.<sup>14</sup> While the bomb cyclone disrupted many aspects of public service delivery, the event also highlighted the value of recent King County investments in resilience at the West Point Treatment Plant. In September 2024, King County completed a two-year capital project to install a unique high-voltage battery system designed to provide stable power to the treatment plant during power surges and outages. As powerful gusts swept through Western Washington overnight, the 16.8-megawatt battery system kept pumps operating continuously, preventing combined sewer overflows and protecting water quality.<sup>15</sup>

Investing in future-ready infrastructure presents an opportunity to address inequities and strengthen community safety and economic opportunity. This includes, for example, installing and operating zero-emission transit bus and EV charging stations first in communities overburdened by air pollution and creating safer, more walkable streets in neighborhoods historically left out of infrastructure

improvements. Requiring that infrastructure built by King County achieve the highest green and equitable building practices will help to ensure that design integrates community priorities, local communities benefit from economic development, lessens the burden and impact on frontline communities, and health of nearby residents and employees is protected. Because these requirements start from the beginning, the county is maximizing synergistic benefits that result in the management of public funds achieving multiple returns on a single investment, instead of requesting additional tax dollars to retrofit or redesign facilities to meet public interests and future climate preparedness. Ensuring equitable community engagement early on in the RapidRide H line design, meant that a stop was built right around the corner from a new food bank facility providing families with quick access to the bus line and avoiding having to carry groceries too far. By focusing on the communities most at risk, King County can build a resilient future that reduces our dependence on climate-polluting fossil fuel where every resident has access to safe homes, clean water, reliable power, and affordable transportation.

## LEARN MORE

The SCAP outlines a series of commitments to build a future where infrastructure serves everyone—equitably, sustainably, and reliably.



### **Sustainable County Infrastructure**

These actions reduce energy use, lower greenhouse gas emissions, generate clean energy, and stimulate economic growth in the clean energy sector.



### **Climate-Ready Capital Projects**

These actions integrate climate risk considerations into capital planning and invest in resilient infrastructure to maintain reliable public services amid climate challenges.



### **Building Energy and Green Building**

These actions improve energy efficiency, reduce utility costs, and enhance well-being for all residents, with a focus on low- to moderate-income households and frontline communities.



### **Zero-Emission County Fleets**

These actions transition King County's fleet of over 6,000 vehicles—including buses, patrol units, and service vehicles—to zero-emission alternatives to reduce carbon pollution.



### **Transit and Transportation**

These actions reduce reliance on private vehicles, enhance public transit, and minimize traffic congestion in areas with high population and job density.



### **River Flood Management**

These actions preserve and restore river floodplains to reduce flood risks while enhancing habitat and strengthening climate resilience.



### **Sea Level Rise Preparedness**

These actions prepare for rising sea levels to minimize economic and environmental impacts, protect shoreline habitats, and reduce risks to public health and safety.



## 9. COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY-LED SOLUTIONS

### WORKING TOGETHER FOR CLIMATE ACTION AND INNOVATION

Sustained work on climate action requires more than policies and plans—it depends on collective leadership, accountability, and collaboration across communities, governments, and sectors. With a \$15.8 billion budget, a workforce of over 16,700 employees, and responsibility for more than 60 services, King County is uniquely positioned to lead by embedding climate action and equity into every aspect of governance. Climate solutions can't be siloed; they must be integrated into how decisions are made, how budgets are spent, and how services are delivered. From operational shifts to large-scale investments, every department and employee has a role to play in advancing science-based, equity-centered, and risk-informed policies that reduce emissions and strengthen community resilience. But leadership doesn't rest solely with government. Lasting solutions must be shaped in partnership with frontline communities, scientists, schools, businesses, and community-based organizations—those who understand their communities' needs, bring trusted relationships, and offer innovative solutions. As a regional government, King

County also has a responsibility to work across jurisdictional borders and share decision-making power—ensuring that communities most affected by climate impacts have the opportunity to lead. By centering community voices and forging strong partnerships, we can build a future where climate action benefits every resident, and resilience is shared equitably.



Participants at a SCAP workshop in 2024.

## CO-BENEFITS

- Advances climate equity by shifting power to frontline communities, ensuring they shape policies, funding, and decision-making
- Strengthens public health by expanding access to clean air, safe housing, and climate education
- Builds climate resilience by replacing crisis-driven responses with permanent, community-led collaboration structures
- Reduces greenhouse gas emissions by engaging community and industry leaders to scale emission reduction programs and policies
- Enhances disaster preparedness and emergency response by integrating community voices into planning, ensuring faster, more effective action
- Increases accountability and innovation by embedding climate leadership across departments and fostering cross-sector partnerships

## EQUITY IMPACTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

True climate action requires more than emergency response—it requires long-term investment in community leadership, employee empowerment, and shared responsibility at every level. Too often, frontline communities are left filling gaps without lasting change or resources.<sup>16</sup> But recent successes show what’s possible when leadership is collective. In 2023, Metro’s shift to prioritize the electrification of its Tukwila base—after strong input from community partners—demonstrated how community leadership can directly shape major infrastructure decisions, ensuring cleaner buses operated first in communities overburdened by air pollution and more equitable service in historically underserved areas. Similarly, when King County employees are empowered to take ownership of climate solutions—from installing

LED lighting to supporting zero-emission transit—benefits achieved prove that leadership belongs to every worker who serves the public.

Greenhouse gas emissions, pollution, and climate impacts don’t stop at jurisdictional boundaries—and neither should the solutions. The health of our air, water, and communities is interconnected across city lines, watersheds, and transportation networks. Through efforts like the King County-Cities Climate Collaboration (K4C), King County works alongside cities of all sizes—especially those with fewer resources—to help them access funding, tools, and programs that benefit their residents. But King County’s leadership goes beyond policy; it also shapes broader industry standards that influence change across sectors. A clear example is how a bus manufacturer designs electric buses to meet King County Metro’s specifications, knowing that if a model can serve King County’s diverse and complex routes, it will meet the needs of most communities nationwide. The County’s leadership shows that if solutions are built to meet the needs of our most impacted communities, they will work for everyone. By embedding permanent, resourced community advisory roles, ensuring equitable compensation for expertise, and supporting participatory planning processes, King County can continue to shift from short-term outreach to lasting, community-driven partnerships that allow us to build better solutions for our community with our communities. When frontline communities, employees, businesses, and local governments share leadership, climate solutions are stronger, more inclusive, and more effective.

## LEARN MORE

The SCAP outlines a series of commitments that will strengthen existing collaboration structures, enhance emergency preparedness, and build community resilience in the face of climate change.



### **Building Capacity with Frontline Communities and Youth**

These actions strengthen County staff capacity to embed climate equity while supporting frontline communities and youth in developing just, community-driven climate solutions.



### **Community Leadership and Community-Driven Policymaking**

These actions support partnerships with frontline community leaders, cultivate pathways for emerging leaders, and invest in community-led climate action.



### **Countywide Greenhouse Gas Policy and Leadership**

These actions support regional coordination by partnering with cities and jurisdictions to align state legislative advocacy, share resources, and amplify local successes to drive broader national and global climate action.



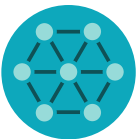
### **Enterprise Leadership and Accountability**

These actions embed equity, efficiency, and accountability into County operations by ensuring employees, leadership, and policies advance King County's climate goals.



### **Climate-Ready Capital Projects**

These actions integrate climate risk considerations into capital planning and invest in resilient infrastructure to maintain reliable public services amid climate challenges.



### **Regional Capacity Across Climate Hazards**

These actions strengthen climate preparedness across King County and the Puget Sound region through internal and external collaborations.

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Extreme Heat Mitigation Strategy Release park tour in July 2024