



# BENCHMARKS FOR A BETTER WASHINGTON

## Fact Sheets

In 2011, the Washington Roundtable began tracking the Benchmarks for a Better Washington, a discrete set of metrics that speak to the heart of what constitutes a world class state – innovation, quality education, efficient transportation, and a healthy business climate. We use independent, 50-state data to determine where Washington ranks, measure changes in performance, and understand where there is opportunity for improvement. **Our goal is to make Washington a top 10 state for quality of life and innovation while ensuring it is not one of the most expensive states in which to do business.**

The Benchmarks tell us where Washington stands and remind us that hard work is needed to catch up, keep up, and move ahead. An update based on data available as of May 2019:

### Quality Education

- Washington remains 6th on the performance of 8th graders on the nation's math test.
- On high school graduation rate, Washington lost ground compared to other states and now ranks 44th in the nation.
- Washington ranks near the bottom (46th) in bachelor's degrees awarded per capita, awarding less than five degrees for every 1,000 residents.

### Efficient Transportation

- Washington ranks 13th for bridge quality based on the percentage of bridges rated poor (4.6 percent).
- Washington's ranking for road conditions dropped to 39th with just 53 percent of the state's highways rated in good condition or better.
- Washington remains among the 10 states with the longest average statewide commute times (27.9 minutes in 2017).

### Innovation & Business Costs

- Washington is a leader in private sector job creation, patent generation, and low rates of electricity, ranking among the nation's top three states in all three categories.
- Washington remains an expensive state in which to do business. Washington ranks 33rd on business tax burden, 42nd on unemployment tax rate per employee, and 50th on the cost of workers' compensation benefits paid.

Learn more at [waroundtable.com/benchmarks](http://waroundtable.com/benchmarks).

# BENCHMARKS FOR A BETTER WASHINGTON

## Education

---

### Goal: Washington will rank among the top 10 states in performance in math.



**Rationale:** Proficiency in mathematics and science is a key predictor for success in more complex and inquiry-based thinking that is essential in pursuing a broad range of career pathways in our state.

**Current Ranking:** Washington ranks 6<sup>th</sup> in the nation based on the percentage of 8<sup>th</sup> graders (42 percent) who scored at or above proficient on the math portion of the [2017 National Assessment of Educational Progress](#).

**Previous Rankings:** 7<sup>th</sup> based on the percentage of 8<sup>th</sup> graders (39 percent) who scored at or above proficient on the math exam in [2015](#). Forty-two percent of Washington 8<sup>th</sup> grade test takers hit that benchmark in [2013](#).

**Source:** [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#)

---

### Goal: Washington will rank among the top 10 states in performance in science.



**Rationale:** Proficiency in mathematics and science is a key predictor for success in more complex and inquiry-based thinking that is essential in pursuing a broad range of career pathways in our state.

**Current Ranking:** Washington ranks 17<sup>th</sup> in the nation based on the percentage of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students (38 percent) who scored at or above proficient on the science portion of the [2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress](#).

**Previous Rankings:** 19<sup>th</sup> based on the percentage of 8<sup>th</sup> graders (35 percent) who scored at or above proficient on the science exam in [2011](#). Thirty-five percent of students hit that benchmark in [2009](#).

**Source:** [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#)

---

### Goal: Washington will rank among the top 10 states based on the percentage of students who graduate from high school.



**Rationale:** Raising the state high school graduation rate will help ensure Washington's young people are prepared to pursue the postsecondary pathway of their choice and access great career and life opportunities in our state.

**Current Ranking:** 44<sup>th</sup> in the nation with an adjusted cohort graduation rate of [79.4 percent in 2016-2017](#).

**Previous Rankings:** 40<sup>th</sup> in the nation in the nation with an adjusted cohort graduation rate of [79.7 percent in 2015-2016](#). Prior to that, Washington ranked 41<sup>st</sup> in the nation with an adjusted cohort graduation rate of [78.2 percent in 2014-15](#).

**Source:** [National Center for Education Statistics](#)

---

### Goal: Washington will rank among the top 10 states in bachelor's degrees awarded per capita.



**Rationale:** The number of bachelor's degrees awarded per capita is a useful indicator of how Washington is doing relative to other states in preparing its students for success in the global economy.

**Current Ranking:** 46<sup>th</sup> based on the number of bachelor's degrees awarded per capita (4.6 per 1,000) by public and private postsecondary institutions in [2016-17](#).

**Previous Ranking:** 42<sup>nd</sup> based on the number of bachelor's degrees awarded per capita in [2014-15](#).

**Source:** [National Center for Education Statistics](#)



# BENCHMARKS FOR A BETTER WASHINGTON

## Transportation

---

### Goal: Washington will rank among the 10 states for bridge quality.

---



13<sup>th</sup>

**Rationale:** Safe and efficient bridges are an essential part of the transportation system and support commerce and economic growth.

**Current Ranking:** 13<sup>th</sup> in the nation with 4.6 percent of bridges rated as poor as of [December 2018](#).

**Previous Ranking:** 9<sup>th</sup> in the nation with 4.9 percent of bridges rated as structurally deficient as of [December 2017](#).

**Source:** [Federal Highway Administration](#)

**Methodology note:** Historically the Federal Highway Administration has published data regarding the percentage of bridges deemed to be “structurally deficient.” Those measures served as the basis of our bridge quality rating. However, the FHA in 2018 changed its rating dimensions to “good,” “fair,” and “poor.”

---

### Goal: Washington will rank among the 10 states with the highest percentage of roads in “good” or “very good” condition.

---



39<sup>th</sup>

**Rationale:** A well-maintained road system is a critical element of the state’s transportation infrastructure, necessary for the safe and efficient movement of people and goods.

**Current Ranking:** 39<sup>th</sup> in the nation with 53.0 percent of highways rated in good condition or better in [2017](#).

**Previous Rankings:** 37<sup>th</sup> in the nation with 52.4 percent of highways rated in good condition or better in [2016](#). Washington ranked 37<sup>th</sup> in the nation with 52.7 percent of highways rated in good condition or better in [2015](#).

**Source:** [Federal Highway Administration](#)

---

### Goal: Washington will rank among the 10 states with the shortest commute travel times per person.

---



42<sup>nd</sup>

**Rationale:** Average commute time is a measure of the functional efficiency of the transportation system. The measure is not mode-specific and simply looks at time to work.

**Current Ranking:** 42<sup>nd</sup> in the nation with an average statewide commute time of 27.9 minutes as reported in the [2017 American Community Survey](#).

**Previous Rankings:** 42<sup>nd</sup> in the nation with an average statewide commute time of 27.8 minutes as reported in the [2016 American Community Survey](#). Washington ranked 40<sup>th</sup> in the nation with an average statewide commute time of 27.1 minutes in [2015](#).

**Source:** [U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey](#)

# BENCHMARKS FOR A BETTER WASHINGTON

## Business Costs

**Goal: Washington will maintain its rank among the 10 states with the lowest electricity rates (industrial and commercial).**



2<sup>nd</sup>

**Rationale:** Electrical power represents the primary energy cost for most businesses.

**Current Ranking:** 2<sup>nd</sup> in the nation for lowest industrial and commercial electricity rates based on [2017 data](#) (6.2 cents per kilowatt hour).

**Previous Rankings:** 2<sup>nd</sup> in the nation for lowest industrial and commercial electricity rates based on [2016 data](#) (6.8 cents per kilowatt hour).

Washington also ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> in the nation for lowest industrial and commercial electricity rates based on [2015 data](#) (6.6 cents per kilowatt hour).

**Source:** [Washington State Economic Climate Study, November 2018](#)

**Goal: Washington will stay out of the 10 states with the highest state & local business tax burden relative to private sector gross state product.**



33<sup>rd</sup>

**Rationale:** Business tax burden is a defining factor in employer decisions to keep or create jobs in a given location. A competitive business tax burden will encourage growth in Washington and better enable employers to be successful and expand here.

**Current Ranking:** 33<sup>rd</sup> based on the state and local business taxes paid as a percent of private sector GSP (4.8 percent in [FY 2017](#)). The state and local business taxes paid as a percent of private sector GSP was lower in 32 other states.

**Previous Rankings:** 42<sup>nd</sup> based on the state and local business taxes paid as a percent of private sector GSP (5.5 percent) in [FY 2016](#). Washington ranked 41<sup>st</sup> based on the state and local business taxes paid as a percent of private sector GSP (5.5 percent) in [FY 2015](#).

**Source:** [Council on State Taxation \(COST\)](#)

**Methodology note:** COST revised the method by which sales tax is calculated between business purchases and consumer purchases. This methodology change appears to be the significant driver of the improvement in this year's ranking.

**Goal: Washington will not be among the 10 states with the highest unemployment insurance tax rates.**



42<sup>nd</sup>

**Rationale:** High unemployment insurance taxes contribute to high business costs. Reducing this cost will encourage employers to keep and create jobs here.

**Current Ranking:** 42<sup>nd</sup> in the nation (or 9<sup>th</sup> most expensive) with an average UI tax rate of \$558 per full-time employee in [2017](#).

**Previous Rankings:** 41<sup>st</sup> in the nation (or 10<sup>th</sup> most expensive) with an average UI tax rate of \$546 per full-time employee in [2016](#). Washington ranked 45<sup>th</sup> in the nation (or 6<sup>th</sup> most expensive) with an average UI tax rate of \$632 per full-time employee in [2015](#).

**Source:** [U.S. Department of Labor, Employment & Training Administration](#)

**Goal: Washington will not be among the 10 states with the highest worker's compensation benefits paid.**



50<sup>th</sup>

**Rationale:** The cost of Washington's worker's compensation policies to employers is directly related to the amount of benefits paid out.

**Current Ranking:** Washington is the most expensive state in the nation for worker's compensation benefits paid. In [2016](#), Washington businesses paid an average of \$774 per covered worker. This amount has come down slightly in recent years.

**Previous Rankings:** The state ranked 50<sup>th</sup> in each of the four previous years. In [2015](#), Washington businesses paid \$789 on average per covered worker. In [2014](#), the average cost was \$825 per covered worker.

**Source:** [National Academy of Social Insurance](#)



# BENCHMARKS FOR A BETTER WASHINGTON

## Growth & Innovation

**Goal: Washington will rank in the top 10 states for total private sector (non-government) job growth.**



**Rationale:** Private sector job growth is a fundamental driver and measure of economic growth. It is also a key driver of state revenue growth.

**Current Ranking:** 2<sup>nd</sup> in the nation based on 3.2 percent private sector (non-government) job growth year-over-year from [January 2018 to January 2019](#).

**Previous Ranking:** 5<sup>th</sup> in the nation based on 2.7 percent private sector (non-government) job growth year-over-year from [December 2016 to December 2017](#). Washington ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> in the nation based on 3.2 percent private sector (non-government) job growth year-over-year from [December 2015 to December 2016](#).

**Source:** [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)

**Goal: Washington will maintain its rank among the top 10 states in the number of patents granted annually to inventors residing in the state.**



**Rationale:** Patents are a symbol of innovation and a leading indicator of future economic potential.

**Current Ranking:** 3<sup>rd</sup> in the nation based on the number of patents issued per 100,000 residents in [FY 2018](#). Washington was issued 98.7 utility, design, plant, and reissue patents per 100,000 residents.

**Previous Ranking:** Washington also ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> in [FY 2017](#), issuing 105.5 patents per 100,000 residents.

**Source:** [The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office](#)