



Washington State  
Transportation Commission

# Where the Rubber Meets the Road

2023 Reflections and Recommendations



# Message from the Transportation Commission Chair



On behalf of the Transportation Commission, I am pleased to submit our 2023 Annual Report, which contains recommendations based on the meetings and discussions we have had throughout the state this year. The Washington State Transportation Commission looks at the entire transportation system statewide, from city streets and sidewalks to ferries, marine ports, and airports.

We are hearing several themes wherever we go across the state and across the agencies responsible for providing Washington's transportation system and services: We need a transportation system that is fully funded, climate ready, and safe for all users. This is where the rubber really meets the road; our long-term vision and our immediate needs have converged presenting opportunities in transportation.

Sustainable funding for transportation via a Road Usage Charge remains at the top of the Commission's priority list. The Commission continues its research and testing to inform a successful launch of a RUC program in the near future. The need to identify revenue replacement for the gas tax is becoming more critical with each passing year as 2035 and our state's zero emissions mandate is fully implemented.

Taking a long-term view, many of our past recommendations continue to be high priorities. For example, traffic fatalities on Washington roadways are continuing to increase, and the Commission urges action to prioritize equity considerations and invest in solutions that will produce timely and effective results.

This year the Commission visited Ellensburg, Friday Harbor, Vancouver and Pasco. We found communities that are thriving and growing at unprecedented rates and have strong local and regional visions they are striving to achieve with intergovernmental cooperation. They are eager to advance innovation, support clean energy solutions and foster stronger industry and education partnerships to create high-quality jobs and develop more inclusive prosperity.

Communities around the state are also facing challenges and barriers. We continue to see vast differences in the needs of urban and rural communities. This report captures some of the challenges we have heard and our policy and financial recommendations for addressing them and developing the transportation system our growing population demands.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D. Young'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the 'y'.

Deborah Young, Chair  
Washington State Transportation Commission

# Table of Contents

<b>Big Ideas</b> .....	2
<b>Recommendations</b> .....	5
<b>Snapshot of Regional Priorities</b> .....	10
<b>Overview of 2023 Work and Activities</b> .....	20
• Tolling and Ferry Fare Actions .....	20
• Road Usage Charge Assessment .....	22
• Washington Transportation Plan .....	23
• West Coast Transportation Network Plan Scoping Effort .....	24
• Route Jurisdiction Study .....	24
• Autonomous Vehicle Work Group .....	24
• Ferry Riders' Opinion Group .....	26
• Naming Transportation Facilities .....	27
<b>Local Partners in Transportation</b> .....	28
• Ellensburg .....	28
• Friday Harbor .....	29
• Vancouver .....	30
• Pasco .....	31
<b>Commission Roles and Responsibilities</b> .....	32
<b>Commissioners</b> .....	33

# Big Ideas

*Our partners and colleagues have provided insightful input over the last year, leading to our three Big Ideas that we believe must be acted upon to sustain and evolve our transportation system.*

## Create a Regenerative Mobility Ecosystem

Washington state has demonstrated leadership in its innovative use of state highway right of ways for expanded and accelerated broadband deployment, and there is more we can do. Highway right of way (ROW) can also be used for solar placement in strategic locations, advancing our green energy sustainability efforts. Rest areas, park-and-ride lots, and ferry terminals utilizing solar canopies should also be considered. The combined effect of this widespread solar deployment could lead to the creation of “transmission corridors” in which transportation facilities could generate electricity and contribute to the statewide grid to meet growing demand.

As we consider ways to fully utilize state-owned property and specifically right of way property, we can do so with the support of the Federal Highway Administration, which expanded the definition of “compatible uses” of the highway ROW to include projects and infrastructure that address the climate crisis, the digital divide, and that will enhance the resilience of the energy grid. A new class of priority uses for the ROW, called Clean Energy and Connectivity projects, was formally designated by FHWA creating flexibility in federal permitting.



Mukilteo Ferry Terminal

## The following actions are recommended

**Direct the development of a Regenerative Mobility Ecosystem Blueprint to serve as a guide for long-term investments aimed at expanding the use of state-owned property to expand clean energy regeneration, support climate goals, and enhance capacity for EV charging. The creation of the Blueprint would include taking the following recommended actions:**

- Utilizing ROW solar-mapping tools to determine strategic locations across the state for the placement of solar charging infrastructure, with a long-term goal of creating transmission corridors along our highways and assets that will support the state’s grid. Additional opportunities for solar placement include canopy solar structures at park and ride lots, ferry terminals, and rest areas to support EV charging.
- Digitize the inventory of all state-owned parcels, in particular those parcels owned by WSDOT.
- Identifying ROW opportunity locations statewide to create and enhance the establishment of pollinator colonies and natural ecosystems within highway aprons and strategic right of way locations.
- Assess the feasibility and identify strategic locations for the possible placement of wireless, inductive charging in roadway travel lanes and at ferry terminals.

## Advance Equity in Transportation

In recent years, the cost of living has skyrocketed in Washington state. From 2019 to 2022 median home prices in Washington increased by nearly 63% while average wages saw just a 12% increase. In line with this, a recent study by the University of Washington found that 28% of Washington households do not have adequate earnings to meet the minimum cost of living, up from 22% in 2019.<sup>1</sup> Considering current economic trends, as the state expands the use of tolling and facing growing ferry revenue needs which ferry fares must contribute to, we must identify options for providing relief to those who need it most.

Additionally, as policy is developed and implemented, it is critical that we ensure those impacted, especially the underrepresented and historically marginalized, have access to state transportation policy development efforts at the earliest stages to craft sustainable and informed policy.



Ben Franklin Transit

### The following actions are recommended

- **Advance work to develop and design a low-income tolling program for all existing and future toll facilities.**
  - Building on the recommendations from the Commission's 2021 Low Income Toll Program Study for I-405 & SR 167 Express Toll Lanes study, with funding and direction, the Commission is poised to develop and advance a low-income tolling program in collaboration with WSDOT. More information on this can be found in the Commission's **2024 Tolling Report**.
- **Direct an assessment of possible approaches for a low-income ferry fare pilot program.**
  - Given rising ferry fares and the associated impacts on riders, and in alignment with the Commission's work to advance considerations for a low-income tolling program, a low-income ferry fare program is needed to support fair and equitable access. The Commission set forth its intent to assess and establish a low-income ferry fare pilot program in 2020 (WAC 468-300-010) dependent upon legislative direction and funding.
- **Enable the Transportation Commission to establish a Statewide Transportation Equity Advisory Committee (STEAC).**
  - This committee would provide proactive, early, and ongoing advice, guidance, and recommendations through an equity lens on the many interdisciplinary policy issues the WSTC has jurisdiction over, including tolling, ferry-fare setting, long-range planning, statewide transportation policy development, and special studies, such as road usage charging. With direction and funding, the Commission could establish this body by 2025.

<sup>1</sup> Kucklick, A., Manzer L., Mast, A. (2023). Overlooked & Undercounted: Struggling to Make Ends Meet in Washington State, University of Washington, School of Social Work. [https://selfsufficiencystandard.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/WA2021\\_Demo\\_SSS.pdf](https://selfsufficiencystandard.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/WA2021_Demo_SSS.pdf)

## Increase Funding Flexibility & Opportunities for Rural Washington

Thirty of the thirty-nine counties in Washington state are considered rural, and the infrastructure backlog and needs in rural parts of the state and in small towns continues to grow. Rural roads face increasing risks for failure, including washouts due to slope erosion; aging bridges that serve as vital links; lack of all-weather roads; growing occurrences of wide-spread fires; etc.

During each of the Commission's local meetings held across the state this year, many local and county leaders reinforced the need for additional flexibility and funding opportunities for rural transportation projects. The ability to take advantage of federal funding opportunities is also a challenge given the limited resources of many rural jurisdictions combined with the complexity of the federal grant application process and subsequent reporting and compliance requirements. Additionally, the ability of rural communities and small towns to raise their own tax revenues through local option taxes is limited by the size of their populations.

The growing needs of our state's small towns should be prioritized to create more reliable access to rural communities, improve freight movement, and increase safety on rural highways.



*Doe Bay Creek Road, Orcas Island*

## The following actions are recommended

- **Create a Statewide Rural Resilience (RRR) Program.**
  - Dedicate funding for regional transportation planning organizations to address critical resilience projects in rural areas.
  - Establish a customized rural project prioritization system that prioritizes and ranks rural projects under a customized set of criteria compared with those used for prioritizing projects in urban and suburban areas.
  - Support rural communities in identifying and applying for federal and state grants and provide ongoing technical assistance to manage them once awarded.
- **Implement a Fund Exchange Program.**
  - Establish a program that will facilitate the exchange of constrained federal dollars for more flexible state funding sources for identified local projects. Lessons learned from the current WSDOT pilot should be considered in setting up this program. Projects should be part of an adopted local plan and be included in the Transportation Improvement Programs (TIP). Agency and project eligibility should be as broad and inclusive as possible.
  - Many states that have implemented fund exchange programs see benefits including lower oversight costs and improved cost effectiveness, especially for smaller projects. Eleven state Departments of Transportation (DOTs) have developed federal fund exchange (or swap) programs.
    - Exchange programs for locally administered federal aid projects allow local agencies to exchange federal dollars for state dollars. Each state identifies an exchange rate, which is the ratio of state dollars that can be exchanged for federal dollars. Exchange rates vary between states ranging from an equal exchange (1:1) to 75 cents of state dollars for a federal dollar (3:4). Where the exchange rate is not 1:1, the difference is often used by states to offset program administration costs (FHWA, 2018).

# Recommendations

*In addition to the Big Ideas outlined in this Annual Report, the Transportation Commission is directed in law to provide the Governor and the Legislature with policy and fiscal guidance in seven issue areas, which this section offers further thought on:*

- Transportation finance
- Preserving, maintaining, and operating the statewide transportation system
- Transportation infrastructure needs
- Promoting best practices for adoption and use by transportation-related agencies and programs
- Transportation efficiencies that will improve service delivery and/or coordination
- Improved planning and coordination among transportation agencies and providers
- Use of intelligent transportation systems and other technology-based solutions

## Transportation Finance

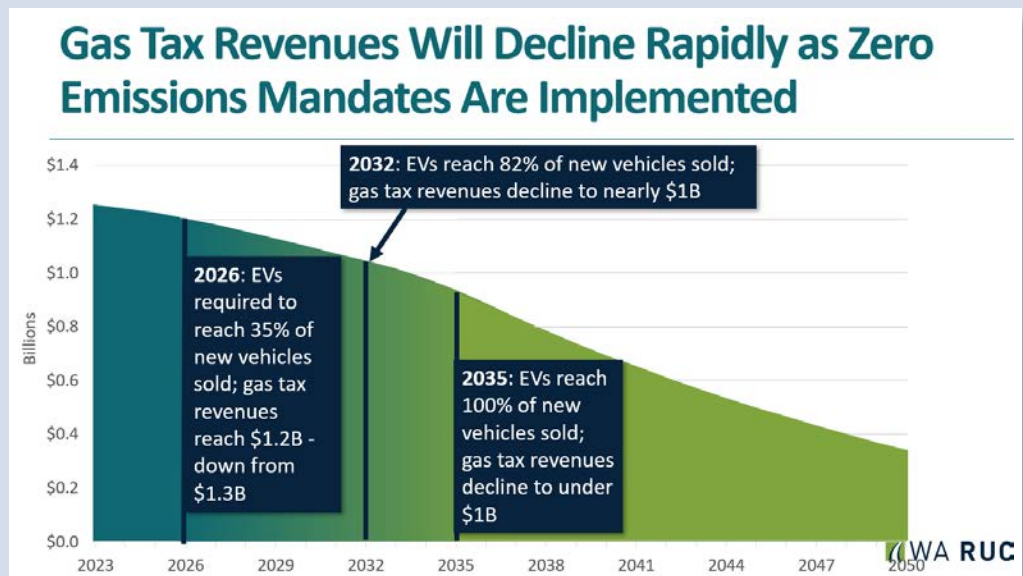
### Expand transportation funding tools

The Legislature has invested significant dollars in our state transportation system, yet rising costs are challenging how far those investments can go. Roughly \$1.1 billion per fiscal year is needed just to meet current maintenance and preservation needs of our state highway system. Adding to the funding challenge is the fact that declining gas tax revenues will accelerate year to year as our statewide vehicle fleet transitions to more fuel-efficient and zero-emission vehicles, with a requirement that all new cars be zero-emission by 2035. This reality creates an urgency around the need to establish a sustainable and equitable long-term funding source for our highways, bridges, and ferry system.

The most viable and promising replacement to the gas tax is a Road Usage Charge (RUC). Legislation to implement an initial RUC program has been introduced over the past three legislative sessions (2021, 2022 and 2023), based on Transportation Commission studies conducted over the past decade, but no program has been enacted yet. In the meantime, the Commission is wrapping up its current RUC research and will be seeking further federal funding to support the state's anticipated transition to a RUC in the near future.

The following actions are recommended:

- **Implement a Road Usage Charge (RUC) Program to begin in 2025.**
  - Delivers funding sustainability by shifting from reliance on the consumption of fossil fuel to charging all passenger vehicles for miles driven, regardless of their mpg or fuel source.
  - Action is needed to authorize the launch of an initial RUC program in which drivers of vehicles that get 25 mpg or better can volunteer to pay a RUC in lieu of the gas tax.
  - To ensure funding solvency, a 10-year transition plan needs to be set forth laying out how Washington state can systematically move the statewide vehicle fleet from the gas tax to a RUC program by 2035, which is when our state will require all new vehicles be zero-emission.



# Preserving, maintaining, and operating the statewide transportation system

## Preserve what we have

Washington state owns a transportation system that would cost over \$200 billion to replace today, making it critically important that we maintain what we have. The Legislature took a significant step toward meeting maintenance and preservation needs with the 2022 Move Ahead Washington funding package, but the aging transportation system's needs are accelerating. The Washington State Department of Transportation estimates the unfunded need for preservation and maintenance to be at \$11 billion over the next 10 years.

Ongoing efforts to improve the delivery of maintenance and preservation projects needs to be continued. There is one simple thing that can be done to save the state over \$20 million a year by limiting pavement damage without compromising public safety: Phase out the use of studded snow tires on public roadways.

The following actions are recommended:

- **The Commission continues to recommend the Legislature and Governor prohibit the sale of studded tires and phase out their use within five years after they are no longer sold.**
  - The current \$5 fee established in 2016 on the sale of every studded tire in Washington state covers only a fraction of the costs in damage they cause to the public roads and highways. Unaddressed, this damage adds to the safety challenges facing our transportation system.
  - More than a dozen states have banned tires with metal studs. Studies show all-weather tires perform better than studded tires in most winter driving conditions in Washington state because they have better contact with the road surface. There are now more options for driving on ice such as snow socks, tire straps, and traction mats.



*Studded Tire Wear, State Route 904 North of Cheney*



*Washington State Ferries docking in Seattle.*

## Building the Future of Washington State Ferries

Ferries serve as a critical marine highway system connecting our island communities and towns across the Puget Sound. The Legislature has provided significant funding over the next several years for new ferries, and the ferry system is making important changes to its hiring and retention programs. But many of these solutions will take several years to fully implement. Ferry fares contribute significantly to the operations of our state ferry system, which is facing challenges such as staffing shortages, limited vessel availability, and associated service disruptions. Affordability by riders is also a concern.

The following actions are recommended:

- **Address access and connectivity challenges** at ferry terminals by identifying ways to enhance and support access to transit services in ferry-served communities and facilitating the provision of last mile connections that will allow riders to safely and conveniently walk-on to the ferry.
- **Fully implement the WSF Work Force Plan** to build a stable, experienced workforce that will support WSF's ability to provide operational reliability. Training and professional development are particularly important for ensuring a sustainable pipeline of employees for the future. Also, extend funding for the Pre-Apprenticeship & Support Services (PASS) Program to WSF to provide financial support and training to women, minorities, and socially and economically disadvantaged individuals seeking to secure required credentials.



- **Assess how locally operated Passenger-Only Ferry Service can support and augment the movement of people across the Puget Sound area in a coordinated manner with WSF.** Passenger-only ferry service has been successfully implemented in the Puget Sound by local operators, and the demand for additional service has grown. As expansion is considered by local operators, a system-wide service assessment is needed to determine where, when, and how growth in passenger-only ferry service aligns with and can integrate with WSF service. The assessment should identify how the state's goal to reduce vehicle miles traveled and emissions can be supported by the advancement of passenger-only ferries.
  - The assessment should build upon recent studies of passenger-only ferry service options.
  - The assessment should review the current level of service provided by WSF and local passenger-only ferry operators and identify strategic opportunities and locations for potential future expansion of passenger-only service on a systemwide level.
  - The assessment should address the circumstantial impacts that will emerge with expanded passenger-only ferry service, and identify possible mitigations, such as approaches to addressing last-mile connections and land-side transit service needs.

## Promoting best practices for adoption and use by transportation-related agencies and programs

### Continue to Monitor Autonomous Vehicle Developments in Other States to Inform the Development of Best Practices and Build Knowledge

Since 2018, the legislatively directed Autonomous Vehicle (AV) Work Group has fostered collaboration with partner states, peer agencies, and technology developers to identify best practices and develop and recommend consensus-based approaches to managing the operation of AVs. The AV Work Group came to an end per current law in December 2023, but given the ongoing development of AVs, the need to stay abreast of developments will be important for Washington state as policies and regulatory structures continue to evolve over time.

The following actions are recommended:

- **Identify a lead state agency to be responsible for monitoring the continued scan of national developments and efforts in other states, with updates due to the Legislature each session to inform the development of policies into the future.**



*Autonomous Vehicle operating in city of Seattle.*

- This monitoring effort will ensure Washington is current with lessons learned and will assist state agencies and policy makers as they continue to actively engage in dialogues with industry organizations and representatives and other states.
- Direct a state-sponsored and managed AV pilot project in multiple locations statewide.
- Integrate public engagement as a core component of a pilot. The objective of this pilot program would be to provide the public first-hand experience with AVs, enable the exploration of possible operational considerations unique to Washington in preparation for future AV deployment, and identify approaches to harnessing AV opportunities that increase equity and access.

### Enhance and Strengthen Traffic Safety Requirements

Over the course of just a few years, traffic fatalities have increased 29% from 538 in 2019 to 750 in 2022, according to Washington Traffic Safety Commission, reaching a 20-year high. During this time, all high-risk behaviors and factors contributing to fatal crashes have increased, including distracted driving and impaired driving. Young driver fatalities are also increasing, and pedestrian fatalities are at historic highs. The Commission continues to support a data-driven approach to solutions, with equity considerations at the center of all policies in addressing these disturbing trends.

The following actions are recommended:

- **Re-Institute funding for Driver Training programs in public schools.**
  - While Driver Training programs received some attention last Legislative Session, the Commission urges prioritization of programs that ensure all young drivers are getting trained properly, regardless of ability to pay, by re-instituting driver training programs in public schools. Currently, only 30 school districts of more than 300 in Washington are offering Driver Training. The average cost for private driver training programs is \$700. Equity should be a central tenant in funding drivers education in public schools to ensure cost is not a barrier for communities in the greatest need.



*Driver training in Washington*



*Washington State Patrol ignition interlock devices prevent impaired driving.*

- **Reduce Washington's blood alcohol concentration (BAC) limit from .08% to .05% BAC.**
  - Blood alcohol concentration limits also received attention last session. The Commission continues to support specific legislation consistent with National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) recommendations that states lower the blood alcohol concentration (BAC) limit from .08 to .05 to save lives and increase road safety. In Washington state in 2022, 352 fatalities involved drug-positive or alcohol impaired drivers, higher than any year in the past decade. Crash risk increases substantially for drivers with a BAC of .005-.079. Impaired drivers are more likely to speed, less able to react and control their vehicles, and less likely to wear seat belts. With the implementation of a similar law, Utah has experienced significant decreases in fatal crashes, nearly a 20 percent reduction.

## Efficiencies to improve service delivery and coordination

### Leverage Technology to Advance the Evolution of Public Transportation

The notion of public transit services is expanding and redefining what public transport is. Evolving approaches to micro-transit services utilizing small vehicles and vans create new opportunities to access underserved communities more readily. Benton-Franklin Transit's CONNECT and King County Metro's Metro Flex program provide on-demand neighborhood transit service for the same cost as a bus trip.

Additionally, technology advancements are enabling the expansion of on-demand transit services. There are many successful examples of recently implemented and planned services as reported by the National Renewable Energy Lab and technology company Pantonium Inc. Real-time rider demand informs flexible bus routes, and the use of smartphone applications that integrate real-time, multi-modal service information provide passengers more certainty around connections within their trip and the modal options within a larger network of buses, trains, and last-mile options.



*King County Metroflex on-demand neighborhood transit services*



*King County Metroflex Program*

The following actions are recommended:

- **Assess the potential for expansion of emerging transit service approaches** that incorporate technology, micro transit, and enhance on-demand capabilities. The assessment should include a focus on approaches that increase access and utilization of transit services within underserved communities and assist with filling last-mile service gaps within and between communities.

# Use of intelligent transportation systems and other technology-based solutions



WattEV public truck charging depot in California

## Next Generation Transportation

Both commercial and personal vehicle technology continue to evolve, with driver assist technology doing more to increase driver safety and awareness and automate more human driver tasks. To fully enable vehicle technology, there is a need for road-side technology infrastructure to be installed so that vehicles and the infrastructure can talk to each other, expanding real-time information to drivers that can increase safety and improve overall traffic operations.

Innovations continue on the vehicle fuel front, with the advancement of alternative fuels that reduce climate impacts but require new infrastructure to support. Washington has been among a few states leading the Electric Vehicle transition, with 18% of its new car sales in the first half of 2023 being either fully electric cars or plug-in hybrids. Policies and investments are needed to fully support and advance a next generation of vehicles and transportation infrastructure.

The following actions are recommended:

- **Support electrification of freight mobility.**
  - Work with private partners to identify, through research and assessment, the most efficient and cost-effective ways to deploy electrification of the freight transportation fleet, including assessing parking and charging needs for freight movers, identifying strategic locations statewide for charging, and assessing possible approaches and infrastructure needs for placement of charging infrastructure designed to charge large trucks in a time-efficient manner.
- **Driver Training should be reimagined to meet the needs of the next generation of drivers.**
  - Advancements and recent studies in Advanced Driver Assistance Systems (ADAS) and increases in micro-mobility devices, biking and walking, and other new transportation technologies require an update of our state's Driver Training programs to ensure new drivers are adequately prepared for the growing technology and automation coming to vehicles and our transportation system.
- **Pilot test and advance telecommunications technology.**
  - The placement of roadside technology infrastructure is needed maximize driver assist and driver information technology and support the future advancement of increased vehicle automation. With the use of roadside telecommunications, safety-enhancing services can be deployed more consistently and efficiently, including:
    - Warnings as a vehicle approaches a work zone
    - Sending speed alerts to vehicles when approaching curves
    - Sending real-time road condition updates and warnings
    - Providing advanced warning for red-light runners
    - Providing emergency and transit vehicle preemption
    - Providing warning messages when approaching pedestrians, cyclists, and other vulnerable road users.



WSDOT driver information signage on State Route 527

# Snapshot of Regional Priorities

*In Washington, the Legislature established Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) in 1990. In larger urban areas, they are integrated with the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) to carry out both state and federal planning requirements.*

*RTPOs and MPOs are made up of local elected officials, tribal nations, transit agency leaders, port officials, and business and community leaders who come together to make transportation decisions for the region they represent.*

***This section provides a snapshot of recent activities, challenges, and priorities as provided by the 18 RTPOs and MPOs.***

***Consistent with their diversity, some of the information provided by each organization will vary.***

## **The Benton-Franklin Council of Governments (BFCOG) - MPO and RTPO for Benton and Franklin Counties**

### **2023 Top Successes**

1. BFCOG updated its Public Engagement Plan (PEP). The PEP outlines how BFCOG will engage and involve the community in all phases of the regional planning process.
2. BFCOG updated its Congestion Management Process (CMP). The CMP is a regionally collaborative planning process in which local jurisdictions identify a unified regional approach to solving congestion throughout the Tri-Cities.
3. BFCOG completed its 2023 Carbon Reduction Program (CRP) Call for Projects. The 2023 Call for Projects allocated over \$2.2 million in regional transportation funding to local projects specifically aimed at reducing carbon emissions in the Tri-Cities.



*I-90 Vantage Bridge Deck Replacement*

### **2024 Top Issues/Challenges/Needs**

1. After 34 years, the cumulative effects of inflation, increased coordination of transportation and land use at the regional level, and additional responsibilities have rendered the RTPO Program appropriation of \$4.4 million severely inadequate. RTPOs are requesting a long-overdue realignment of the program appropriation with legislated responsibilities at \$11 million.
2. The Benton-Franklin area is experiencing one of the highest growth rates in the country. This presents challenges for the area as it works to accommodate growth while maintaining quality of life. The Benton-Franklin region is working to balance the maintenance of existing infrastructure with the expansion necessary to accommodate continued growth.



*Concept of Confluence Parkway Project, City of Wenatchee*

## **The Chelan-Douglas Transportation Council (CDTC) - MPO and RTPO for Chelan, Douglas Counties**

### **2023 Top Successes**

1. The City of Wenatchee initiated a \$170 million-plus progressive design-build project to construct a long-standing regional priority, Confluence Parkway, with federal and state Move Ahead Washington funding.
2. CDTC partnered with WSDOT North Central Region to complete a corridor study identifying achievable, cost-effective safety improvements to SR 28 between East Wenatchee and Rock Island, the highway corridor in the region with the highest concentration of severe crashes.
3. CDTC initiated a study of Columbia River crossing options to meet long-term mobility, multimodal connectivity, public safety and economic development needs of an urbanized region growing on both sides of the Columbia River valley.

### **2024 Top Issues/Challenges/Needs**

1. The CDTC region has several well-defined transportation improvements that would be good candidates for federal discretionary grant funding programs, but the cities and counties do not have sources for the non-federal matching funds to qualify.
2. The funding outlook at the state level is murky; this is a challenging time to predict revenue sources that will define the funding and financing capacity for implementation of CDTC's updated Regional Transportation Plan.
3. CDTC, like the other Regional Transportation Planning Organizations around the state, needs adequate funding support from the state. The annual appropriation for the state's RTPO program has not increased since 2004.

**Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments (CWCOG) - MPO for Cowlitz County and Rainier, OR**

**2023 Top Successes**

1. CWCOG was awarded USDOT Safe Streets and Roads for All planning grant to develop a Comprehensive Safety Action Plan for Cowlitz County and six incorporated cities.
2. The region began a new partnership with the Washington Traffic Safety Commission to host the/a Region 3 Target Zero Manager at the MPO.
3. The Mobility Management program in partnership with RiverCities Transit published a series of How to Ride videos to assist in decreasing vehicle miles traveled and provide access to public transportation.



*Lewis and Clark Bridge, State Route 433 spanning the Columbia River*

**2024 Top Issues/Challenges/Needs**

1. Planning funds are needed to update the 20-year-old feasibility study for the T-1 freight corridor Lewis & Clark Bridge replacement project and to determine solutions for interchanges on the Washington and Oregon sides of the bridge. The Lewis & Clark Bridge is an aging (it opened in 1930) and is a functionally obsolete bi-state bridge spanning the Columbia River.
2. An SR 411 corridor study from Kelso to Castle Rock is needed to determine future safety and mobility improvements.
3. Talley Way, a T-2 freight corridor in South Kelso, is also anticipated to have significant traffic increases from industrial development at I-5/Exit 36. Talley Way needs major roadway and safety improvements (center turn lane, bike lanes, curb and gutter, sidewalk, and stormwater upgrades) and a new bridge over the Coweeman River.

**Island Regional Transportation Planning Organization (IRTPO) - Island County**

**2023 Top Successes**

1. IRTPO is currently updating their Regional Transportation Plan. The role of the Regional Transportation Plan is to ensure ongoing coordination and collaboration among all the local and state agencies working to provide safe, efficient, and reliable travel throughout the region. The RTP is expected to be completed in February 2024.



*IRTPO Long Range Transportation Plan*

**2024 Top Issues/Challenges/Needs**

1. As a region, one of the most significant challenges continues to be maintaining access to and from the islands. Residents still have developing public transit services and working to reach more rural areas.

**The Lewis-Clark Valley MPO (LCVMPO) - MPO and RTPO for Asotin County**

**2023 Top Successes**

1. The Lewis Clark Valley MPO (LCVMPO) was awarded funding from the Safe Streets for All (SS4A) program for a Regional Safety Action Plan. This comprehensive plan will cover all roads within the LC Valley region, including local. Once complete, local agencies will be able to apply for implementation grants for projects.
2. The School Safety Study completed last year has led to Safe Routes to Schools funding in the City of Clarkston. These

projects will provide safer passage for children to get to school at Grantham Elementary and Holy Family School.

3. The LCVMPO is partnering with Urban SDK, a traffic management software developer, to do forecasting for the next update rather than a traditional travel demand model.



*Snake River, Clarkston*

**2024 Top Issues/Challenges/Needs**

1. Dam breaching of the four Lower Snake River dams continues to be an issue/discussion that will greatly affect the movement of products from the Palouse area that are currently barged from the Port of Lewiston to the West Coast. The tourism industry will also suffer as a result due to the inability of Riverboat Cruises to continue should the dams be breached.
2. Necessary improvements on SR 129, which is the downtown corridor in Clarkston, as well as accessibility improvements fronting the High School have been delayed by WSDOT beyond the four years of the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).
3. Increased traffic on aging infrastructure continues to be a concern throughout the region.

## Northeast Washington Regional Transportation Planning Organization (NEW RTPO) - Ferry, Pend Oreille, and Stevens Counties

### 2023 Top Successes

1. NEW RTPO secured \$329,000 from USDOT/FHWA to complete a Comprehensive Safety Action Plan for the region.
2. Participated in the WSDOT Chewelah Paving Project meetings. This project will incorporate complete streets concepts into the US 395 arterial that runs through the center of Chewelah.
3. Started a Regional Electric Vehicle Working Group. This group is starting the initial planning work to help our region be ready to utilize all funding opportunities that become available. This is a tough task in an EV-resistant part of the state. Our work also includes civic education on EVs and the facts about EV ownership.



EV Charging Station in Newport

### 2024 Top Issues/Challenges/Needs

1. Above all, STAFF! As with many small, rural organizations, we need more staff to keep up with the transportation planning needs of the community and the administrative demands of federal and state agencies to utilize the resources they offer. We are in the “just getting by” mode and feel that, if properly staffed, we could provide the level of services our community needs.
2. Funding for both planning and implementation (construction) of projects in our region. We are always short of funds to get projects built. We currently have over 100 projects on our Regional TIP with only three funded.
3. We need WSDOT to consider that one solution does not work for both sides of the state. Eastern Washington is a vastly different region than the western side of the state. Other than Spokane, we are very rural and travel great distances for basic services such as healthcare and shopping. We do not have vast public transportation networks to get our people around. This needs to be considered when funding formulas are developed for programs.

## The Okanogan Council of Governments (OCOG) - Okanogan County

### 2023 Top Successes

1. There are good working partnerships between local, state, federal, and tribal governments. Innovative approaches to project coordination and cooperation between agencies help blunt the impact of scarce resources at all levels.



Okanogan Complex Fire near Omak, Source: US Forest Service.

### 2024 Top Issues/Challenges/Needs

1. OCOG continues to advocate for a more equitable base level of funding to support important regional planning efforts for all regions in the state, away from a population-based approach that penalizes more rural regions.
2. Available revenues for local, tribal, and transit system preservation are inadequate to meet the backlog of need, much less address basic system improvements.
3. WSDOT's North Central Region needs funding for maintenance and preservation of the state highway system. Funds are also needed to reconstruct bridges, such as the Methow Valley River bridges on SR 153. SR 153 is a vital lifeline and essential evacuation route for the Methow Valley and is designated as a part of the state scenic and recreational highway system.
4. OCOG is in a wildfire-prone area and the transportation system is subject to closures during fires. Closures impact local access and regional commerce. Roads and transportation facilities adjacent to fires experience flooding, erosion, slides, falling trees/rocks for months after the fires are contained.

## Palouse RTPO (PRTPO) – Asotin, Columbia, Garfield, and Whitman Counties

### 2023 Top Successes

1. PRTPO updated Palouse RTPO website.
2. The region completed the Palouse Active Transportation Plan (website and planning document).
3. Staffing transition for the RTPO was a success. Policy updates, process documentation, technology and software updates, increased engagement with RTPO Board members and agency staff as well as relationship-building to bring local agencies together for planning and discussion of regional transportation topics has been largely successful in 2023.



Pullman Transit boarding at Washington State University

### 2024 Top Issues/Challenges/Needs

1. As the state prioritizes electrification of transit fleet vehicles, rural transit agencies face challenges including local match funding requirements for grants supporting purchase of new electric vehicles, performance issues with electric vehicles and limited options for qualified and/or available maintenance and repair technicians, as well as performance issues related to terrain in rural areas and freezing temperatures.
2. Continued efforts are needed to work towards Target Zero for highways within the Palouse RTPO. Identification and implementation of education and/or infrastructure that reduces traffic accidents caused by distraction, drowsiness, or careless driving are needed.
3. Funding for maintenance and preservation of state and local highways is currently insufficient.

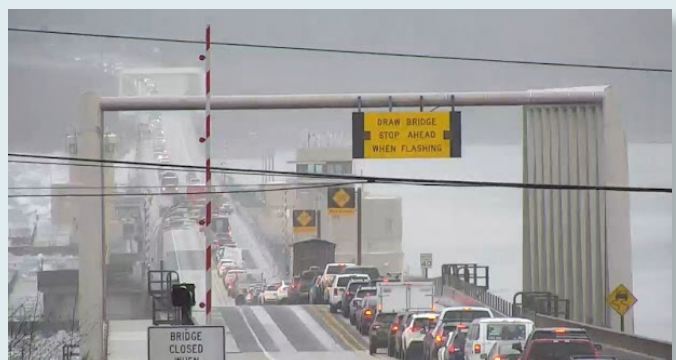
## Peninsula RTPO (PRTPO) – Clallam, Jefferson, Kitsap, Mason Counties

### 2023 Top Successes

1. **Big projects advance.** The Johnson Road/SR 305 Roundabout project opened, right of way for Belfair’s SR 3 Freight Corridor project got underway, and a consortium of PRTPO members secured a RAISE grant to advance the Puget Sound to Pacific Trail.
2. **Federal funding swap...almost!** PRTPO supported member efforts resulting in a federal funding swap pilot program, but it needs to extend at least through December 2026 to fairly judge its value for local project delivery.
3. **Tribal EV-readiness advances.** A tribal team partnered with WSU’s Green Transportation Program to secure a grant to develop transportation electrification plans for the Squaxin Island Tribe, Skokomish Tribe, and Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe to guide future EV investments.

### 2024 Top Issues/Challenges/Needs

1. **Keep safety top of mind:** Fatal crash rates are going up while overall rates are leveling out. Let’s recommit to making our streets and highways safer for all users. State funds support local efforts to tame “Main Street” state highway traffic through our small rural communities.
2. **Improve WSF service reliability:** State ferry routes serving the Peninsula Region are chronically “one boat down,” leaving all but one of our five state routes operating with a single vessel. This creates unacceptable disruptions impacting travelers, commerce, and transit across the region.
3. **Revisit Hood Canal Bridge opening policies with the Coast Guard:** The right-of-passage for oversized sailing yachts needs to be more thoughtfully weighed against the traffic and economic impacts created when the bridge opens, and the policy updated accordingly.



State Route 104, Hood Canal Bridge opening

**Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC)** – MPO and RTPO for King, Pierce, Snohomish, and Kitsap Counties

**2023 Top Successes**

1. Receipt of a Safe Streets and Roads for All grant to develop a Regional Safety Action Plan and support development of local safety action plans.
2. Development of a new, interactive Legacy of Structural Racism report for the region.
3. Updates to PSRC’s federal funding processes to further incorporate equity, including a new Equity Formula Allocation for Federal Transit Administration funds, and an Equity Pilot Program for Federal Highway Administration funds.



*Seattle waterfront in Puget Sound Region*

**2024 Top Issues/Challenges/Needs**

1. Continued work to advance the region’s climate goals and partnership to develop a regional climate action plan under EPA’s Climate Pollution Reduction Grant program.
2. Beginning the development of the Regional Transportation Plan, including further enhancements on safety, climate and equity. This work will reflect updated travel data from the 2023 Household Travel Survey and updated data collection efforts on the regional transportation system.
3. Working to support PSRC’s 86 member jurisdictions as they work to meet the state-required update of their local comprehensive plans by the end of 2024. PSRC will work closely with jurisdictions on their updates, including review and certification of local plans for consistency with VISION 2050.

**Quad County RTPO (QUADCO)** – Adams, Grant, Kittitas, and Lincoln Counties

**2023 Top Successes**

1. The region adopted an updated Human Services Transportation Plan (HSTP).
2. QUADCO coordinated and funded four planning studies within the jurisdiction of member agencies. These planning studies were finalized and included such topics as transportation plans and safety plans.
3. QUADCO supported the development of four STBG-TA projects within the region.

**2024 Top Issues/Challenges/Needs**

1. Funding is needed for road and transportation improvements across the region continues to be a primary concern for regional agencies.
2. Safety and capacity of I-90 continues to be a concern. This is the backbone roadway connecting QUADCO as well as much of the eastern portion of the state with the western portion of the state.



*I-90 and State Route 906*



## Skagit Council of Governments (SCOG) – MPO and RTPO for Skagit County

### 2023 Top Successes

1. **Mount Vernon Library Commons Project.** The commons project received additional funding in 2023. Construction continues with this multi-use infrastructure project that will bring public parking, an electric vehicle (EV) mega-charging site, electric bicycle charging and parking, and a regional transit stop.

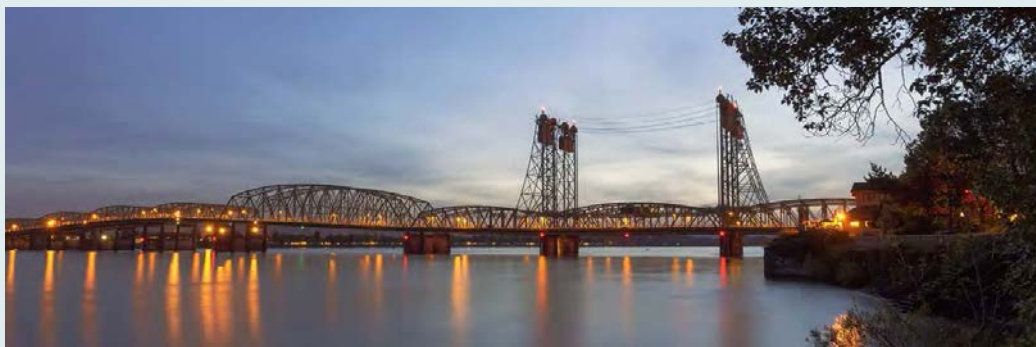


*Mount Vernon Library Commons*

2. **South Commercial Avenue Corridor Plan.** Additional funding has been received to further the multimodal and complete streets investments of Commercial Avenue, which is the main street and state highway leading to the Anacortes ferry terminal.

### 2024 Top Issues/Challenges/Needs

1. **Adequate funding for local transportation system Needs.** Maintenance and preservation needs for these local facilities are estimated at \$27 million per year. Of these local needs, nearly 60% are being met with available revenues (roughly \$16 million) and the other 40% are unmet needs (roughly \$11 million).
2. **Adequate funding for regional planning.** Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPO) across the state need adequate funding from the state to remain a vital partner in transportation planning activities. The RTPO program has not increased since 2004.



*I-5 Bridge spanning the Columbia River*

## Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council (SWRTC) – MPO for Clark County and RTPO for Clark, Skamania, and Klickitat Counties

### 2023 Top Successes

1. SWRTC secured strategic grants to update regional traffic safety planning under the federal Safe Streets and Roads 4-All initiative and has launched a regional pilot program for traffic signal timing to improve performance and reduce carbon emissions on priority regional corridors.
2. The region is wrapping up Regional Transportation Plans for Clark, Skamania and Klickitat Counties, setting in motion 20-year transportation system investment strategies in support of community and economic vitality goals.
3. SWRTC deployed thousands of Household Travel field surveys within Clark County to gain a deeper understanding of regional travel patterns and choices, which will help inform future planning and travel forecasting work.
4. Continued robust collaboration with regional and bi-state partners to advance bi-state bridge replacement activities for I-5 and Hood River/White Salmon bridge replacement projects and supported start-up collaboration for the Bridge of the Gods seismic and retrofit feasibility studies.

### 2024 Top Issues/Challenges/Needs

1. Funding stability is needed from state and federal programs. Federal appropriations below Transportation Act authorization limits the region's ability to fund strategic investments to support economic growth. State funding that supports existing RTPO mandates and new law requirements is vital yet woefully out of date relative to existing needs.

## Southwest Washington RTPO – RTPO for Cowlitz, Grays Harbor, Lewis, Pacific, and Wahkiakum Counties

### 2023 Top Successes

1. SW RTPO acquired construction funding for the Aberdeen US 12 Highway-Rail Grade Separation Project. This project will improve safety and work to address significant congestion issues in the community.
2. The region started Regional Trails Plan for the five-county planning area (Cowlitz, Grays Harbor, Lewis, Pacific, Wahkiakum) with a focus on identifying future trails to improve regional connections and developing scoping reports to assist with key trails implementation.
3. The Mobility Management program made significant progress in coordinating regional approaches to public transportation, including the development of a Trip Assistant website and materials for transit agencies to distribute: 1) Slap bands and handouts for use on flag stop routes; and 2) Youth Activity Book.

### 2024 Top Issues/Challenges/Needs

1. SWRTPO, like the other Regional Transportation Planning Organizations around the state, needs adequate funding support from the state. The annual appropriation for the state's RTPO program has not increased since 2004. The five-county RTPO includes 30 cities/towns and 12 ports with unique opportunities and transportation needs.
2. Local agencies are struggling with securing enough funding for maintenance and preservation while working to address larger transportation system needs.
3. Improvements to, or around, congested I-5 interchanges in Cowlitz and Lewis Counties (Exits 21, 22, 39, 72 and 82) are needed.



US 12 Highway-Rail Grade Separation in East Aberdeen

WSDOT to pursue a Safety Collaboration Pilot to explore areas where the agencies can achieve greater alignment in project identification and programming.

3. **Leveraging Grant Funds:** SRTC has continued working with local public and private sector partners to implement a \$2.5 million grant to install Electric Vehicle charging equipment at 51 sites throughout the region. The council was awarded a \$500,000 grant to develop a Regional Safety Action Plan and is leading a local Clean Energy Coalition to facilitate awareness of upcoming grant opportunities and potential partnerships.

### 2024 Top Issues/Challenges/Needs

1. **Expand Transportation Safety Programs:** Transportation-related injuries and fatalities continue to trend upward in the Spokane Region as well as throughout the state. Since 2014, roadway fatalities and serious injuries crashes have increased by 62.5% in SRTC's planning area. SRTC firmly believes that improving conditions requires more effective collaboration strategies, additional financial resources, and sustained commitments of collaboration between our transportation partners.

2. **Adequate Funding for Maintenance and Preservation:**

A financial analysis completed in 2021 indicated a \$4 billion shortfall in maintenance and preservation funding needed for the Spokane Region over a 23-year period. In response,

SRTC increased the set-aside of STBG funding by 53% to be more supportive of local needs. Although Move Ahead Washington provided an increase in transportation preservation and maintenance funding by \$3 billion, funding levels are not sufficient to maintain the existing transportation system in a state of good repair. As additional funding for preservation and maintenance is considered, SRTC encourages a balanced approach that strategically allocates funding over time, enabling state and local agencies to successfully deliver projects. SRTC also supports strategies such as fund swaps to facilitate efficient program delivery.

## Spokane Regional Transportation Council (SRTC) – MPO and RTPO for Spokane County

### 2023 Top Successes

1. **Improved Consensus on Regional Priorities:** Each year, SRTC assembles the "Unified List of Regional Transportation Priorities & Policy Statements" for the Spokane region. The priorities are developed with input and support from WSDOT, local governments, Chambers of Commerce, and other transportation leaders such as the Washington State Good Roads & Transportation Association. Building consensus in the region ensures funds are allocated to the most critical transportation infrastructure needs.
2. **Piloting Innovative Planning Activities:** SRTC works with local and state partners to identify and explore opportunities to improve our planning activities. SRTC also partnered with



Maple Street Bridge deck replacement in Spokane

- 3. Adequate Funding for RTPOs:** Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) have an important responsibility to provide transportation planning support in rural and tribal areas across the state. Funding allocations, however, have not been increased over time to meet the cost of operations. The original biennial appropriation established for the RTPOs in 1990 was \$3.2 million and the funding in the most recent biennium was set at \$4.9 million. Over the 34-year program history, there were also two RTPOs added, and the responsibilities of these agencies have been expanded. SRTC supports an increase in funding needed for RTPOs to perform their statutory duties.

## Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC) - MPO and RTPO for Thurston County

### 2023 Top Successes

- 1. Regional Trails Plan:** The Thurston Regional Trails Plan is a blueprint for expanding and enhancing a countywide shared use trail network. The original plan was adopted in 2007; on Dec. 1, the Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC) adopted a comprehensive update.
- 2. Martin Way Crossing Strategy:** TRPC was awarded \$700,000 in funding from the Connecting Communities Pilot Program for the Martin Way Crossing Strategy; this will be a continuing partnership between TRPC, the cities of Lacey and Olympia, Thurston County, and Intercity Transit building on the Martin Way Corridor Study begun in 2020. The Martin Way Crossing Strategy will identify appropriate locations for mid-block crossings on Martin Way.
- 3. Commute Trip Reduction:** With increased state funding to support the work, TRPC hired another staff member to help run the commute trip reduction program. Another set of hands and eyes means TRPC will be able to improve its support of the region's existing 150-plus worksites and employee transportation coordinators and find better ways to involve work sites that don't currently participate.



*Chehalis Western Trail, Thurston County*

### 2024 Top Issues/Challenges/Needs

- 1. Adequate Funding for Regional Planning:** Washington state created Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) as a crucial component of comprehensive growth management planning in urban and rural areas. Today, the state has two more RTPOs than existed in 1990, and the responsibilities of these agencies have been expanded through state law. The original biennial appropriation established for RTPOs has only increased by approximately 1.5% per year while inflation has increase at a substantially higher rate. The current state budget allocation to RTPOs is inadequate, which diminishes their capacity to meet legislative responsibilities. State funding of RTPOs needs to be increased substantially to provide the needed capacity.
- 2. Access to Big Data:** Big data - larger, more complex data sets that often come from new data sources - can be used to inform all aspects TRPC's work program, including multimodal and active transportation, congestion, household travel behavior, etc. The cost of obtaining big data, however, can be prohibitive. While TRPC has funded its own access to big data for the last two years, we won't be able to do so again in 2024. Access to big data is becoming a more critical component to transportation planning. Using economies of scale, the state is in a better position to negotiate reasonable costs and access to a big data source that all MPOs and RTPOs could utilize.
- 3. Prioritizing and Maintaining Momentum on I-5 Work, Yelm Bypass, and Roundabouts:** Work on I-5 (Mounts Road through Tumwater) continues to be a priority and need for the Thurston Region. Move Ahead Washington provided a little more than half of the funding needed to complete the design work for the Nisqually Delta bridge replacements and for part time shoulder use on southbound I-5 through Lacey and Olympia. Partial funding was also provided to local agencies to construct three roundabouts on Highway 507 (this will improve 507's function as an emergency detour route when I-5 is shut down). Finally, finishing the Yelm bypass will help route through-traffic around Yelm's downtown, a bottleneck exacerbated when I-5 shuts down. Each of these projects is an essential component in the I-5 work that needs to be fully funded and prioritized so that the work can be completed in an efficient and timely manner.

**Walla Walla MPO and Sub-Regional Transportation Planning Organization (WWVMPO/SRTPO) – MPO and RTPO for Walla Walla County**

**2023 Top Successes**

1. The region supported completion of US 12 (WSDOT) Phase 7 – Nine Mile Hill to Frenchtown – new four-lane highway
2. WWVMPO/ SRTPO supported the reconstruction of roadways and installation of three roundabouts on Alder and Poplar in Walla Walla.
3. The Region supported installation of a mini-roundabout at Wallula Avenue and Gose Street in Walla Walla County.



*Roundabouts at the intersections of Alder/Park, Alder/Palouse, and Poplar/Palouse in Walla Walla*

**2024 Top Issues/Challenges/Needs**

1. Increase Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) funding.
2. Funding needed for US 12 (WSDOT) Corridor Completion – Phase 8 (Wallula to Nine Mile Hill) new four-lane highway and Clinton interchange
3. Funding Need - for Highway Roadway Preservation and Safety (Countywide).

**Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG) – MPO and RTPO for Whatcom County**

**2023 Top Successes**

1. **State and federal grants:** WCOG was awarded just over \$2 million of competitive funding for four important efforts: Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA) Regional Mobility Grant to increase the reach and impact of the Smart Trips transportation demand management program; WTA transit travel training with Whatcom County middle school students; Safe Streets and Roads for All grant to complete a regional Safety Action Plan; a USDOT Strengthening Mobility and Revolutionizing Transportation (SMART) grant to work with WSDOT, BC Ministry of Transportation & Infrastructure, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and Canada Border Services Agency to plan a replacement border wait-time measurement and traveler-information system for the Cascade Gateway.
2. **Continued timely use of federal funding:** WCOG coordinates among local government project sponsors and WSDOT’s Local Programs Office to monitor projects’ progress and help ensure that federal transportation funding allocations are used within the required timeframe. By meeting these

deadlines, WCOG has qualified to receive additional federal funds forfeited by states that did not use them in a timely way (\$3.85 million extra in 2023).

3. **Pilot of video analysis for informing safety improvements:** WCOG partnered with WSDOT Mt. Baker Area and the City of Bellingham to contract for 72-hour video analysis of five intersections at and adjacent to the I-5 – Lakeway Drive interchange. Data-rich summary analyses of near-miss

events were used to recommend site-specific treatments to improve safety for pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles.

**2024 Top Issues/Challenges/Needs**

1. Like MPOs and RTPOs across the state, WCOG will be working to coordinate regional and local-government planning policies and practices in response to 2023 legislated changes to the GMA (climate action, multimodal system performance, vehicle miles traveled forecasting, etc.).
2. WCOG will be working to improve its public engagement – especially with historically underrepresented and vulnerable community members. WCOG will work to maximize the impact of partnerships and innovation to improve connections and dialogue with people whose collective input will better reflect all residents of the region.
3. WCOG, with other RTPOs, is emphasizing the need for RTPO program funding to be realigned with requirements and costs that have increased significantly since the program was established by the Legislature in 1990.
4. With new state requirements to measure and track vehicle miles traveled greenhouse gas emissions, multimodal transportation network activity, and equity-focused demographics, WCOG is exploring new data sources and partnerships.



*Whatcom Transit Authority, Bellingham*

## The Yakima Valley Conference of Governments (YVCOG) – MPO and RTPPO for Yakima County

### 2023 Top Successes

1. Continued our partnership with WSDOT and several member jurisdictions on the SR 12/Naches Active Transportation Corridor Study (Naches) and the SR 24 / Moxee Multimodal Corridor (Moxee, Yakima County) Study. Worked with the Yakama Nation, WSDOT, and the National Park Service to provide planning support to the Yakama Nation-led Heritage Connectivity Trail Project, which aims to create miles of multimodal trails within the Yakama Nation that link to communities and trail systems beyond its boundaries.
2. Completed the 2023 Public Participation Plan Update. The primary document included sections and tables translated into Spanish. A Spanish version of the document will be available on our website by Dec. 31, 2023.
3. An active participant in the Federal Rail Administration's Amtrak Daily Long-Distance Service Study (Northwest Region Stakeholder Work Group). Central Washington (Yakima/ Kittitas Counties) has been without passenger rail service since October 1981. An initial review indicates that our region would be a potential candidate for returning passenger service.



*Greenway Trail along the Yakima River, Yakima, Washington*

### 2024 Top Issues/Challenges/Needs

1. Equity, in many forms, is still an ongoing concern in the Yakima Valley. YVCOG continues to advocate for more equitable funding program opportunities. YVCOG will continue to develop equity in project selection, planning, and improved public outreach and participation.
2. YVCOG and its jurisdictions look to develop a countywide preservation project funding process utilizing annually obligated Surface Transit Block Grant (STBG) funds in conjunction with prioritized construction projects to meet annual regional obligation authority goals. This new process is expected to begin in early 2024.
3. 2024 brings updates to YVCOG's Title VI Plan, 2024-2045 Regional Transportation Plan, and a Regional Safety Action Plan. These will be augmented by new opportunities in the areas of connecting communities' plans, passenger rail corridor planning, and trail/transit expansion and connectivity planning.

# Overview of 2023 Work and Activities

*This section provides an overview of the major work efforts the Commission undertook in 2023. It also serves as the required annual reporting to the Legislature on changes made to toll rates, pursuant to RCW 47.56.855. Further details on tolling and the Commission's tolling-specific recommendations are found in the Commission's 2024 Tolling Report, which can be found on the Commission's website.*

## Tolling and Ferry Fare Actions

As the State Tolling Authority, the Commission is responsible for setting toll rates, toll rate policies, and related fees for all of Washington state's tolled facilities. In addition, the Commission is responsible for setting ferry fares and related policies for the Washington State Ferry (WSF) system. When revising or establishing toll rates and ferry fares, the Commission carefully reviews traffic and revenue projections, considers legal obligations, and conducts outreach to gather input from impacted communities.

Tolls and ferry fares generated a combined \$721 million throughout the 2021-23 biennium and are projected to generate \$819 million throughout the 2023-25 biennium. While this demonstrates significant improvements, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting changes in commute and travel patterns are still being felt on our state's toll and ferry systems to varying degrees. For example, toll traffic on the State Route (SR) 16 Tacoma Narrows Bridge (TNB), the SR 167 High Occupancy Toll (HOT) Lanes, and SR 99 tunnel have fully recovered back to their pre-COVID traffic levels from FY 2019. However, traffic on SR 520 floating bridge and I-405 Express Toll Lanes still lag behind pre-COVID levels. Ferry ridership has also been slow to recover, with current ridership projections for FY 2024 about 21% below pre-COVID levels.

It is still unclear if or how long changes to work and commute patterns will persist. Despite this, tolling and ferry fare revenues remain a significant portion of the state's transportation budget, helping to fund major capital improvements and system operations, and improving traffic flow on key corridors.

In 2023, the Commission:

- Adjusted passenger and vehicle ferry fares, effective October 1, 2023, and October 1, 2024.
- Implemented a toll rate increase on the SR 520 Bridge on July 1, 2023, which was adopted by the Commission in August 2021.
  - The delayed implementation date was enabled by a \$58 million appropriation of federal American Recovery Plan Act funds in the 2021-23 Transportation Budget.
- Initiated a toll rate setting process for the I-405 ETLs / SR 167 HOT lanes, which is expected to conclude in early 2024.

Further detail on the performance and rate-setting activities for each tolled facility can be in the Commission's 2024 Tolling Report.

## SR 16 Tacoma Narrows Bridge (TNB)

The Commission did not make any adjustments to current toll rates for the TNB in 2023 and does not anticipate making any adjustments in 2024.

Compared with the state's other tolled facilities, the TNB has a unique financing structure in that it has scheduled, automatic increases in debt service payments, which has led to toll-rate increases over the years. These toll-rate increases have been necessary to ensure toll revenues can meet the growing debt payments as well as all legal obligations, including covering the costs to maintain and operate the facility.

In 2018, legislation was passed that provided up to \$85 million in loans through 2030, with toll revenues expected to pay off these loans by 2032. Then in 2022, additional legislation was passed that committed \$130 million in General Fund transfers over 10 years (FY 2023 - FY 2032) to the TNB Account with intent for the Commission to adjust toll rates accordingly on the facility. Both the loans and General Fund transfers remain critical to meet financial obligations for the facility at current toll rates. Additional information on this can be found in the TNB Loan Update section of the Commission's 2024 Tolling Report.

## SR 99 Tunnel

The Commission did not make any adjustments to current toll rates for the SR 99 tunnel in 2023 and does not anticipate making any adjustments in 2024. This is primarily due to appropriations provided to the SR 99 tunnel account as a result of the \$76.9 million Alaskan Way Viaduct Project settlement that was secured in late-2022, allowing current toll rates to stay in place.

The SR 99 tunnel opened for traffic in February 2019 and began tolling in November of that year. Under current law, toll revenues generated by the SR 99 tunnel must be used to fund \$200 million of bonded construction costs for the tunnel, as well as to fund the facility's toll collection, operations, maintenance, and repair and replacement costs.

Pending funding decisions by the Legislature, the Commission anticipates the need for a toll-rate increase as soon as July 2025 to address significant projected financial shortfalls for the SR 99 tunnel. The Commission will continue working with partners to monitor and assess traffic and revenue performance on the facility going forward.

## SR 520 Bridge

Following action taken by the Commission in August 2021, toll rates on the SR 520 Bridge increased by an average of 15% on July 1, 2023. The intent of this increase was to meet long-term financial requirements and to ensure that the SR 520 Bridge financial plan demonstrated compliance with bond covenant requirements. The toll rate increase ranged from 20 cents to \$1.10, depending on the time of day and day of week.

Tolls are expected to contribute \$1.2 billion toward the Bridge's construction cost over 39 years (by 2051). Rates vary by day of week and time of day to maximize revenue collected and vehicle throughput and minimize diversion to other routes.

The Commission will continue working with partners to monitor and assess traffic and revenues and the need for any toll rate adjustments for the facility in 2024.

## I-405 Express Toll Lanes (ETLs) / SR 167 High Occupancy Toll (HOT) Lanes

The Commission did not make any adjustments to current or future toll rates for the I-405 ETLs / SR 167 HOT Lanes in 2023. However, in late 2023, the Commission initiated its process to adjust toll rates for both facilities, with an anticipated effective date in early 2024. The Commission is also assessing future needs for the corridor, including consideration of changes to toll policies and further toll rate adjustments, in advance of the opening of the Bellevue to Renton segment of the I-405 toll lanes expected in summer 2025.

The I-405 ETLs and SR 167 HOT lanes are both dynamically tolled, meaning the price to travel in these lanes varies based on real-time traffic conditions and is adjusted automatically using an algorithm. In 2008, the Commission set the toll rate range for the SR 167 HOT lanes at \$0.50 minimum, and \$9.00 maximum and has not made any changes since. And in 2015, the Commission set the toll rate range for the I-405 ETLs at \$0.75 minimum to \$10.00 maximum and has not made any changes since. Vehicles with at least three occupants are always exempt from tolls on the I-405 ETLs, and vehicles with at least 2 occupants are exempt from tolls during off-peak hours on I-405 or anytime on SR 167.

The Commission will continue working with partners to monitor and assess traffic and revenue performance on the facilities going forward.

## Planning for Future Toll Projects

In 2023 the Commission continued to work with WSDOT in planning future tolling projects. This includes three facilities that have been authorized for tolling by the Legislature in the central Puget Sound Region: the I-405 ETLs from Bellevue to Renton, and the SR 509 and SR 167 expressway projects (Gateway Program). While tolling is not expected to begin on these facilities for at least a couple more years, the Commission continues to partner in developing tolling assumptions and estimates.

Tolling is expected to begin as soon as Summer 2025 for the I-405 ETLs from Bellevue to Renton, and in 2026 for SR 509 and SR 167 expressways (Gateway Program). The Commission anticipates beginning toll-setting preparations over a year in advance of the opening of each of these facilities, and public outreach will be important in the development of toll policy options.

The Commission also continued to engage with WSDOT and the Oregon Department of Transportation on the planning and preparations to replace the I-5 Bridge over the Columbia River, for which the Legislature provided tolling authorization in 2023. The Commission initiated discussions with the Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC) in the fall of 2023 regarding the bi-state rate and policy setting process and will work with the OTC through 2024 to establish a bi-state tolling agreement and determine the toll rates and policies for pre-completion tolling and the new bridge, once its open.

## Washington State Ferry Fares

Each biennium, the Commission sets ferry fares to meet the revenue target that is set by the Legislature. For the 2023-25 biennium, the fare revenue target was \$419 million, which represents about 57% of the expected operating costs for Washington State Ferries (WSF).

To meet the Legislature's fare revenue target, the Commission took action in August 2023 to increase ferry fares by 4.25% for vehicle and passenger riders on October 1, 2023, and October 1, 2024. The Commission also adopted a 1% increase to the discount offered for multi-ride passes, effective October 1, 2023, and expiring September 30, 2025.

In addition, the Commission adopted a policy change to the ferry fuel surcharge rule (WAC 468-300-080), clarifying that a fuel surcharge can only be implemented after review and approval by the Commission. This change came in response to legislative direction that was provided in the 2023-25 Transportation Budget, which amended RCW 47.60.315 to state that any ferry fuel surcharge imposed by the Commission for the 2023-25 biennium may not go into effect until after the ensuing regular legislative session.

The Commission also continued to engage with WSF on advancing strategies to improve the reliability, sustainability, and resiliency of the ferry system in alignment with the WSF 2040 Long Range Plan.

# Road Usage Charge Assessment

Washington relies on a state fuel tax of 49.4 cents per gallon as the primary source of funding for roads and bridges. As vehicles become more fuel-efficient and electric, funding will decline, so the state’s reliance on motor fuel taxes must evolve. Per legislative direction, the Commission has been assessing and testing a pay-per-mile road usage charge (RUC) since 2012 – an approach to generating revenue that could eventually replace the per-gallon state gasoline tax and higher flat annual registration fees for electric, plug-in hybrid, and hybrid vehicles. RUC allows drivers of all vehicle types to contribute road funding in proportion to their usage.

The Commission’s RUC research over the past year included the final stages of the Forward Drive project, fully funded by a federal grant and focused on equity, cost reduction, and user experience. In 2023, a pilot test took place that included an interactive web-based simulation of RUC and three follow-on experiences.

In the first stage of the pilot, over 1,100 Washington drivers took part in an interactive web-based simulation of RUC. Following a pre-screening to establish participant demographics, the simulation asked each participant to enroll by providing information about their vehicles. Next, each participant reported their odometer reading and selected a method of providing image verification of their odometers. Next, participants were given an opportunity to customize their RUC experience by selecting a future mileage reporting method, a form exemption claim for miles driven off Washington roads, an optional discount based on household income, a payment plan, and a payment method. Throughout the simulation, participants who made certain selections were

offered the opportunity to opt into one of three follow-on experiences on the topics of installment payments (FlexPay), telematics-based mileage reporting (AutoPilot), and manual mileage exemption claims (MilesExempt).

In the second stage of the pilot, those who opted into each of the three follow-on experiences participated for up to three additional months. FlexPay participants were asked to make three equal monthly installment payments to assess user experience, administrative effort, and compliance. AutoPilot participants opted in to enroll their vehicles with a technology partner who automatically collected miles-driven data from their vehicles and provided a monthly statement of miles driven and charges incurred. Finally, MilesExempt participants provided monthly claims of miles driven off Washington roads along with evidence of their claims, subject to review and verification.

**Chart A** summarizes the pilot process including participant recruitment, simulation, and the three follow-on experiences.

### Key findings:

- 56% supported RUC as a replacement for the state fuel tax, the highest level of support measured for RUC in a statewide representative survey since research began.
- 70% were satisfied with the process of reporting and paying RUC experienced in the simulation
- 85% found no steps difficult to complete.
- The average RUC owed net of gas taxes paid was \$29.86
- Large majorities preferred to self-report miles over other methods offered (88%) and to make their payment in a lump sum rather than installments (85%).

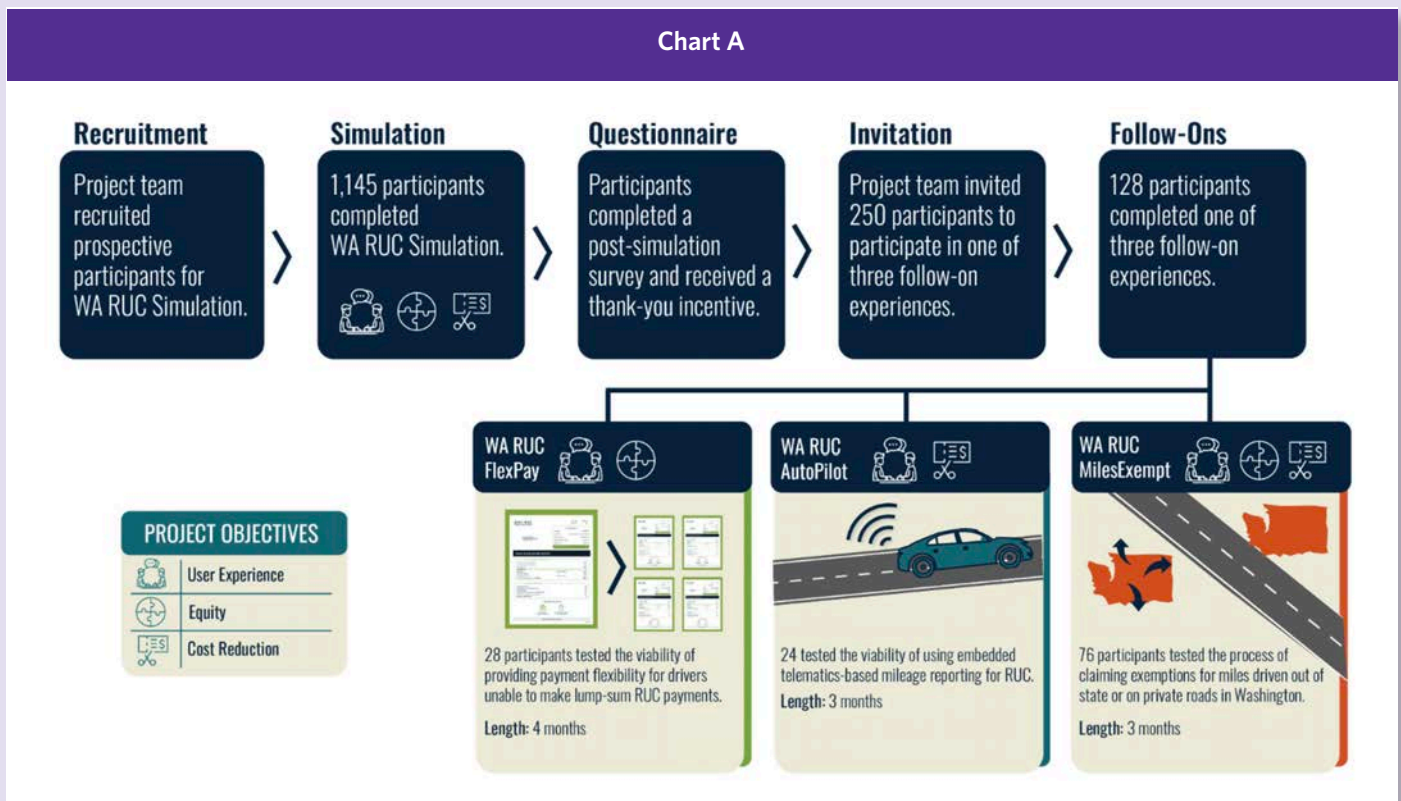




Chart B



- The median time to complete the simulation, from enrollment to reporting miles driven to customization to payment was 5 minutes, 20 seconds (see Chart B).
- Among low-income participants, only 64% opted for a lump sum payment.
- 72% of participants believed it is important to have the option to exempt miles driven off Washington roads, while 80% of participants said they drove fewer than 200 exempt miles (the amount of the “standard exemption” offered in the simulation).

The Forward Drive final report issued in January 2023 covers the full range of research undertaken since 2020, including financial analysis, equity outreach and research, innovative technologies, cost reduction analysis, the pilot, and a first-of-its-kind effort to develop RUC standards.

For more information about WA RUC and the Commission’s ongoing research and assessment of RUC, visit: [www.waroadusagecharge.org](http://www.waroadusagecharge.org).

## Washington Transportation Plan Update

The Washington Transportation Plan (WTP) is established in state law to serve as a policy plan creating a 20-year roadmap for our state’s entire transportation system at all jurisdictional levels. It is the only transportation plan that incorporates the priorities of cities, counties, regions, and all modes of transportation and brings them together under one vision for our entire state. To ensure the WTP’s vision and policy framework is reflective of current needs and priorities, it is required under RCW 47.01.071 to be updated every four years. The WTP also serves as one of our state’s tools demonstrating our compliance with federal planning requirements (23 USC Sec 135 and 23 CFR Parts 450, 771 and 49 CFR Part 613).

The 2023 Legislature has provided funding to carry out an update of WTP. Under the Washington State Transportation Commission’s direction, the WTP update process will be informed by guidance from a steering committee composed of Commissioners, the Joint Transportation Committee’s Executive Committee, the Governor’s Office, the Secretary of the Department of Transportation, and representatives of metropolitan and regional transportation planning organizations. As the plan update process progresses, the Transportation Commission and the Joint Transportation Committee will review development at key points.

The WTP update will be active from the fall of 2023 through the end of 2025.

The updated plan must align with and support the achievement of current mandates set forth in recent legislative actions including: the HEAL Act, Climate Commitment, 16-year Move Ahead Washington funding package, as well as elevated preservation and safety priority goals for transportation planning and operations. Ensuring the WTP reflects recent legislative actions will require a broad outreach process including a new array of partners and relationships. The new direction set by the legislative enactments and societal changes makes the public engagement and outreach elements of WTP even more critical to ensure equitable and easy participation in the update process and shaping of the final plan

## West Coast Transportation Network Plan Scoping Effort

An initial assessment and scoping effort will be conducted, in conjunction with the WTP Update, to determine the feasibility of creating a future West Coast transportation network plan that would identify and coordinate transportation improvements and investments across the west coast states. The WTP update process will inform the scoping of this West Coast Transportation Network Plan intended to leverage and align Washington, Oregon, and California efforts to reduce our collective carbon footprint, improve freight and passenger mobility, and strengthen West Coast resiliency.

This scoping effort will begin in mid-2024 and be completed by December of 2025, aligned with the timing of the WTP Update.

The scoping effort will examine current practices in each of the west coast states in the areas of system performance, policies and vision, and funding and collaborations. It will include consideration of:

- State activities, investments, and plans that support the establishment of clean transportation in the air, on the highways, and on rail lines moving freight and passengers.
- Currently identified resiliency risks along the west coast and existing strategic plans and investments that could inform a future west coast unified plan.
- Input collected through a series of workshops and interviews from Caltrans, CTC, and CalSTA, ODOT, OTC, and WSDOT and WSTC.

## Route Jurisdiction Study

The 2023-25 Transportation Budget directs the Washington State Transportation Commission to conduct a Route Jurisdiction Study aimed at assessing the current state highway inventory and local roadway designations to determine if changes are needed in jurisdictional assignment between the state, county, and city road systems. The assessment will also review current criteria used to define the state highway system to determine if this criterion continues to be applicable. The commission will submit a final report of findings and recommendations to the transportation committees of the Legislature by no later than July 1, 2025.

The Transportation Commission will actively collaborate with the Transportation Improvement Board (TIB) and Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) as well as other transportation partners in carrying out the study. The Route Jurisdiction Study will be complete by July 2025.

## Autonomous Vehicle Work Group

RCW 47.01.510 directs the Washington State Transportation Commission (WSTC) to appoint and convene a Work Group to gather information and develop policy recommendations to prepare for the operation of autonomous vehicles (AVs) on public roadways in Washington State. The Work Group was legislatively authorized to convene through December 31, 2023, marking this as the last year of its purview. The information below provides a high-level overview of the Work Group's activities in its final year (2023), with more detail included in the full 2023 AV Work Group Report.

The State of Washington, through its Work Group process, took a deliberative and forward-looking approach to the entrance of autonomous vehicle technologies into the transportation network, holistically evaluating potential regulatory, operational, and community implications and benefits.

The Work Group was made up of a 35-member Executive Committee of public, private, and non-profit organizations, as well as seven subcommittees led by nine state agencies that homed in on specific areas of interest.

The Work Group's final annual report in 2023 highlights a recommendation from the Commission for the Legislature to charge the Commission or another entity with being on point to keep apprised of AV developments nationally and in other states, and to continue collaborating with public and private sector partners on refining Washington's AV policies over time. The report also revitalizes the 2022 recommendation to authorize and fund a state-sponsored AV pilot, as well as reprising six other Work Group recommendations endorsed but not acted on in prior years for further consideration and action. For further detail and a full list of recommendations, please refer to the 2023 AV Work Group Report .

# AV Work Group Executive Committee



Government Representatives and Key Stakeholders from:

- Governor
- Four members from Senate
- Four members from House
- Insurance Commissioner
- DOL Director
- WSDOT Secretary
- WSP Chief
- Traffic Safety Commission Director
- State Chief Information Officer
- Transportation Commission Member
- Health Secretary
- Employment Security Director
- Labor & Industries Director
- Data, Technology & AV Testing
- Shared, Electric, TNC & Transit
- Automakers
- Local Governments
- Consumers/Traveling Public
- Environment
- Academic
- Underrepresented Communities
- Freight
- Labor

## Subcommittees



### Health & Equity

TBD Lead Agency

Co-Chairs: Dr. Andrew Dannenberg, UW School of Public Health; TBD

- Health and equity considerations related to autonomous vehicles, such as air quality, water quality, noise, green space, mental well-being, physical activity, safety, and social connections
- Engagement from communities, prioritizing communities of color

### Infrastructure & Systems

WSDOT Lead Agency

Co-Chairs: Roger Millar, WSDOT; Alison Cochran, PACCAR

- Roadway infrastructure
- Traffic management
- Transit service & vehicles
- Advertising
- Right of way
- Multi-modal transportation
- Mobility as a service

### Liability

Insurance Comm. Lead Agency

Co-Chairs: David Forte, Office of the Insurance Commissioner; Harris Clarke, PEMCO

- Insurance
- Tort liability
- Criminal law
- Judiciary

### Licensing

DOL Lead Agency

Co-Chairs: Beau Perschbacher, DOL; Drew Wilder, Vicarious Liability Risk Management LLC

- Manufacturer Vehicle Testing
- Pilot certification
- Vehicle registration
- Driver's licensing
- Rules of the road

### Safety

WTSC & WSP Lead Agency

Co-Chairs: Captain Dennis Bosman, Washington State Patrol; Manuela Papadopol, Designated Driver

- Traffic safety
- Law enforcement
- Synchronization with other safety priorities
- Drivers and vulnerable users and hazards

### System Tech & Data Security

State CIO Lead Agency

Co-Chairs: Zack Hudgins, Office of the Chief Information Officer; Michael Schutlzler, Washington Technology Industry Association

- Data & information management
- Cybersecurity
- Privacy protection

### Workforce

ESD and L&I Lead Agency

Co-Chairs: Brenda Wiest, Teamsters; Caitlyn Jekel, Washington State Employment Security Department; Allison Drake, Washington State Department of Labor & Industries

- Worker safety & worker rights
- Worker displacement/job loss
- Worker retraining and transition
- Industry impacts

For its final legislatively mandated year of convening, the Work Group focused on preparing its final, legacy report, The Roadmap to the Future. Based on the information and insights gathered throughout the five-year course of the Work Group, this legacy report serves as the Roadmap to Washington's mobility future, proving a foundational resource for lawmakers

to consider and refer to as deliberations occur around the advancement and regulation of AVs in Washington state. It also provides guidance for public agencies, as well as private and community partners, on what to focus on and develop as the state prepares for automated vehicle technologies to safely test and deploy on Washington public roadways.

# Ferry Riders' Opinion Group

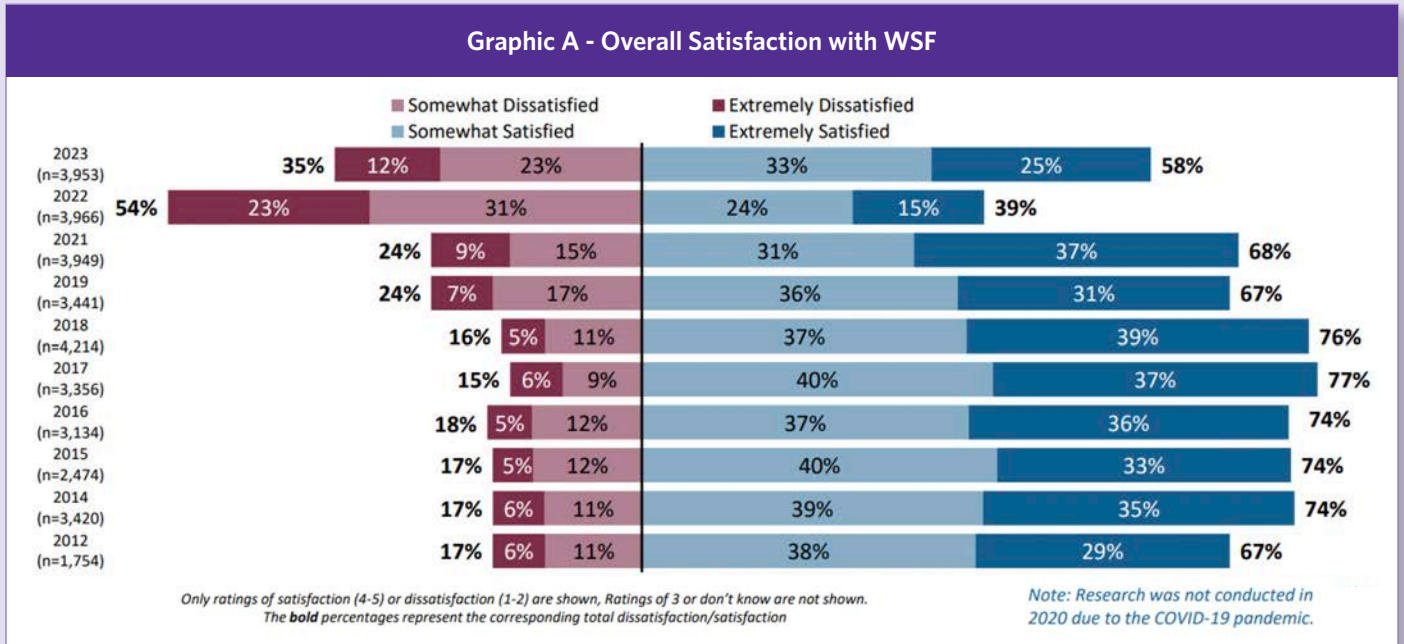
The Commission conducts surveys of ferry riders each year to provide the Governor, the Legislature, the Commission, and WSDOT insights and guidance on ferry operations by the people and businesses that use the ferry system. The Ferry Riders' Opinion Group (FROG) is an online community of over 30,000 Washington State Ferry (WSF) riders who participate on the survey panel to weigh in on ferry issues through online surveys and quick polls. This allows for data to be collected over time to understand how reactions to key issues and operations are changing.

In 2023, the Commission conducted its FROG Winter Ferry Performance survey, which gathered feedback from 3,953 riders regarding their travel behavior and frequency between January and March 2023. The survey was fielded via the FROG panel as well as made available to non-panel members via WSF communications that included rider alerts, website and newsletter mentions, and social media posts.

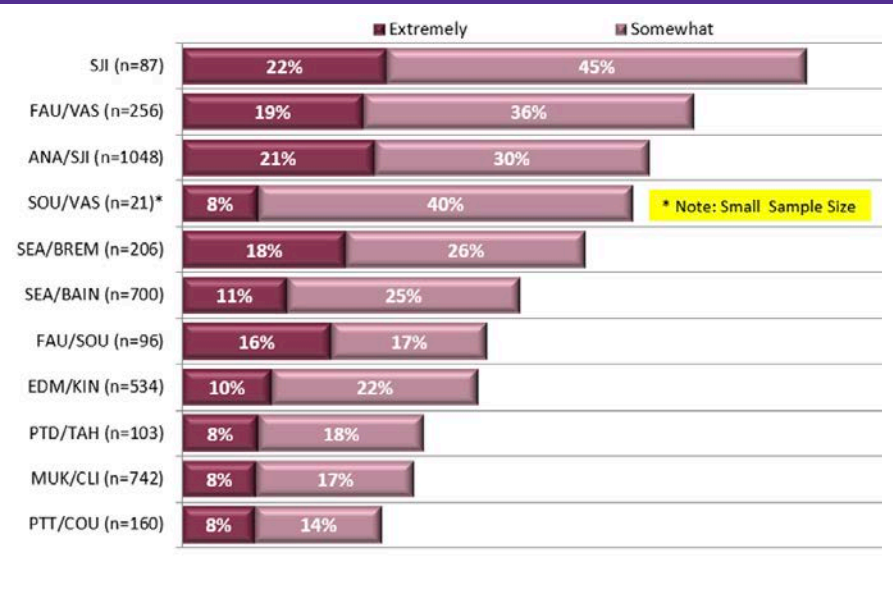
More details on 2023 FROG research findings can be found on the WSTC web site.

Some key findings from the 2023 Winter Ferry Performance study include:

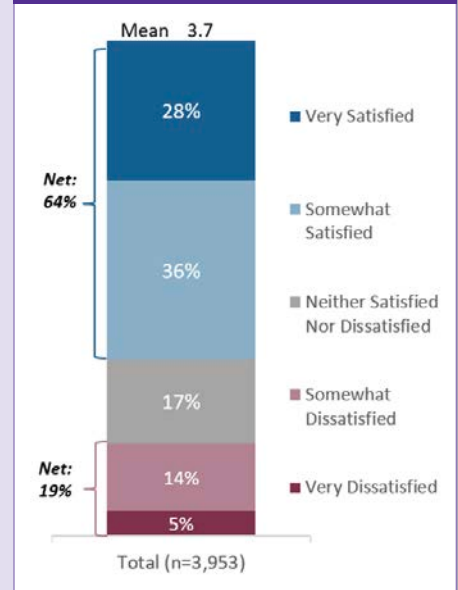
- Overall satisfaction (“extremely satisfied” plus “somewhat satisfied”) with WSF was 58% in 2023, up from 39% in 2022, and closer to the 68% seen in 2021. Conversely, about a third (35%) of respondents were dissatisfied (23% “somewhat dissatisfied,” 12% “extremely dissatisfied”). That is a 19-point decrease from 2022, where 54% were dissatisfied (**note: see Graphic A**).
- Riders of the San Juan Inter-Island route expressed the highest level of dissatisfaction compared with other routes at 67%. (**note: see Graphic B**)
- Systemwide, about a third (35%) are dissatisfied with the timeliness of departures, and about two-fifths (42%) are satisfied. Similarly, 34% are dissatisfied with on-time/dependable arrivals, compared with 44% who are satisfied.
- The most common rider touchpoint continues to be driving onto the ferry (83%). Visiting the passenger deck (79%) and using the WSF website (78%) were the next most common rider touchpoints.
- Satisfaction with WSF communication improved in 2023, with 64% satisfied and one in five (19%) dissatisfied, (a significant decrease from 28% in 2022 but well above 10% in 2021). Dissatisfied riders expressed frustration with schedule dependability issues and suggest better utilization of communication tools, such as text alerts designed to alert only for desired routes. (**note: see Graphic C**)



**Graphic B - Overall Dissatisfaction by Route - 2023 (Total Dissatisfied)**



**Satisfaction with WSF Communication**



## Naming Transportation Facilities

The Commission is authorized to name state highways, bridges, and ferries. The following naming actions occurred in 2023:

- State Route 411 traversing Cowlitz County from milepost 1.5 to 12 was named the “Cowlitz County Deputy Sheriff Dustin DeRosier Memorial Highway.”
- The Riffe Lake Overlook on State Route 12 approximately 0.4 miles east of Mossyrock Dam was named the “Gary Stamper Memorial Overlook.”
- Two plazas at the Colman Dock Ferry Terminal in Seattle were named as follows:
  - **?ululali**, a place of Traveling Water, from the Suquamish Tribe, for the North Plaza nearest Columbia Street; and
  - **slu?wit**, a perforation for a canoe, a short cut, a canoe pass, from the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, for the South Plaza nearest Yesler Way.
- The Interstate 90 / Argonne Interchange, which includes a bridge for Argonne Road at approximately Interstate 90 MP 287.83 and a bridge for Mullan Road at approximately Interstate 90 MP 287.88 were named the “Deputy Joseph M. O’Connor Memorial Overpass”.
- Highway 20 in Okanogan County was named the “Vietnam War Veterans’ Memorial Highway”. Honoring the service and sacrifice of Washington State Vietnam War veterans.

# Local Partners in Transportation

*The Commission holds four local meetings each year around the state. These meetings focus on hearing the local perspective on transportation from city, county and regional representatives, businesses, transit, tribes, and more. In 2023, the Commission held meetings in Ellensburg, Friday Harbor, Vancouver, and Pasco.*

## Ellensburg

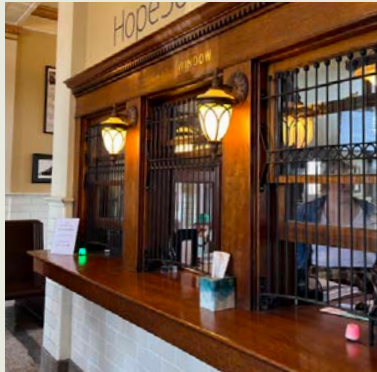
1. STEER I-90 Coalition, a partnership between Quad-Co Regional Transportation Planning Organization (QUADCO) and Kittitas County is studying ways to improve safety on I-90 between Cle Elum and Easton. Interest in recreational activities coupled with residential growth and more truck traffic have led to more collisions and congestion, and partners are looking at ways to increase safety to reduce both. Keeping the key route between the producers of Central Washington goods and the Pacific seaport open is also a high priority.

2. Currently, WSDOT estimates there are approximately 1,500 lane miles due for or in need of maintenance and preservation. WSDOT's South Central Region Office will address 73 lane miles in 2023.

3. With airports in Puget Sound unable to expand to meet the growth in air passengers expected by 2050, Yakima city officials are urging state officials to consider the Yakima Air Terminal for expansion. Future electrification of aircraft could make Yakima well-positioned for regional connections from small and large airports across the state.

4. The average age of those living in Ellensburg is 25 and this young population values a vibrant downtown with shops, galleries, and restaurants as well as transportation choices and options. Ellensburg is working in partnership with local business organizations to support and expand its very walkable downtown. As an early adopter of Complete Streets principles, the city is accommodating all transportation modes and users as it completes a variety of road and stormwater projects. Its priorities include pursuing state and federal grants to leverage local investments.

5. Central Transit is one of the few city owned and operated transit systems in the state. They offer a range of very successful and fare free services providing key connections to other transit providers throughout Central Washington.



*The 1910 Northern Pacific Train Depot*

6. The Central Washington University (CWU) aviation program offers the only Bachelor of Science in Aviation in the state, maintaining 17 aircraft that help train students for careers in aviation. This very successful CWU program is getting national attention and continues to grow and expand.

7. The city of Moses Lake's burgeoning aerospace and battery technology industries are bringing population growth and new housing to this rapidly growing city. With a population of 25,000, Moses Lake is projected to become a mid-sized city in the next decade. Immediate transportation needs include upgrades to the Mae Valley Interchange, Broadway Corridor (Highway 171/Historic Route 10), and the Wheeler Corridor/Road O Interchange.

8. Kittitas County is one of the fastest-growing counties in the U.S. and faces challenges keeping its 578 miles of public roads and its bridges maintained with county road fund revenue. Growth in residents and tourism in the county and small cities within it like the city of Kittitas has led to congestion in

the region on both state and local roads. In February of this year, the county received a federal grant through USDOT's Safe Streets for All program to help guide safety improvements at Snoqualmie Pass.

9. The Yakama Nation's Tribal Traffic Safety Committee, made up of transportation partners in the region with assistance from University of Washington's STAR Lab, has worked to improve safety at the highest-risk intersections throughout the reservation. The Heritage Connectivity Trail, a 150-mile trail network to improve pedestrian safety on the reservation, remains a high priority, with efforts now focused on 23 miles of connections between Union Gap and Toppenish.

10. The award-winning organization People for People operates nine offices throughout the region with nearly 200 employees providing essential rural lifeline transportation, particularly to the aging and disabled. The organization has been extremely successful securing grants from Transportation and Health Care agencies and organizations including WSDOT, Workforce Development Council, Washington Health Care Authority, Department of Social and Health Services

## Friday Harbor



1. The leisure and hospitality industries, impacted heavily during the pandemic, are rebounding, and construction is also playing a role in the post-pandemic economic recovery of the San Juan Islands.
2. San Juan County has an unusually wide range of income levels, with some of the highest incomes and lowest wages in the state. A lack of affordable workforce housing and Washington State Ferries service reliability continue to be challenges for the island economy.
3. Washington State Ferries has assembled a taskforce of 25 residents to assist with a schedule re-write for San Juan Islands routes. Crew and vessel shortages continue to significantly affect travel for island residents and businesses reliant on the ferry system for access to healthcare, education, and commerce.
4. Work is underway across San Juan County to make county infrastructure more resilient to winter storm surges, which have threatened roadways and washed-out culverts, stranding residents. Preserving shoreline habitats that support endangered species is a focus while also ensuring that the 600,000-800,000 annual tourists, vital to the county's economy, can move safely using a variety of transportation modes.
5. San Juan County was awarded a \$5.28 million for the construction of a safe and accessible non-motorized transportation corridor between the Town of Friday Harbor and the San Juan County Land Bank's Zylstra Lake Preserve. This corridor is known as the Zylstra Trail. The trail, which is facing some resistance from adjacent property owners and others, would also connect the ferry-accessed population hub of Friday Harbor to a publicly accessible natural preserve, as well as provide connectivity between the homes in the Zylstra Lake area and the businesses and services in the Town of Friday Harbor.
6. Alaska Airlines has recently partnered with Kenmore Air for connecting flights to San Juan Islands through Seattle-Paine Field in Everett. You can now book flights through Alaska Airlines from destinations along the West Coast to the San Juans. Kenmore Air is the largest seaplane operator in the United States in addition to offering landplane operations. The company carried roughly 20,000 passengers via its landplane services to and from the Friday Harbor and Eastsound airports in 2022, and roughly 16,000 via seaplane to six destinations in the islands.

7. Walkable streets are a priority for the town of Friday Harbor, which serves as one of the main ports of call for visitors to the San Juan Islands, and efforts are ongoing to complete gaps in sidewalks. Creating more "green" infrastructure and better stormwater management are goals to help manage storm surges. Traffic studies have the town bracing for increased demand for transportation and ferry services, and coordination with Washington State Ferries is key to ensuring ferry riders can get to their destination and keep streets free of congestion.
8. San Juan County is a member of the North Sound Transportation Alliance (NSTA), and a top priority for the alliance is studying the connection between health and transportation and quantifying how many of the region's residents are not getting medical care because they don't have the means to get to it. Twenty-one transportation studies are underway by agencies in the region, and the alliance is working to facilitate data-sharing among study partners and encourage solutions that strengthen the transportation network of the five-county region.



*San Juan Valley Road, San Juan Island*

9. The SWISS Regional Partnership is currently serving the regional planning and project development function for San Juan County bringing together Snohomish County, Whatcom County, Island County, Skagit County and San Juan County to coordinate on transportation, behavioral health and broadband expansion specifically.
10. Island Rides is a nonprofit that transports customers in its nearly all-electric vehicle fleet. The service accepts vouchers through the county transportation program and serves the elderly, disabled and low-income residents, often driving them to medical appointments. The organization employs 10 and has 35 volunteer drivers. The county is working in partnership with Island Rides to improve mobility and support a transportation voucher program provides those with low incomes the means to travel aboard the Washington State Ferries or on private taxis.

## Vancouver



1. Forecasts predict that an additional nearly 200,000 people will move to the Vancouver area by 2045. That growth has implications for residents and businesses already located in the Clark County region as well as those interested in coming. A shortage of viable land with established infrastructure and limits to the power grid are challenges.
2. Growth of the region has put pressure on all transportation infrastructure, including all six state-owned border bridges in the region. Adaptive ramp metering has been effective in helping to manage congestion, and Active Traffic Management, Lane Control and a Video Messaging System have helped drivers navigate hazards and led to a reduction in traffic and increased throughput on busy highways throughout the region.
3. As the Southwest Washington anticipates significant regional growth in traffic including freight and goods on the Interstate 5 corridor in the coming decade, a safer Interstate 5 Bridge becomes even more urgent.
4. Tolling and a new Oregon regional tolling system that would govern tolling on the existing Interstate 5 Bridge as well as a replacement bridge are being carefully monitored by local and regional officials and the public alike.
5. Vancouver is responding to an anticipated housing deficit of 14,000 homes with a Housing Action Plan and a tax levy that will raise \$100 million over the next decade to build affordable housing.

6. An \$8 million investment in “complete streets” is allowing the city of Vancouver to leverage state and federal funding for projects that are transforming downtown and Central Vancouver including a new waterfront district, increased multifamily housing, great parks and schools, safer walkable streets and more frequent and accessible transit services.

7. C-Tran is working in close collaboration with the city of Vancouver to expand bus rapid transit and other climate-friendly travel options including on-demand transit. This year, C-Tran opened the Vine on Mill Plain with a \$30 million dollar Federal Transit Administration Grant. The Vine on Mill Plain will serve 37 new stations along a 10-mile corridor between downtown Vancouver and the new transit center, located near Mill Plain at 184th Avenue. Bus rapid transit, or BRT, uses a combination of features, including larger vehicles,



*I-5 Bridge, Vancouver, Washington*

enhanced station design, technology and improved passenger amenities, to create a faster, more efficient and reliable service and an interconnected network throughout the service area.

8. The Port of Vancouver, a deep-water port that specializes in bulk cargo, is working with federal, state and local transportation partners expand the “High, Wide and Heavy” transportation corridor carrying oversized loads to inland destinations from Columbia River ports. These loads include components for wind energy and infrastructure, and other large equipment and machinery needed to expand or maintain our roads and power grid.



*Waterfront in Vancouver, Washington, Source: Visit Vancouver.*

9. The Cowlitz Indian Tribe is creating new partnerships throughout the region in support of economic development and environmental stewardship. This year, the Tribe secured over \$1.2 million from the state’s Clean Energy Fund for its Fleet Electrification and Resilient Energy Project to decarbonize transportation through electric vehicle charging and invest in solar installations with battery back-up systems to reduce risks from power outages for vulnerable populations.

10. The Cowlitz Indian Tribe has also recently signed a memorandum

of understanding with surrounding municipalities to partner in road maintenance and improvements on existing and new road connections leading to the tribe’s reservation, and a new partnership with C-TRAN led to the location of a new transit station near the tribe’s casino as part of the agency’s Ridgfield route.



## Pasco



1. The Tri-Cities is the energy hub of Washington state and the Pacific Northwest with over 5,000 employees in energy-related fields. There are over 14 companies and 10 utilities located in the Tri-Cities focusing on renewable or clean energy technologies. In addition, the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory (PNNL) in Richland is recognized as a leader in energy technology development. Abundant, reliable, and inexpensive energy, and a strong business climate, make the Tri-Cities an excellent location for expanding renewable hydrogen technologies and establishing a hydrogen hub.
2. The Tri-City Development Council discussed the impacts of the Lower Snake River Dam removal project, which would shift products currently being shipped by barge to rail and truck, resulting in an estimated increase of over 42,000 rail cars or 160,000 trucks annually through the area. Increased diesel emissions from added truck and train volumes would also affect local communities.
3. Growth rates in the Tri-Cities area are exceeding the state average, spurring new partnerships and collaborative planning. The region is taking a “growth pays for growth” approach, aiding the private sector, and taking a collaborative approach to planning to ensure infrastructure is in place to meet the demands of growth throughout the region.
4. Pasco is one of the fastest-growing and most diverse cities in the Tri-Cities region. The city’s population is estimated to reach 121,828 in 2038. This will be a 52% increase from the city’s 2022 population of 80,180. Pasco’s Broadmoor area, 1,240 acres of vacant land planned for mixed-use development, is expected to hold the major share of the city’s future growth. This area presents an opportunity to pilot transportation projects linking land use and transportation to help meet the city goals of lowering the housing and transportation costs as a proportion of total household income. The city prioritizes transportation improvements that connect communities and provide for all modes of travel. The Lewis River Bridge project is one example of the city’s efforts to better connect historically marginalized areas of the city.
5. Each of the larger cities in the region, Pasco, Kennewick, Richland and West Richland, have seen rapid growth in population, new housing, and traffic. Growth projections have the region adding 20 new people per day, necessitating six additional housing units every day (or a total of 44,035) through 2038.



Lewis Street Bridge Overpass, Pasco, WA.

6. Major state transportation projects currently underway in the region include the I-90 Vantage Bridge deck replacement and new variable message signs to warn drivers of delays and allow them to detour through the area. The design process and right of way acquisition is also getting underway for 10 miles of new four-lane divided highway on US 12 between Wallula and Nine Mile Hill in Walla Walla County.
7. Transportation experts throughout the region continue to plan, execute improvements that maximize existing highway and roadway capacity, and explore local connections improving the grid system. However, bridges over the Columbia River are key to the ability to travel throughout the region and do present bottlenecks and choke points. A north bypass may be needed in the future to get from Richland to the US 395 area, recognizing that expanding industrial developments across the region will increase truck traffic requiring additional freight mobility and safety improvements.
8. The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation operates Kayak Public Transit, which provides free transportation to the public in 19 rural communities in Northeast Oregon and Southwest Washington. It’s one of the largest transit agencies in the state of Oregon in terms of area served (spanning 100 miles east and west and 70 miles north and south). It has expanded frequency of service and continues to expand the number of routes it operates. Its goal is to create a regional transit authority. Funding sources include the Oregon Department of Transportation as well as the Washington State Department of Transportation; the transit service also requires coordination with regional governments and large employers in both states.
9. Ben Franklin Transit serves the region with a population of 285,000. It offers a variety of services including fixed-route, dial-a-ride, and services that bridge the gaps of providing connections to fixed-route services. The agency’s ridership has fully recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic and is now increasing over pre-pandemic levels. The agency has free passes for seniors, youth and veterans, and marketing efforts have included new wraps to create military appreciation buses. In 2024, the agency will be adding a shopper shuttle, shuttle to the airport and bus service to the new Amazon warehouses. Other improvements are planned to several transit centers, hubs, park and rides, and other facilities, and the agency has plans for a new downtown Pasco transit hub.
10. Throughout the Tri-Cities region, there are emerging examples of multi-jurisdictional partnerships that maximize workforce and best utilize the skilled labor force regardless of jurisdiction. WSDOT and the City of Prosser were able to use local workforce on a recent state highway sidewalk project through the city, for example.

# Commission Roles and Responsibilities

The Washington State Transportation Commission is a seven-member body of citizens appointed by the Governor for up to two six-year terms. The WSDOT Secretary and a representative from the Governor's Office serve as ex officio members.

The Commission provides an open public forum for transportation policy development. It reviews and assesses how the entire transportation system works across the state and issues the state's 20-year Washington Transportation Plan. As the State Tolling Authority, the Commission adopts state highway tolls and sets ferry fares. The Commission also conducts special studies and projects as directed by the Legislature.

## Current Responsibilities in Detail

### Washington Transportation Plan

Every four years, the Commission recommends to the Legislature a comprehensive and balanced statewide transportation plan, which also addresses local and regional needs. The plan must be consistent with the state's growth management goals and is based upon six statutory transportation policy goals: preservation, economic vitality, safety, mobility, environment & health, and stewardship.

### Tolling & Ferry Fare Responsibilities

The Commission adopts tolls for all state toll facilities including: the State Route (SR) 520 bridge, the SR 16 Tacoma Narrows Bridge (TNB), the SR 167 high occupancy toll (HOT) lanes, the Interstate 405 express toll lanes (ETLs), and the SR 99 tunnel. It actively monitors and assesses traffic and toll revenues; reviews and oversees toll collection processes, costs, and operational policies; and serves as a public forum for input on tolling. The Commission also adopts fare policies for Washington State Ferries (WSF) and reviews and adjusts fares. In addition, it reviews the long-range ferry system capital plan and works with WSF in developing operational strategies.

### Ferry Customer Survey

The Commission conducts surveys of ferry customers at least once every two years, utilizing the Ferry Riders' Opinion Group (FROG) survey panel that is made up of over 25,000 ferry riders. Data gathered from the FROG panel helps to inform WSF level of service, customer satisfaction, and decisions related to operations, pricing, planning, and investments.

### Policy Guidance

The Commission offers policy guidance and recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature on a multitude of transportation topics and issues, including:

- Transportation finance and funding.
- Preserving, maintaining, and operating the statewide transportation system.
- Transportation infrastructure needs.
- Efficiencies that will improve service delivery and intermodal coordination and connectivity.
- Improved planning and coordination among transportation agencies and providers.
- Use of intelligent transportation systems and technology.
- Needed laws to prepare for the operation of autonomous vehicles operating on public roadways.

### Public Involvement and Outreach

The Commission conducts public outreach through meetings held in Olympia and in communities throughout the state, which focus on local and regional transportation issues and challenges. The Commission also gathers statewide public input through its FROG survey panel, special projects and studies, and its public email and web site.

### Transportation Innovative Partnerships Program

The Commission may receive and solicit concepts or proposals for eligible public-private partnership (PPP) projects. In consultation with the Governor, it may execute, reject, or continue negotiations on proposed PPP projects.

### Route Jurisdiction Transfer Program

Cities, counties, or WSDOT may petition the Commission to consider a revision to the state highway system. Once the Commission's review is complete, it forwards a recommendation to the Legislature for final action in law.

### Naming State Highways, Bridges, and Ferries

The Commission names state highways, bridges, and ferry vessels. The Legislature, community organizations, local governments, or individuals may submit a naming request. The Commission carefully considers community support and consults with WSDOT before acting to name a transportation facility or vessel.

### Special Studies

The Commission conducts special studies or projects directed by the Legislature, which result in formal reports and recommendations to the Legislature and Governor. Studies or projects currently underway (visit WSTC website for details):

- The Road Usage Charge (RUC) is under assessment as a replacement to the gas tax. In January 2020, the Commission submitted a final report of findings and recommendations to the Governor and Legislature, culminating over seven years of research and testing. In the fall of 2020, the Commission began a new phase of RUC research, as directed by the Legislature. The work is funded with a grant from the Federal Highway Administration.
- The Autonomous Vehicle (AV) Work Group advises the Commission in its task to make recommendations to the Legislature on policies that will enable the safe accommodation of AVs on public roadways statewide. (sunsets December 2023)
- The Washington Transportation plan is undergoing an update and will be complete by December 2025.
- The Advanced Technology study assessing technology approaches that advance safety and compliance with tolling and HOV lane usage.
- The Route Jurisdiction Study evaluating the current state highway inventory and local roadway designations and is reviewing current criteria used to define state highways. The evaluation will be completed by July 2025.

# Commissioners



## **Debbie Young, Chair, San Juan County**

Debbie brings 30 years of management, negotiation, and natural resources experience to the Commission. She worked in the utility industry for over 20 years as the Natural Resources Manager for Tacoma Power, leading the federal licensing process for Tacoma's hydroelectric projects. Debbie has

served on the National Hydropower Association Board, the Tacoma Land Conservancy, and the Forterra Board of Directors. She also served on the Nisqually River Council for over 15 years, including a term as Chair. Debbie now resides on Lopez Island where she and her husband operate a small farm providing meat and specialty food products to customers in the Puget Sound region. Appointed by Governor Inslee in 2015 for a partial term, she was reappointed in 2023. Her term expires June 30, 2028.



## **James "Jim" A. Restucci, Vice Chair, Yakima County**

Jim has over 35 years of government service as a soldier in the U.S. Army and Army National Guard for 20 years and as a city official. Serving as the Mayor of Sunnyside, Washington, from 2010-2018, he is now serving his 5th term on the City Council.

Jim has Chaired the Yakima Valley Transportation Policy Board for the past nine years. He served as President of the Association of Washington Cities in 2016, and was President of People for People, Inc. Jim currently oversees the daily operations of a technology services company he co-founded in 2002. Jim was appointed by Governor Inslee in 2018. His term expires June 30, 2024.



## **JC Baldwin, Chelan County**

JC has served as an elected port commissioner for the Chelan Douglas Regional Port Authority since 2005. She is the president and CEO of a tech-support solutions center in Wenatchee that serves clients worldwide, and she has worked in the technology sector most of her professional career.

In addition to her experience as a small business owner and elected official, JC has served on the state Community Aviation Revitalization Board, the state Public Works Board (appointed by Governor Gregoire in 2012) and the Washington Public Ports Association Executive Committee. She is past president of both the Wenatchee Valley Chamber of Commerce and Cashmere Chamber of Commerce and is an active member of Cashmere Rotary. JC was appointed by Governor Inslee in 2023, and her term expires June 30, 2029.



## **Shiv Batra, King County**

Shiv was a co-founder and President of a U.S.-based engineering company for over two decades. He has held leadership roles in numerous engineering and construction organization, promoting innovations, value engineering, technology transfer, civic, and professional

development activities locally, nationally, and internationally. He also served two terms as a U.S. Commissioner for the Permanent International Association of Navigation Congress (PIANC-USA) and Vice President of (PIANC-International.) His senior level participation with two notable multi-billion-dollar projects includes design and construction of the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal Project to protect New Orleans from future hurricanes like Katrina and latest expansion of the Panama Canal Project to design and build new locks and dams. Shiv and his wife are active in many local and international non-profit organizations. Appointed by Governor Inslee in January 2016, Shiv was reappointed in 2019. His term expires June 30, 2025.



## **Kelly Fukai, Spokane County**

Kelly has spent her career building and cultivating relationships with government, education, business, and community leaders. Kelly is the Vice President of Government and Community Affairs at the Washington Technology Industry Association where she serves as the organization's

leading subject matter expert on policy formation and oversees all aspects of government and community relations. She brings over 25 years of experience in leading and working with diverse groups with divergent interests in the development of collaborative and comprehensive plans and policy that grow necessary infrastructure, enhance economic and workforce development, and support community interests. She has previously worked at Avista, the Pinnacle Marketing Group, Schweitzer Engineering Laboratories and Spokane International Airport. Kelly is the proud mom of three great kids, Mason (20), Abbey (18), and Jack (16). Appointed by Governor Inslee in June 2020, her term ends June 30, 2026.



## **Nicole Grant, King County**

Commissioner Nicole Grant infuses her passion for transportation policy with a deep understanding of workers' rights and climate activism. The former Leader of MLK Labor and climate activist organization 350 Seattle, Nicole Grant now heads public policy as the political director of her union,

IBEW Local 46. Commissioner Grant is a licensed journey level electrician, who spent the bulk of her construction career in the field, building our local transportation infrastructure working on projects like the Washington State Ferries system, Sound Transit, and the Port of Seattle. Her hope is that by bringing together hands-on knowledge of our transportation infrastructure and public policy that is informed by community engagement she can serve our state as we continue to build a world class, modern transportation system. Appointed by Governor Inslee in November 2022, her term expires June 30, 2027.



## **Roy Jennings, Clark County**

Roy retired from the United States Marine Corps as a Staff Non-Commissioned Officer after 20 years of honorable service. While in the USMC, he worked on various transportation projects including airports, ports, railheads, as well as building roads. In 1997, he and his family moved

to Southwest Washington, where he drove a transit bus for over 20 years. A graduate of the University of Oregon Labor Education & Research Center, Roy has served the citizens of Southwest Washington as the Secretary Treasurer, Southwest Washington Central Labor Council, as a member of the Board of Directors for C-TRAN. Roy also served as the Treasurer of the Labor Roundtable of Southwest Washington. Appointed by Governor Inslee in 2014. Roy was reappointed by Governor Inslee in 2019. His term expires June 30, 2025.



**Washington State  
Transportation Commission**

P.O. Box 47308  
Olympia, WA 98504-7308  
360.705.7070  
[www.wstc.wa.gov](http://www.wstc.wa.gov)