

To: Region Planning Managers and M2 Team members

CC: Planning Studies Group

From: Kerri Woehler, Multimodal Planning and Data Division Director

Subject: Planning Studies Review and Approval Process

Planning Studies Review and Approval Process

Purpose

This memorandum replaces the September 14, 2018, “Concurrence Memo” and describes the process that WSDOT agrees to follow when developing planning studies. Planning studies can be for a corridor, network, or subarea. Study participants identify performance gaps, define the need, consider alternatives, and make recommendations that WSDOT and local partners can support.

Background

In the past, receiving approval for a planning study was challenging. There was no defined structure in place to engage the right people at the right time to provide input. Coordination, feedback, and communication between the regions and HQ could be uneven and disjointed, which often led to last minute changes. Some studies were not effective in managing local partners’ expectations regarding the scope and feasibility of recommendations.

To improve planning studies, the Multimodal Planning and Data Division (MPDD) recommended a pilot process that was detailed in the “Concurrence Memo”. Regions and HQ agreed to develop planning studies that met these six performance measures:

1. Decreased time for a study to be signed and approved.
2. Increased engagement between regions and HQ.
3. Decreased frustration.
4. Increased support of study conclusions.
5. Improved trust and better relationships.
6. Studies that reflect Practical Solutions.

After the pilot studies were completed, MPDD assessed the concurrence process with feedback and assistance from regions, M2 Team members, the Integrated Systems and Modes (ISM) Steering Committee, and the ISM Task 1.2.5 Advisory Group. The assessment concluded that the six performance measures were being met, but that there was still room for improvement. There was unanimous support to keep the concurrence process structure and to document the roles and responsibilities of the regions and HQ.

Roles and responsibilities

Below are the roles and responsibilities for regions and HQ in reviewing and approving a planning study.

REGION

- Ultimately responsible for producing studies and recommendations that reflect the Secretary's Executive Order 1090.01 Advancing Practical Solutions.
- Coordinates participation of the M2 Team with the Multimodal Planning and Data Division liaison. M2 Team input is especially valuable at the following decision points:
 - Work program.
 - Scope of work.
 - Community engagement strategies.
 - Performance gaps and measures.
 - Draft recommendations.
 - Draft report.
- Manages all aspects of a planning study such as work plan, schedule, budget, community engagement, briefings, and development of recommendations.
- Obtains regional administrator's signature for approval of the final study.

M3 TEAM

The M3 (multimodal, multidisciplinary, multi-agency team(s)) are led by the region and provide local and regional perspective on a region's planning study. A M3 Team:

- Provides input and local perspective to the regions on the content of a planning study at specific study decision points and/or milestones such as identification of performance gaps.
- Focuses on consistency with local plans and policies.
- Is expected to have participation from the Multimodal Planning and Data Division liaison.

M2 TEAM

The M2 (multimodal, multidisciplinary) Team is led by the Multimodal Planning and Data Division liaison and serves as a core team of subject matter experts from HQ, modes, and divisions. The M2 Team includes representation from the Active Transportation Division; Capital Program Development and Management; Development Division, Environmental Services Office; Maintenance; Office of Equal Opportunity; Public Transportation Division; Rail, Freight and Ports Division; Traffic; and Transportation Safety and Systems Analysis.

The M2 Team:

- Provides input and statewide perspective to the regions on the content of a planning study at specific study decision points and/or milestones such as identification of performance gaps.
- Focuses on consistency with modal plans, policies, and WSDOT messaging.
- May be requested to participate in non-planning study activities such as traffic studies, modal plans, modal studies, MPO/RTPO plan updates, and pre-design workshops.

MULTIMODAL PLANNING AND DATA DIVISION LIAISON

- Leads the M2 Team and presents a unified response to a region's information requests.
- Resolves any inconsistencies among M2 Team members' feedback.
- Participates as part of a region's study team or M3 Team, if requested.
- Briefs the MPDD director and resolves any issues prior to receiving the director's signature on a final planning study.

REGIONAL ADMINISTRATOR

- Approves the planning study. The RA signs a completed planning study validating that the study followed the practical solutions framework detailed in the Secretary's EO 1090.01.

MULTIMODAL PLANNING AND DATA DIVISION DIRECTOR

- Concurrs with the RA's approval. The Director signs a completed planning study validating that the study followed the review and approval process as described in Appendix A and attached flowchart.
- Allocates T Program budget to regions to conduct planning studies.
- Provides MPDD staff support to regions, as workloads allow.

Contacts

If you have any questions, please contact Richard Warren, MPDD Planning Studies Manager at Richard.Warren@wsdot.wa.gov or 206-498-5071.

Appendix A

General process

This general process outlines the major steps for a planning study as shown on the attached Planning Studies Flowchart. This process is scalable. The flowchart and the steps were developed by WSDOT staff from Capital Program and Development and Management; Design; Environmental Services Office; MPDD; NW Region – Mt. Baker Area Planning; and Olympic Region Planning. Input on this process was also received from regions, modes, and the M2 Team.

STEP 1: IDENTIFY NEED

Region gathers data and drafts the study's purpose and need, performance issues, and the community engagement plan. This is an opportune time to seek the advice of the M2 Team. If possible, regions should provide at least ten calendar days to the M2 Team for review and comment on the materials.

STEP 2: DRAFT SCOPE OF WORK

Region drafts scope of work which can include:

- Definition of the area of study.
- Study area's purpose and need.
- Schedule and budget.
- Community engagement/outreach plan
- A list of M3 team members' roles, responsibilities, and their level of commitment to the study.
- Anticipated deliverables.

This is an opportune time to convene the M3 Team and to gain feedback. The M3 Team is the multimodal, multidisciplinary, and multi-agency advisory group that is managed and convened by the region. The MPDD liaison is available to attend the M3 Team meeting at the region's requests.

STEP 3: FINAL SCOPE OF WORK

Region updates scope of work. This is an opportune time to seek advice from the M2 Team on concerns and issues from the M3 Team.

STEP 4: PLANNING STUDY KICK-OFF

Region kicks off the study. This is an opportune time to check-in with the M2 Team and M3 Team for feedback and guidance.

STEP 5: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Region implements the community engagement plan consistent with the agency's Community Engagement Plan.

STEP 6: ANALYSIS

Region performs analysis and gathers data to meet proposed performance metrics and measures such as:

- Traffic data.
- Collision data.
- Maintenance and preservation needs.
- Environmental screening.
- Freight needs and use.
- Active transportation connectivity issues and needs.
- Public transportation issues and needs.
- Environmental justice communities.
- Network connectivity.

This is an opportune time to involve M2 Team and M3 Team for feedback and guidance.

STEP 7: RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES

Region develops materials for the draft planning study which can include recommendations, performance measures, criteria for prioritization, and results of community engagement activities.

- Community engagement must be documented and at a minimum include who was contacted, what, how and when outreach was conducted; what was heard, and how feedback was considered. See the agency's Community Engagement Plan for more information.
- Recommendations can be policy actions, operational changes, Transportation Systems Management and Operations strategies; etc. In some cases, a traditional capital solution or improvement project may be recommended but expectations of local partners regarding the scale and scope of the recommendations should be managed and documented. It is important to share with local partners that solutions are prioritized from system-wide needs and available resources. The priority actions documented within a plan, when evaluated at the system level, may not rise to the level needed to obtain funding.
- Include the list of all recommendations that were considered. For recommendations not selected include an explanation of the reason(s) they were not selected for further analysis and or implementation.
- Accepted recommendations need to include:
 - Data and analysis results that will meet performance metrics.
 - Planning level estimates – including costs to maintain the proposed recommendations.
 - Anticipated timeline.
 - Implementation lead, support of MPO/RTPO including agreement to include in their respective regional plan, and funding partners.
- Additional information in a study includes:
 - Disclaimers relating to data, community engagement, budget constraints, etc.
 - State of good repair statement that describes the backlog of maintenance and preservation needs on the state highway system.
 - Vicinity map.
 - State, regional, and local context of the study. This includes a description of how this plan meets state, regional, and/or local concerns.
- Include which recommendations should be considered through more detailed analysis and include who will lead this analysis and if this analysis is funded.

STEP 8: RELEASE DRAFT PLANNING STUDY FOR COMMENT

Region develops draft planning study and seeks input from M2 Team and M3 Team and the parties identified in

the study's community engagement plan. If possible, regions should provide at least ten calendar days for review and comment.

STEPS 9 AND 10: SUBMIT FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR APPROVAL AND OBTAIN RA APPROVAL AND MPDD DIRECTOR CONCURRENCE

Region finalizes planning study and coordinates with the MPDD liaison to prepare the briefing packet and briefings of the MPDD Director and RA.

STEP 11: PUBLISH PLANNING STUDY

Once the planning study has been signed by the RA and MPDD director, the region coordinates with the MPDD liaison to file the study with the WSDOT Library and post to the appropriate website.

NOTES:

PEL: There are extra steps to this process if the planning study is a Planning and Environmental Linkage (PEL) study. See WSDOT's Environmental Services Office for more information on PEL studies.

M2 Team: The process shows milestones in a planning study that are the most opportune time to involve M2 Team participation to obtain timely input. The process is not indicative of the only times M2 Team members should be consulted. Regions, modes, and other parties are encouraged to engage with the M2 Team at any point during their study. Contact the MPDD liaison to coordinate those consultations.

Region Subject Matter Experts: Involvement of the M2 doesn't replace the functions of region subject matter experts.

Appendix B

Planning Study Flowchart

