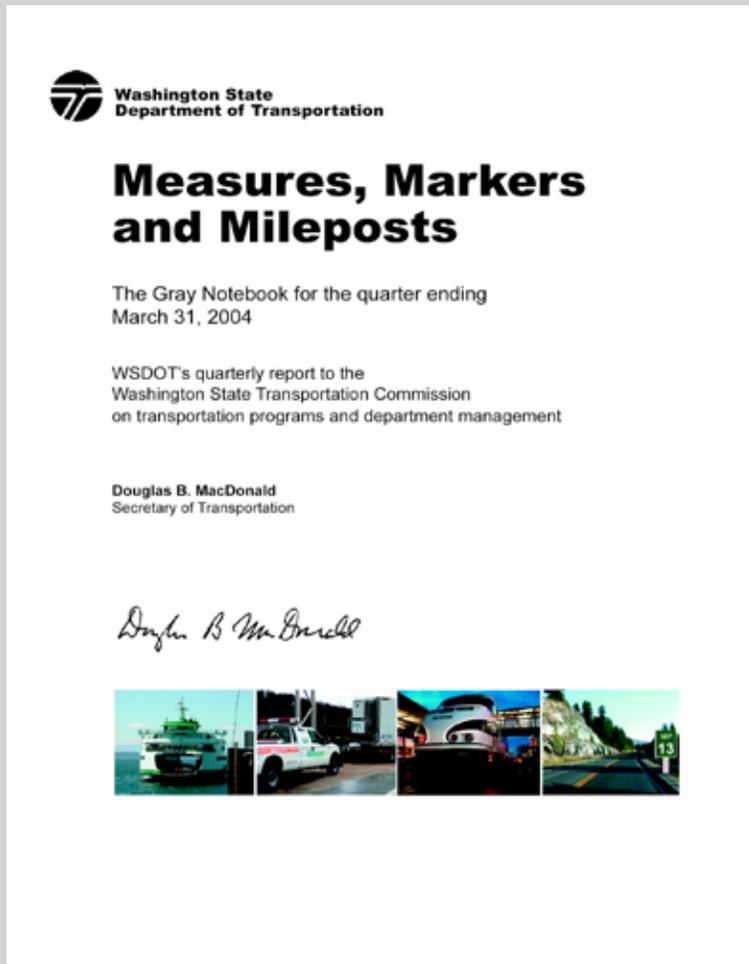




**Washington State  
Department of Transportation**

# Navigating the *Gray Notebook*



*Measures, Markers and Mileposts*, also called the *Gray Notebook* (GNB) because of its gray cover, provides quarterly, in-depth reports on agency and transportation system performance. The purpose of the *Gray Notebook* is to keep WSDOT accountable to the Transportation Commission, Washington State citizens, legislators, and transportation organizations. It is also an important internal management and integration tool. The rigor and quality control involved in developing each performance report requires a hands on approach by staff and managers at all levels and across all programs. The GNB effort exemplifies WSDOT's "what gets measured, gets managed" mantra.

Agency wide performance reporting is a high priority at WSDOT. Data tracking, measurement and reporting methods continue to be refined. The reporting approach is dynamic to adapt to changing public and legislative expectations and agency needs and provide timely performance information.



# Navigating the Gray Notebook

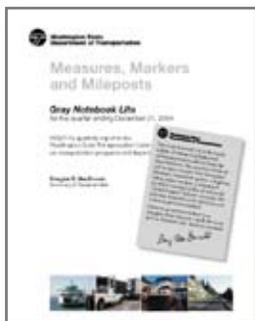
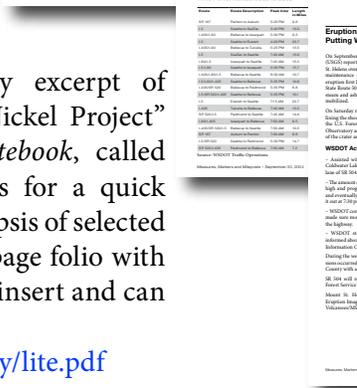
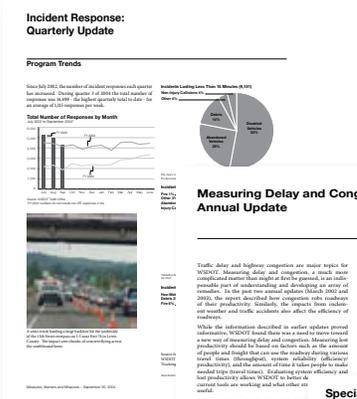
The report is organized into two main sections. The *Beige Pages* report on the delivery of the projects funded in the 2003 Transportation Funding Package and the *White Pages* describe key agency functions and provide regularly updated system and program performance information. The *Gray Notebook* is published quarterly in February, May, August and November. The current edition and archives are available on-line: [www.wsdot.wa.gov/accountability/](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/accountability/)

## Beige Pages

The *Beige Pages* are WSDOT's project delivery performance report on the Nickel Projects and other projects designated by the legislature in its 2003 Transportation Funding Package. It contains detailed narrative project summaries and financial information supporting WSDOT's "no surprises" reporting focus.

## White Pages

The *White Pages* are WSDOT's transportation system and agency program performance report. Annual and quarterly updates are provided based on regularly scheduled reporting cycles. Special features change from quarter to quarter.



## Gray Notebook Lite

WSDOT publishes a quarterly excerpt of key performance topics and "Nickel Project" summaries from the *Gray Notebook*, called *Gray Notebook Lite*. *Lite* allows for a quick review and provides a short synopsis of selected topics. It is published as a four page folio with a two page *Beige Page* summary insert and can be accessed at [www.wsdot.wa.gov/accountability/lite.pdf](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/accountability/lite.pdf)



## How to Find Performance Information

The electronic subject index gives readers access to current and archived performance information. The comprehensive index is easy to use and instantly links to every performance measure published to date. Measures are organized alphabetically within program areas. A click on the subject topic and edition number provides a direct link to that page. A copy of the subject index is also provided in the back of each edition. To access the index electronically, visit:

[www.wsdot.wa.gov/accountability/graybookindex.htm](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/accountability/graybookindex.htm)

## Project Pages

Project Pages contain information on all aspects of a specific project. The Quarterly Project Reports are accessible through a link on the Project Page.

Project Pages can be found at:

[www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/)



## Quarterly Performance Topics

Quarterly topics are featured in each edition.

## Annual Performance Topics

System performance updates are rotated over four quarters based on data availability and relevant data cycles. Annual updates provide in depth analysis of topics and associated issues (see GNB Topic Publication Cycles).

## Special Topics

Selected Special Features and Program Highlights are provided in the back of each edition and focus on noteworthy items, special events and innovations.

## GNB Topic Publication Cycles

### Quarterly

- Washington State Ferry System
- Amtrak *Cascades* and Grain Train
- Highway Construction Program
- Incident Response Program
- Special Bridge Projects Update
- Workforce Training and Worker Safety
- Program Highlights and Special Features

### Annual

#### March

- Aviation Program
- Environment - EIS Documentation, Fish Passage, Permitting, and Cultural Resources
- Asset Management - Rest Areas
- Maintenance - Winter Snow and Ice Wrap-up

#### June

- Benchmarks
- Construction Contracts Actuals to Estimates
- Intelligent Transportation Systems
- Safety Initiative Updates

#### September

- Bridge Condition
- Highway Litter
- Highway Congestion
- Commute Options

#### December

- End of Season Construction Projects Summary
- Maintenance Accountability Process and IVM
- Pavement Condition
- Safety Before and After Project Analysis
- Environment-Wetlands, Stormwater, Erosion Control, Water Quality, EMS and Compliance

### Semiannual

**March and September** - Hot Mix Asphalt, Construction Cost Increases

### Biennial

Special Ferry Update, Value Engineering, Safety - Top Ten High Accident Corridors and Locations, Environmental - Hazardous Materials and Noise and Air Quality

## WSDOT's Performance Journalism

The *Gray Notebook* uses a special style of reporting called "Performance Journalism." Performance Journalism is the combination of quantitative reporting using charts, tables, and measurements and storytelling in the form of special features, text, and pictures. The goal is to share the performance of even WSDOT's most complex and diverse programs and projects clearly and concisely in a format that everyone can easily understand and explain to their neighbors. A collaborative effort between the production staff, data analysts, and program experts across the agency is essential.

The Performance Journalism method embodies key principles (shown at right) to communicate performance. Agency staff continuously seek better ways to measure and communicate performance and demonstrate accountability.

### Performance Journalism Principles

**Good Stories:** use narrative reporting to make it real

**Good Writing:** explain it to your next door neighbor

**Good Data:** source data is your credibility

**Good Format:** design should not distract from content

**Good Graphics:** every chart tells a story, every chart asks a question

**Quality Assurance/Quality Control:** it is part of every step in the analysis and report production

**Good Timing:** (as in "real-time") provide frequent and timely information

**Good Presentation:** share information in a conversational style

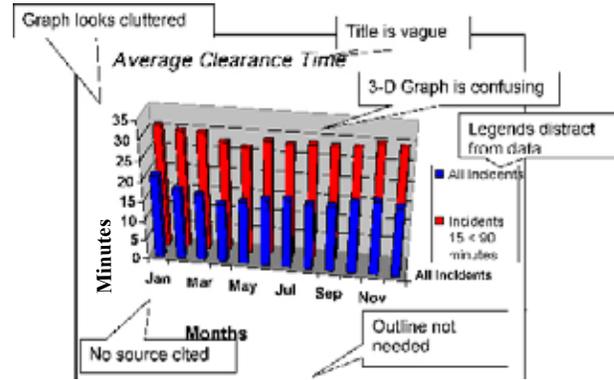
**Good Software:** use software capable of generating both good formats and good graphics.

## Charting the *Gray Notebook* Way

WSDOT developed the “performance journalism” approach used in the *Gray Notebook* to engage the reader and make our data more accessible. Using our own creativity, as well as insights from Edward R. Tufte on presenting statistical evidence and information design, we developed simple chart designs using the following guidelines.

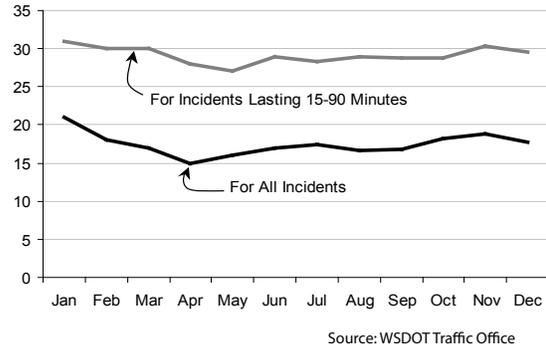
- Avoid colors, make the chart work in black and white
- Use plain English and avoid jargon
- Cite data sources
- Eliminate legend boxes and use pointers to label data
- Show only relevant data and remove chart junk (outlined boxes, colors and lines)
- Avoid 3-Ds: Don't Do multi-Dimensional graphs
- Drop extra grid lines and numbers and lighten lines
- Use clear chart titles and subtitles to explain the X and Y-axis, content and purpose

### Before: A Typical Graph

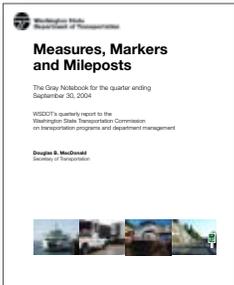


### After: As Published

Incident Response Average Clearance Time Statewide January 2003 to December 2003 (in minutes)



## A Central Role in Agency Accountability



The *Gray Notebook* is the foundation for agency performance assessment and reporting as well as public and legislative communication. The development of the GNB has influenced many related accountability and performance products. Some examples are listed below.

### Statewide Benchmarks

The Washington State Transportation Commission and WSDOT, working collaboratively with the Washington State Transit Association, implemented statewide benchmarks for eight categories of transportation system performance: [www.wsdot.wa.gov/accountability/benchmarks/](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/accountability/benchmarks/)

### Congestion Measures

WSDOT is enhancing the use and development of new congestion performance measures that are based on real time travel time information. Accomplishments include the deployment of a revamped and increased Incident Response Program and the assessment of operational and capital improvements on non-recurring and recurring congestion: [www.wsdot.wa.gov/accountability/peaktime/WSDOT\\_Measuring\\_congestion.pdf](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/accountability/peaktime/WSDOT_Measuring_congestion.pdf)

### WSDOT's Business Directions

The agency's recently released draft Business Directions (strategic plan) is based on the programs and projects funded in the 2003-2005 Transportation Budget and the 2004 supplemental budget. It reflects WSDOT's program and project delivery responsibilities with the goal to demonstrate the best possible return for taxpayers' dollars: [www.wsdot.wa.gov/accountability/2003-2007\\_Business\\_Directions.pdf](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/accountability/2003-2007_Business_Directions.pdf)

**Washington Transportation Plan (WTP):** The 2005 update is a blueprint for state transportation programs and investments. The plan covers all modes of Washington's transportation system: roadways, ferries, public transportation, aviation, freight rail, passenger rail, marine ports and navigation, and bicycles and pedestrians: [www.wsdot.wa.gov/planning/wtp](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/planning/wtp)

### Research and Development

WSDOT actively researches and explores national and international performance measurement trends. WSDOT recently reviewed the state of the practice in state DOT performance measurement and launched a new Performance Measure Library: [www.wsdot.wa.gov/accountability/library/](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/accountability/library/)

## Get in Touch!

The *Gray Notebook* is produced by WSDOT's Strategic Assessment Office, working with contributing staff in WSDOT programs and WSDOT's Graphics Office.

Feedback is appreciated. If you have questions or suggestions regarding the *Gray Notebook*, please contact:

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[graynotebook@wsdot.wa.gov](mailto:graynotebook@wsdot.wa.gov)