FIVE YEAR REVIEW
Non-Metropolitan Local Official Consultation Process
Washington State Department of Transportation

Background

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) developed and adopted a Non-Metropolitan Consultation Process on February 17, 2006 in compliance with 23CFR450.210(b). This regulation requires each state to have a documented process "for consulting[1] with local officials representing units of general purpose local government" during the development of the statewide transportation planning process and the statewide transportation improvement program (STIP). States are further required in 23CFR450.210(b)(1) to review this process and solicit comments every five years regarding the effectiveness of the consultation.

Section (c) of this CFR also requires consultation with tribes during the development of the statewide transportation planning process and the STIP, but that process will not be addressed in this document. The WSDOT Tribal Liaison is currently updating WSDOT's protocol for consultation with tribes.

Formal Consultation Process

In Washington state, the transportation planning consultation process with non-metropolitan local officials takes place primarily through RTPOs - as established in Chapter 47.80 RCW:

1. RTPO – Statutory Authority

   The authority to form RTPOs was established in 1990 as a part of the state Growth Management Act. RTPOs are voluntary associations of local government (cities, counties, and transit districts) for the purposes of transportation planning (Chapter 47.80 RCW). RTPOs develop regional transportation plans and Regional Transportation Improvement Programs (RTIPs). They have been active in the development of the *2007-2026 Washington Transportation Plan*, the federally compliant, statewide, long-range transportation plan. The WSDOT Transportation Planning Office verifies that each RTPO conforms to statutory requirements through continuous plan coordination and grant management.

2. RTPO – Structure

   There are 14 RTPOs in Washington state. RTPO membership includes 38 of the 39 counties in the state. Per regulations, RTPOs in urbanized areas must be the same organization as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) designated for the area. Population counts in the 2000 Census resulted in the formation of three new MPOs. The formation of these new MPOs changed the distribution of RTPOs to include:

   - Two that are exclusively rural in nature (Northeast Washington RTPO and Quad-County RTPO)
   - Two that are mainly rural in nature but include an adjunct member county that has an urbanized area (Palouse and Peninsula), and
   - Ten that are affiliated with MPOs

[1] *Consultation is defined as: "When one party confers with another identified party and, prior to taking action(s), considers that party's views."*

3. RTPO – Membership
   RTPOs must create transportation policy boards that include representatives of member cities, towns, and counties. These boards must allow other transportation stakeholders (major employers, port districts, transit districts, WSDOT Regions, and tribal governments) to participate in policy-making. While all RTPOs may provide voting membership on their executive boards to the Transportation Commission, WSDOT, and large public ports, those RTPOs containing counties with a population greater than one million must provide voting membership to those organizations. Generally, RTPO boards and policy and technical committees meet regularly—usually monthly or quarterly. Representatives of WSDOT and other state agencies regularly consult and coordinate with local elected and staff officials as a part of these meetings.

4. RTPO – State Funding
   Since 1995, the legislature has provided an appropriation of at least $1.2 million per year for RTPO support. During the last statewide plan development process, the legislature appropriated an additional $1 million per fiscal year for RTPOs. During the current biennium, the legislature has appropriated $2.2 million per year to support RTPOs and their long-range transportation planning efforts.

5. RTPO – Consultation process
   There are five core parts to the RTPO consultation process in Washington:
   a. WSDOT/MPO/RTPO Coordinating Committee meetings
      WSDOT facilitates quarterly meetings primarily made of staff representatives of all RTPOs. Any member can suggest issues or topics for discussion at these meetings. WSDOT executives and Washington State Transportation Commission members periodically attend these meetings and discuss issues that help frame statewide policy.
   b. RTPO – Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)/STIP process
      Each year the RTPOs directly enter data describing their selected projects from their regional TIP into a WSDOT database. This data is then forwarded for inclusion in the STIP. The RTIP process includes coordination and consultation with WSDOT regional staff, Highways and Local Programs, and the Transportation Planning Office to develop a coordinated program. In this process, RTPO members and staff have an opportunity to review WSDOT projects in their area.
   c. Statewide Transportation Planning
      RTPO policy board members (local elected officials) and technical committees (county, city, transit, port, and other staffs) provide key feedback on which state projects, programs, and policies should be proposed in statewide transportation plans and programs to meet and support local and regional needs. The statewide plans and programs providing this opportunity include, but are not limited to:

      i. Statewide Long-Range Transportation Plan (federal requirement)
      ii. Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (federal requirement)
      iii. Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan (state requirement)
      iv. Statewide Policy Plan (state requirement for the Washington State Transportation Commission)
      v. Statewide modal plans (state requirement):
         1. Highway System Plan, State Ferry System Plan, Freight Mobility Plan, Aviation Plan, Marine Ports and Navigation Plan, Freight Rail Plan, State

Rail Plan, Intercity Passenger Rail Plan, Passenger Rail Plan, Bicycle Facilities and Pedestrian Walkways Plan, Public Transportation Plan

vi. Strategic Highway Safety Plan (state requirement)

RTPOs were instrumental in developing the *2007-2026 Washington Transportation Plan*, fulfilling both federal and state requirements for a long-range and multimodal plan. During 2009, they participated in the development of the Aviation System Plan, Ferry System Plan, and Freight Rail Plan. In 2010, they participated in the *Strategic Highway Safety Plan (Target Zero) and* the *Highway System Plan*. RTPOs were also active in the development of the *Washington Transportation Plan 2030*, which is the Transportation Commission's statewide transportation policy plan.[2]

d. Individual RTPO meetings
WSDOT Region representatives interface regularly with the RTPOs. The Regional Administrator is typically a voting member of the Policy Board and the Region Planning Manager is typically a member of the RTPO Technical Advisory Committee. They routinely attend RTPO policy and technical meetings. Not all RTPOs have the same organizational structure, so committee participation varies.

WSDOT Region Planning Offices assist in the development and review of local and regional transportation plans and studies. They coordinate with RTPOs and others in developing, analyzing, and refining solutions for highway deficiencies. They review and coordinate study methodology and provide recommendations and input to local agencies (RTPOs) and local interest groups concerning land use actions, traffic mitigation, and future transportation improvements. They also coordinate with RTPOs and local jurisdictions in updating the Travel Demand Model, particularly for developing projects and studies.

<u>Other Consultation Opportunities</u>
In addition to the RTPO program, Washington state participates in a variety of statewide, non-metropolitan local official consultations, in compliance with 23CFR450.210(b):

- **Local Government Associations**
  Every five years WSDOT provides the Washington State Association of Counties and the Association of Washington Cities an opportunity to comment on the effectiveness of the Non-Metropolitan Local Official Consultation Process. Other organizations are also involved (Washington Association of County Officials), as appropriate.

- **Non-RTPO County**
  San Juan County, composed entirely of islands, is currently not a member of an RTPO. Its four largest islands are served by the Washington State Ferries (WSF, a division of WSDOT). These ferry routes are considered the only state highways in the county. The WSF established ferry advisory committees in the county. These committees consult and receive input on transportation planning and report back to WSF. Local elected officials appoint most members of these committees (WSF also uses Ferry Advisory Committees in other service areas). Funds

[2] The WTP2030 does not replace the 2007-2026 WTP as Washington state's federally compliant long-range plan.

for San Juan County are reserved in the RTPO grant program. Periodic dialogs have occurred regarding their joining an RTPO, but the consensus within the county appears to be that no change to current consultation procedures is needed.

- **Local Area Meetings**
  The Washington State Transportation Commission holds local area meetings around the state at least four times a year to gain an in-depth understanding of transportation issues important to various areas of the state. The information gathered helps the Commission to recommend policies and budgets. Although these meetings are not solely for non-metropolitan local officials, rural local officials consistently participate in them.

  The commission is also required by state law to conduct regional forums to collect citizen input on transportation issues every five years. RCW 47.01.075 specifically states that:
  "(1) The transportation commission shall provide a public forum for the development of transportation policy in Washington state to include coordination with regional transportation planning organizations, transportation stakeholders, counties, cities, and citizens. At least every five years, the commission shall convene regional forums to gather citizen input on transportation issues. The commission shall consider the input gathered at the forums as it establishes the statewide transportation plan under RCW 47.01.071(4).
  (2) In fulfilling its responsibilities under this section, the commission may create ad hoc committees or other such committees of limited duration as necessary.
  (3) In order to promote a better transportation system, the commission may offer policy guidance and make recommendations to the governor and the legislature in key issue areas, including but not limited to:

  (a) Transportation finance;
  (b) Preserving, maintaining, and operating the statewide transportation system;
  (c) Transportation infrastructure needs;
  (d) Promoting best practices for adoption and use by transportation-related agencies and programs;
  (e) Transportation efficiencies that will improve service delivery and/or coordination;
  (f) Improved planning and coordination among transportation agencies and providers; and
  (g) Use of intelligent transportation systems and other technology-based solutions."

- **Opportunity for process review**
  WSDOT conducted a sixty-calendar day period to allow non-metropolitan local officials to review and comment on the consultation process. The review period was from November 10, 2010 until January 14, 2011. Following this review, WSDOT assessed the recommendations, incorporated pertinent changes, and submitted the final process to FHWA and FTA prior to February 24, 2011.

- **Innovative Communication Technology**
  WSDOT has begun and continues to communicate vital traffic information and agency news using its Web site and social media tools on the Internet. Some examples of these technologies include:

- Blogger (wsdotblog.blogspot.com/) - A blog is a Web site, usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. WSDOT engages the public by telling them about what we do, and allows readers to leave comments in an interactive format.
- YouTube (www.youtube.com/user/wsdot) - This is a video-sharing Web site where users can upload, view and share video clips. Videos allow WSDOT to show audiences footage of road conditions, storm damage, project simulations, or other events and activities in a visually compelling way.
- Twitter (www.twitter.com/wsdot) - This free networking and micro-blogging service allows its users to send and read other users' text updates (known as tweets) of up to 140 characters in length. Our Twitter updates are sent to subscribers and received on their computer, cell phone, or mobile hand-held device. This real-time information enables the user to adjust their travel plans or routes accordingly.
- Flickr (www.flickr.com/photos/wsdot) - This is an image and video-hosting Web site, and online community platform. WSDOT posts photos and descriptions of high profile events, construction projects, and most recently, 2009 winter storm damage.
- Facebook (www.facebook.com/WSDOT) – This free interactive social media network is a way to stay up to date with WSDOT news via profile updates and photos. All you have to do is "Like" the WSDOT Facebook page, and you can keep tabs on what WSDOT is doing.
- RSS Feeds (www.wsdot.wa.gov/news/rss/) - RSS (Real Simple Syndication) is a way for you to keep up on your favorite news and information without having to visit the Web site to see what is new. This information is viewed through a RSS News Reader.

- **Sensitivity to Rural Areas Without Broadband Internet Access**
  WSDOT is aware of the communication barriers to rural areas of the state that currently do not have broadband Internet access. These identified cities will receive review instructions and feedback mechanisms via newsletters mailed through the post office.