

- 950.01 General
- 950.02 References
- 950.03 Standard Architectural Design
- 950.04 Criteria for Public Art
- 950.05 Process and Project Delivery Timing
- 950.06 Approvals
- 950.07 Documentation

950.01 General

There has been a growing interest on the part of communities to use art within the transportation facilities of the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT). It can be used to provide visual interest along roadsides, make unique statements about community character, and create a positive public response that will last over time.

Proponents for public art might be local agencies or engaged citizens' groups with interest in the outcome of a WSDOT project. The environmental and public involvement processes offer opportunities for community partnership on the visual and aesthetic qualities of a corridor.

The public art policy in this chapter is intended to: provide guidance for managing public art on WSDOT facilities and within its rights of way; reinforce the existing policy in the [Roadside Policy Manual](#); designate appropriate locations for the incorporation of public art features; and provide for the consistent use of statewide development, review, and approval processes on new and existing features.

The appropriateness of public art is frequently dependent upon its location and composition. For example, an art piece or feature chosen for the back side of a noise wall, at a safety rest area, or along a bike path may not be suitable at the end of a freeway ramp or along the main line of a highway. In addition to appropriate placement, WSDOT must balance the requests for proposed public art projects with the need to provide corridor continuity, improve the unity of highway elements, and provide roadsides that do not divert motorists' attention from driving.

While some local jurisdictions dedicate a percentage of their project budgets for art, WSDOT has no such dedicated funding. Section 40 of the State Constitution specifies that gas tax money must be used for a "highway purpose." Therefore, public art beyond WSDOT standard design is typically funded by communities or other entities outside of WSDOT.

When city or community entrance markers are proposed, this policy should be used in conjunction with the guidance contained in [Chapter 1600](#), Roadside Safety, the [Traffic Manual](#), and the [Roadside Policy Manual](#).

What is public art?

For the purposes of WSDOT policy, public art is an enhancement to a functional element, feature, or place within a transportation corridor to provide visual interest. The enhancement could be an addition to a functional element, integrated into a design, or for purely aesthetic purposes.

An element is considered "public art" if it is beyond WSDOT standard practice for architectural treatment.

950.02 References

950.02(1) Federal/State Laws and Codes

[Chapter 47.42 Revised Code of Washington \(RCW\)](#), Highway advertising control act – Scenic vistas act

950.02(2) Design Guidance

[Bridge Design Manual](#), M 23-50, WSDOT

[Roadside Policy Manual](#), M 25-31, WSDOT

950.02(3) Supporting Information

[A Guide for Achieving Flexibility in Highway Design](#), AASHTO, 2004

[Flexibility in Highway Design](#), FHWA, 1997

[Roadside Manual](#), M 25-30, WSDOT

[Traffic Manual](#), M 51-02, WSDOT

[Understanding Flexibility in Transportation Design – Washington](#), WSDOT, 2005

www.wsdot.wa.gov/research/reports/600/638.1.htm

950.03 Standard Architectural Design

WSDOT's public art policy does not apply to the standard design of transportation architectural elements such as simple geometric patterns; combinations of WSDOT [standard concrete formliners](#); contrasting pavement patterns or colors in crosswalks or roundabouts; or earth-tone colors on structures or barriers.

To discuss the details of proposed public art projects, contact the State Bridge and Structures Architect, and the region or Headquarters (HQ) Landscape Architect for regions without a Landscape Architect. They are key members of the Public Art Specialty Services Team (described in [950.05](#)) and can answer questions and assist in determining an appropriate course of action.

950.04 Criteria for Public Art

Placement and composition of public art is unique and is to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Prior to approval of public art, a public art plan is to be developed in coordination with the Public Art Specialty Services Team. The team will review the concept, guide the local agency or design team through the process, and approve the plan in accordance with [950.06](#).

The following criteria are to be addressed and documented in the public art plan:

- The public art proponent, the funding source, and those responsible for the installation and maintenance of the proposed art.
- Safe maintenance access.
- Maintenance Agreement with local agencies for maintenance where appropriate. If there is a potential for vandalism, address this issue in the associated maintenance agreement.

- Whether public art resulted from the specific recommendation(s) of a planning-level study.
- Subject of the recommended art.
- Visibility:
 - Art visible from the main line must contribute to corridor continuity and the view from the road.
 - Art visible to the community or adjacent to the neighborhood side of a structure may have more flexibility in design than that visible from the main line.
- Safety and security: Public art must not negatively impact safety nor create an attractive nuisance.
- Potential for traffic distraction: Proposed art must not distract motorists. It must be appropriate for the speed and angle at which it will be viewed.
- Scale and context: The public art plan should address the scale of the proposed work and its fit within the surrounding landscape and land use.
- Contribution of the art to community character.
- Impact of the proposed art on social, cultural, and environmental features:
 - In general, WSDOT would not approve the addition of art on a historic structure or within an ecologically sensitive area.
- Compliance with applicable laws, such as the [Scenic Vistas Act](#) and [23 CFR 752](#), Landscape and Roadside Development.
- Compliance with the [Traffic Manual](#) and the [Roadside Policy Manual](#):
 - Lettering that can be construed as advertisement is not allowed.
 - “Welcome to [insert city name]” lettering is permissible at the end of ramps if it complies with the [Traffic Manual](#) section on Sign Design.
 - Locations for community gateway signs are described in the [Roadside Policy Manual](#).
- Demonstrated responsible use of tax dollars and enhanced public trust in WSDOT judgment.

For further information on these criteria, see the [Roadside Manual](#).

950.04(1) Acceptable Public Art Features

Public art must be in compliance with WSDOT corridor guidelines, such as the Mountains to Sound Greenway Implementation Plan or the I-90 Architectural Design Standards, and existing policies such as the [Roadside Policy Manual](#) and the [Bridge Design Manual](#).

The following are examples of types and locations of acceptable public art features:

- Concrete surface treatments (beyond WSDOT standard)
- Colored paving/colored pavers/scoring patterns (beyond WSDOT standard)
- Specially designed benches, trash cans, planters, or other street furnishings
- Soft lighting and lighting fixtures
- Small-scale sculptures or art pieces (when not viewed from the main line)
- Attachments to decorative railings, light poles, or fences
- Decorative bus shelters

950.04(2) Unacceptable Public Art Features

The following are examples of unacceptable public art features:

- Kinetic sculptures
- Brightly lit or flashing art
- Art that poses a safety risk or liability
- Large sculptures (the size is relative to its context and location in the landscape)
- Art with highly reflective qualities or adverse colors
- Art that is a distraction to drivers or out of context with the surroundings
- Art with a topic/theme that could cause negative public reaction
- Art that resembles a traffic control device
- Art that contains advertising

950.05 Process and Project Delivery Timing

Begin the development and review of public art early in the design process, and conduct subsequent reviews during the course of its development. Do not include public art as a change order or addendum to a project without first having gone through the process described in this policy. Project Ad and Award dates will not be delayed due to an incomplete public art process.

A public art plan is developed to incorporate public art into projects on state highways. Include the review of the public art plan by the [Public Art Specialty Services Team](#) in project reviews.

950.05(1) Public Art Plan

The public art plan is developed by the Project Engineer's Office or by the local artist or community sponsoring the proposal. The plan provides enough detail and description to convey the intent of the proposed art project. The plan documents how the proposed art meets the criteria listed in [950.04](#) and includes the following elements:

- Cover sheet with appropriate approval signatures (see [950.06](#)).
- Project overview.

- Location of the proposed art.
- Scale drawings of the proposed art, including proposed materials, attachments, and finishes. Any attachments to fencing or structures, or proposed new structures, will require structural engineering calculations.
- All criteria from 950.04, Criteria for Public Art, addressed and documented.
- Justification and recommendations for public art.
- Documentation showing support by the local community.

Without an approved public art plan, a Maintenance Agreement (as appropriate), and funding, the “art” will not be constructed or installed.

950.05(2) Public Art Specialty Services Team

Include the Public Art Specialty Services Team in the development of public art and the public art plan. The Team includes the following:

- Project Engineer or a designee (if the art is included in a project)
- State Bridge and Structures Architect
- Region or HQ Landscape Architect
- Region Traffic Engineer
- Region Local Programs Engineer (if the proponent is a local community)

For public art proposed within Interstate Limited Access, the following team members are also required:

- Assistant State Design Engineer
- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Safety/Geometric Engineer or a designee

Consider team membership from the following functional areas when their expertise is applicable:

- Maintenance
- Planning
- Environmental
- Real Estate Services

950.06 Approvals

950.06(1) Intermediate Approvals

The Public Art Specialty Services Team is responsible for approving the public art; therefore, be sure to involve them in the development of art during the earliest possible phase of project development. This will ensure approvals happen smoothly and WSDOT and FHWA are aware of the public art as soon as possible.

Project development phases include the following:

- Initial Art Concept review: input and approval.
- Selected Art Concept review: input and approval.
- Final Proposed Art review: input and approval.

950.06(2) Final Approval

Approval of the public art plan is considered approval for the public art. The public art plan cover letter needs to include the following approval signatures as appropriate.

950.06(2)(a) Within Limited Access

Public art within Limited Access on the Interstate is approved by:

- Project Engineer or a designee (if the art is included in a project)
- State Bridge and Structures Architect
- Region or HQ Landscape Architect
- Region Traffic Engineer
- Region Local Programs Engineer (if the proponent is a local community)
- Assistant State Design Engineer
- Region Administrator or designee
- FHWA Safety/Geometric Design Engineer or designee

950.06(2)(b) All Other Projects

Public art for all other projects is approved by:

- Project Engineer or a designee (if the art is included in a project)
- Region or HQ Landscape Architect
- State Bridge and Structures Architect
- Region Traffic Engineer
- Region Local Programs Engineer (if the proponent is a local community)
- Region Administrator or designee

950.07 Documentation

The public art plan, complete with approval signatures, is retained in the Design Documentation Package (DDP).

Refer to [Chapter 300](#) for design documentation requirements.