

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Regional Transportation Plan was developed through a cooperative process with the Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments, which serves as the lead agency for the Longview-Kelso-Rainier Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and the Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Planning Organization (SWRTPO). Partner agencies include the Olympic, South Central, and Southwest regions of the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and Region 2 of the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT). This plan also relies on substantial input from the public, 28 cities, 12 ports, four public transit agencies, and the five counties that constitute the Regional Transportation Planning Organization area.

CWCOG staff regularly meets with the Technical Advisory Committees and policy boards in each of the five member counties. Each of these agencies has in-depth knowledge of the transportation issues surrounding their jurisdictions and has used this expertise to establish their transportation priorities.

Metropolitan Planning Organization

The Metropolitan Planning Organization is federally mandated and authorized to fulfill federal planning requirements for the Longview-Kelso-Rainier urbanized area. The 1980 US Census indicated that the cities of Longview and Kelso (Washington), Rainier (Oregon), and unincorporated areas of Cowlitz County had reached the threshold population and urban densities required for an urbanized area. In 1982, in compliance with federal laws, the local governments and both governors designated the CWCOG as the responsible agency to carry out the required planning responsibilities of an urbanized area for highways, streets, roads, and public transportation. The CWCOG planning responsibilities are defined in the annual Unified Planning

Work Program (UPWP). The CWCOG MPO complies with federal United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) regulations, which require that the

“Metropolitan area has a continuous, cooperative, and comprehensive transportation planning process that results in plans and programs that consider all transportation modes and supports metropolitan community development and social goals. These plans and programs shall lead to the development and operation of an integrated, inter-modal transportation system that facilitates the efficient, economic movement of people and goods.”
(Federal Register, Volume 58, No. 207, October 28, 1993, Section 450.300)

Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Planning Organization (SWRTPO)

The SWRTPO is voluntary, locally developed, and fulfills state planning requirements for the five-county region. The organization is comprised of 69 jurisdictions, agencies, tribes, and non-profits, which represent the region population of 279,240 persons (Washington State Office of Financial Management 2015 Population Estimate). The 1990 Legislature authorized regional transportation planning as part of Washington State’s Growth Management Act (GMA). The Act created a formal mechanism for local governments and the state to coordinate planning for regional transportation facilities and services. Furthermore, where an MPO exists, the regional planning organization is required to be the same entity. In 1991, in response to this state law, the CWCOG consulted with Grays Harbor and Pacific County to form the SWRTPO, with CWCOG as the lead agency. Lewis County was added as the fifth county in 1992.

CWCOG is the responsible agency to carry out the regional planning responsibilities of the five-county Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Planning Organization (SWRTPO).

The SWRTPO was developed specifically to comply with RCW 36.70A, the Growth Management Act (GMA), and RCW 47.80, which authorized creation of RTPOs formed through voluntary association of local governments. As state law provides at RCW 47.80.023, the duties of an RTPO are:

- Prepare and periodically update a transportation strategy for the region;
- Prepare a Regional Transportation Plan that is consistent with countywide planning policies, local comprehensive plans, and state transportation plans;
- Certify that the transportation elements of local comprehensive plans reflect the region’s guidelines and principles for transportation planning; are consistent with the adopted Regional Transportation Plan; and conform with the requirements of the state Growth Management Act;
- Certify that countywide planning policies and the Regional Transportation Plan are consistent;
- Develop a six-year Regional Transportation Improvement Program, which proposes regionally significant transportation projects and programs and transportation demand management strategies;
- Designate a lead planning agency to coordinate preparation of the Regional Transportation Plan and carry out the other responsibilities of the organization;
- Review level of service methodologies used by cities and counties to promote a consistent regional evaluation of transportation facilities and corridors; and
- Work with cities, counties, transit agencies, WSDOT, and others to develop level of service standards or alternative transportation performance measures.

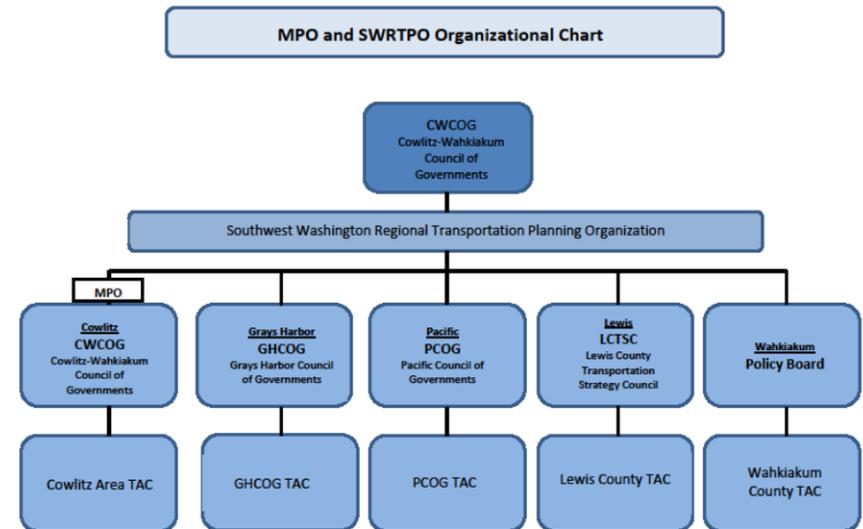


Figure 1-1: MPO and SWRTPO Organizational Chart

Source: CWCOG

Federal and State Transportation Planning Requirements

Since 1991, federal transportation legislation has required that metropolitan transportation planning be accomplished through formation of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs). That ongoing process creates a cooperative, continuous, and comprehensive framework for making transportation investment decisions in urbanized areas of 50,000 or more population. Those investment decisions must include both highway and transit projects. Planning funds are, therefore, provided by the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration to carry out those MPO activities.

The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991 brought about a new focus on a balanced, efficient transportation system. The 35-year interstate highway construction era was over. The ISTEA shifted decision-making about federal transportation funding from the state DOTs to a shared responsibility between the states and the MPOs. Major emphasis was put on local planning and programming. That emphasis expanded the duties of MPOs and RTPOs. ISTEA set forth requirements for Metropolitan Transportation Plans (MTPs), including 16 planning factors to be incorporated into the MTPs.

The 1998 Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) built on the initiatives of ISTEA. Flexibility in the use of funds, emphasis on measures to improve the environment, focus on a strong planning process as the foundation of quality transportation decisions—all ISTEA hallmarks—were continued and enhanced by TEA-21. In 2005, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) was introduced to reauthorize funding and to build on the initiatives of ISTEA and TEA-21.

The current federal transportation act, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) was signed into law on July 6, 2012. MAP-21 creates a streamlined, performance-based surface transportation program and builds on many of the highway, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian programs and policies established in 1991. MAP-21 also addresses the many challenges facing the U.S. transportation system. These challenges include improving safety, maintaining infrastructure condition, reducing traffic congestion, improving efficiency of the system and freight movement, protecting the environment, and reducing delays in project delivery.

Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) Requirements

Oversight of the federal metropolitan planning program is a joint responsibility of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and

Federal Transit Administration (FTA). Requirements for a Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) are addressed in Title 23 CFR Chapter I Section 450.322. MAP-21 continues many of the metropolitan planning requirements of ISTEA, TEA-21, and SAFETEA-LU.

The metropolitan planning process establishes a continuous, cooperative, and comprehensive framework for making transportation investment decisions in metropolitan areas. In addition, it provides for the consideration and implementation of projects, strategies, and services that will address the following federal metropolitan planning factors of MAP-21:

- Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency;
- Increase the safety of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;
- Increase the security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;
- Increase the accessibility and mobility options available to people and for freight;
- Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, improve quality of life, promote consistency between transportation improvements and state and local planned growth and economic development patterns;
- Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes for people and freight;
- Promote efficient system management and operation; and
- Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.

MAP-21 encourages a relationship with other planning officials through consulting with officials responsible for state and local planned growth, economic development, environmental protection, airport operations, and freight movements. It also emphasizes safety and security as separate and distinct planning factors.

The work of MPOs impacts all sectors of the American economy. More than 80 percent of our citizens live and work in metropolitan areas, which drive the nation’s economy and compete head-to-head with regional economies in other countries. Because the pricing of our goods and services in the international marketplace largely determines our ability to compete successfully, we must be able to transport these goods and services efficiently. The quality of metropolitan transportation infrastructure—highways, bridges, airports, transit systems, rail, and ports—is a primary factor in American economic competitiveness.

Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) Requirements

State requirements for regional transportation plans are addressed in RCW 47.80. The following is a brief summary of the state’s planning requirements for regional transportation plans:

- Be based on a least-cost planning methodology that identifies the most cost-effective facilities, services, and programs;
- Identify existing or planned transportation facilities, services, and programs that should function as an integrated regional transportation system;
- Establish level of service standards for state highways with the exception of Highways of Statewide Significance (HSS);
- Include a financial plan demonstrating how the regional transportation plan can be implemented;
- Assess regional development patterns, capital investment, and other measures necessary to ensure preservation of the regional transportation system and make the most efficient use of existing transportation facilities to relieve vehicular congestion and maximize mobility of people and goods;
- Set forth a proposed regional transportation approach to guide development of the integrated, multi-modal regional system; and
- Where appropriate, set forth the relationship of high capacity transportation providers and other public transit providers with

regard to responsibility for, and coordination between, services and facilities.

In order to ensure statewide consistency in the regional transportation planning process, WSDOT and the Regional Transportation Planning Organization shall identify and jointly plan improvements and strategies within those corridors important to moving people and goods on a regional or statewide basis.

Metropolitan and Regional Transportation Improvement Program Requirements

CWCOG is required by federal and state regulations to develop a Transportation Improvement Program for its Metropolitan and Regional Transportation Planning Organizations which spans a four-year period and is updated at least every two years, or more frequently. This Regional TIP (RTIP) includes the transportation projects for both the MPO and the RTPO. The RTIP is the financial plan that identifies and prioritizes federally funded transportation projects to be carried out in the Longview-Kelso-Rainier MPO and across the SWRTPO region.

The primary purpose of the RTIP is to identify and document federally funded transportation projects that are to be included in the Washington State Department of Transportation’s Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). Projects using federal funds must appear in the RTIP and STIP or they will not receive federal funds—even if they have already been awarded. Projects located within the MPO area are approved by the CWCOG Board, and then forwarded to WSDOT for inclusion in the STIP, which is approved by the Governor, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). Projects located in the non-MPO area are approved locally and forwarded to the WSDOT for inclusion in the STIP with the exception of projects in the Cowlitz County area that have Surface Transportation Program (STP) funds for the urban or rural areas. Projects that have STP funds that are administered by the CWCOG must come before the

CWCOG Board for approval prior to inclusion in the STIP. The RTIP also aids in the coordination and cooperation of transportation planning in the region. The RTIP provides the public, elected officials, state and local staffs, transit providers, and other interested parties the opportunity to review regional projects for consistency with regional and local plans, goals and policies.

Public Participation Plan

The Public Participation Plan is the official policy of the Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments regarding involvement of the public in the transportation planning process. The Plan provides an overview of the objectives for public involvement and the activities of the Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Planning Organization (SWRTPO) and the Longview - Kelso - Rainier Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The Plan outlines the adoption and amendment processes for transportation plans, projects, and tasks; comment periods; opportunities for public participation; noticing practices; and strategies for public participation in the activities of the transportation planning organization.

In addition to getting the public to participate in the transportation planning process, the Plan identifies strategies to make information more easily accessible. The objectives of the plan are to:

- Educate and inform the public about transportation planning, projects, and issues within their communities and the region;
- Involve the public in the transportation planning process;
- Ensure that information is easily accessible to all interested parties in the community; and,
- Improve the decision making process to include the interests/needs of stakeholders through informed consent.

Unified Planning Work Program

The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) outlines the transportation studies and tasks to be performed on behalf of the Longview-Kelso-Rainier Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and the five-county Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) over the state fiscal year (July 1 to June 30). Work activities are performed by the staff of Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments (CWCOG) in conjunction with planning partners at Grays Harbor Council of Governments and Lewis County. The UPWP outlines transportation planning activities over the next fiscal year in sufficient detail to indicate who will perform the work, the schedule for completing it, expected results from the activity, and a proposed funding estimate for each task. Work items listed in the document are based on the priorities set by the region through the Long Range Transportation Plan, by guidelines established under the federal urban transportation regulations 23 USC 134, and state requirements in RCW 47.80, and WAC 486.

SUMMARY

The SWRTPO region and the Longview-Kelso-Rainier MPO are governed by an extensive set of federal and state regulations. The Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments is the designated lead agency for implementing MPO and regional transportation planning requirements.

These requirements are established in law to ensure that there is a comprehensive, continuous and coordinated approach to transportation planning. While federal transportation legislation often emphasizes new areas of focus with each authorization of the program, there are state and federal requirements in place that emphasize:

- The efficient movement of goods and people;
- Supporting the economic vitality of the region and the nation;
- Reducing congestion and increasing operational efficiency;

- Integrated planning between modes of transportation (air, marine, rail, highway, transit) and between motorized/non-motorized transportation;
- Preservation of the existing system and prior investments;
- Coordination with local, regional and state plans, economic development plans, and capital improvement plans; and,
- Consideration given to protection of the environment, energy efficiency, quality of life, and coordination with other planning efforts.