

Executive Summary

Looking Ahead 27 Years

The Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) provides an overarching vision and 27-year direction for the regional transportation system serving the Longview-Kelso-Rainier Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and the Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) areas. The plan should be used to guide decisions and prioritize investments to address current and anticipated demands on the entire regional transportation system from non-motorized facilities to freight and public transportation to roadways. The RTP is centered on a shared regional vision – a statement of aspiration for the future of the regional transportation system. Five goals and 27 policies were crafted in order to assist the region in advancing toward this vision. The RTP proposes a list of 71 long-range strategies and 472 funded, planned, and unfunded improvements that will help implement the plan and bring the vision to fruition.

This RTP was developed through a cooperative process of regional stakeholders, consisting of two state Departments of Transportation, 29 cities, five counties, five tribal governments, 12 ports, four public transit agencies, and numerous others. The planning process was led by the Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments (CWCOG), as the MPO and lead agency of the RTPO. CWCOG was assisted by planning partners with the Grays Harbor Council of Governments (GHCOG) and Lewis County Public Works. The RTP is the link between local and statewide transportation planning efforts within the MPO and the RTPO.

Guiding Principles

The RTP is built upon four guiding principles, developed from common regional aspirations identified during stakeholder visioning discussions. These principles were used as a path to develop the plan and determine areas of focus for the existing (Chapter 4) and future (Chapter 8) conditions analysis. The RTP’s guiding principles are:

- **Preserve and improve the regional transportation system through partnerships in order to maximize investment.**
- **Provide an integrated transportation system that encourages the use of all modes by offering accessible, safe, and efficient travel options.**
- **Encourage the preservation and enhancement of public transportation programs and infrastructure throughout the Southwest Washington RTPO and explore opportunities for expanding service to increase access to jobs, services, and other key destinations.**
- **Support the region’s economic vitality through ensuring the transportation network addresses inter- and intra-regional accessibility and mobility needs for both people and goods.**

Visioning Process

The vision of the Regional Transportation Plan is as follows.

To achieve a safe and well-maintained regional transportation system that integrates all travel modes, supports a healthy economy, and enhances the quality of life across the region. The transportation system will:

- **Protect the region’s investment by preserving and enhancing existing infrastructure.**
- **Provide viable travel options across all modes and throughout our diverse region.**

Goals were developed based on the guiding principles, and the common regional aspirations identified during stakeholder visioning discussions. The goals aim to lead the MPO and RTPO in a unified direction where the region’s transportation infrastructure is treated as one interconnected, multi-modal system rather than as separate parts. Numerous policies were crafted under each goal. The RTP goals include:

Goal 1: Promote and support a transportation system that strengthens the region’s economic competitiveness.

Goal 2: Preserve and enhance the region’s existing transportation infrastructure and facilities.

Goal 3: Develop an integrated non-motorized transportation system.

Goal 4: Maintain, modernize, and enhance a sustainable and comprehensive public transportation system.

Goal 5: Maintain and enhance a regional transportation system that is safe and accessible for multiple travel modes.

To provide additional direction for what the MPO, RTPO, WSDOT, ODOT, and/or local agencies should be working on collaboratively to implement the RTP, 71 long-range strategies developed under the four emphasis areas (active transportation, freight, public transportation, roadways).

Existing Conditions

The MPO and RTPO transportation networks facilitate the movement of people and goods. People are able to use the regional transportation system to reach their places of employment, education, recreation, and for other personal needs. The transportation of goods is essential for continued economic development. Goods are transported to, from, and through the region with major intermodal centers located primarily in Aberdeen, Kalama, and Longview.

The existing transportation system, described further in Chapter 4, includes active transportation facilities; freight transportation assets such as rail, waterways, ports, pipelines, and airports; public transportation services; and roadways. Active transportation facilities generally include bicycle lanes, bicycle routes shared with vehicle traffic, sidewalks, and shared paths or trails. The freight rail network includes two mainline and three short-line railroads serving three of the five RTPO counties as well as Rainier, Oregon. There are two waterways, the Columbia River and Grays Harbor, and 12 ports (three of them facilitating international trade) within the region. The pipeline network includes one north-south petroleum line and several regional natural gas lines. Airports consists of general aviation facilities, but none have expanded to serve freight needs. The regional public transportation system includes fixed route services provided primarily by the four public transit agencies and demand-response services of nonprofits and other providers. There is also passenger rail available in two of the five RTPO counties (Cowlitz and Lewis). Finally, the regional roadway network is an interconnected network of interstates, highways, and arterial and collector streets.

People living in the MPO and RTPO regions have expressed that their top two priorities are: 1) Preserving and maintaining the existing system and 2) Transportation improvements that promote economic

development. Four of the top concerns of regional transportation users are: 1) Potholes/road conditions, 2) Lack of transit (bus) options, 3) Traffic/congestion, and 4) Lack of bicycle lanes, bicycle paths, or sidewalks.

Transportation Improvements and Financial Plan

As part of developing this Regional Transportation Plan, 472 regionally significant and/or potentially federally-funded transportation improvements were identified to help implement this plan. A total of 300 of the improvements are for local agencies with 63 being funded improvements with total estimated costs of a little more than \$125 million in year of expenditure dollars and are considered fiscally-constrained. The total unconstrained improvement costs for local agencies could be as high as about \$1.1 billion across the MPO and RTPO regions. There are future estimated revenues that could complete many of these unconstrained improvements, but the revenues will not be enough for all of them to be completed by 2045. This plan also includes 172 transportation improvements for WSDOT with 165 being funded or planned improvements that are fiscally-constrained by virtue of being included in their Eight Year Plan. The WSDOT fiscally-constrained improvements have total estimated costs of about \$975 million in year of expenditure dollars.

This Regional Transportation Plan also has documented many additional unfunded needs for further study or scoping before developing a specific transportation improvement to move forward. The regional, unfunded needs help agencies to remain focused on the biggest priorities around the region.

Implementation and Challenges Ahead

After plan adoption, agencies will be working on designing, constructing, and securing funding for transportation improvements consistent with this RTP (most of them already identified in Chapter 6) to move forward towards achieving the vision. The CWCOG, as the MPO and lead agency of the RTPO, will complete planning work focused on accomplishing some of the long-range strategies and/or regional, unfunded needs. CWCOG will continue to remain engaged in local and state planning efforts, perform public outreach, and continue to integrate performance-based planning and programming into MPO planning and operations. As the future unfolds, there will be many challenges, possible successes, and new opportunities.