
Grant Program Examination 2016



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INTRODUCTION

This report documents changes made to the public transportation grants administered by WSDOT in preparation for the 2017-2019 biennium. As a step towards making program changes WSDOT engages a diverse group of stakeholders and interested parties to help evaluate the distribution and administration of the grants. These pages document the ideas and issues raised in the 2016 evaluation process. The value of this report is in documenting why changes were or were not made. By documenting and communicating the improvement process WSDOT encourages individuals and organizations to help us make future improvements. Through this report, WSDOT reinforces its commitment to improve by offering people the opportunity to influence the design and delivery of WSDOT's public transportation grants.

Grant Program Review

In 2005, the Washington state legislature directed the Department of Transportation – Public Transportation Division (Division) to examine existing grant programs, as noted in Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 47.66.080:

Beginning in 2005, and every other year thereafter, the department shall examine the division's existing grant programs, and the methods used to allocate grant funds, to determine the program's effectiveness, and whether the methods used to allocate funds result in an equitable distribution of the grants. The department shall submit a report of the findings to the transportation committees of the legislature. [2005 c 318 § 6.]

The Division engages an informal committee comprised of grant program stakeholders, recipients and interested parties, the Grant Program Advisory Committee (GPAC), for ideas, to identify issues, and to provide feedback. Division staff are also encouraged to offer ideas and help identify program issues. WSDOT's contribution often focuses on the delivery of equitable and effective grants.

When engaging with our partners and communities, the Division strives to:

- Increase alignment of grant program investments with the legislative intent and agency strategic goals, with an emphasis on access, mobility, safety and filling performance gaps.
- Improve communication and collaboration with and between partners (WSDOT regions, local governments, grantees, and MPOs / RTPOs) to deliver better transportation system outcomes.

The outcomes from these efforts should demonstrate success by having:

- Increased consent on program changes
- Improved projects and project selection
- Greater community ownership of the projects
- Simplified application and evaluation process

The grant programs under the purview of the Division include:

- The Consolidated Grant Program (which includes Federal Transit Administration and state rural mobility and paratransit funds)
- The Regional Mobility Grant Program
- The Puget Sound Transit Coordination Program
- The Commute Trip Reduction Program
- The Vanpool Investment Program

GPAC Process:

Nearly thirty individuals participated in GPAC meetings in the spring of 2016, including representatives from rural areas, the non-profit sector, tribes, various transit agencies, and others interested in public transportation in Washington state.

Weekly meetings took place throughout March and April 2016, in person in Olympia, as well as accessible through on-line computer screen sharing and via conference calls. Each meeting addressed specific grant program elements, with the conversation facilitated by a Division staff member. Participants were given the opportunity to place issues or ideas on the agenda prior to and at the meetings. To ensure alignment with what was discussed and recorded, GPAC participants received a summary of the meeting's discussion and were asked for confirmation and/or edits as needed. A list of the general topics for each meeting and of participants during the GPAC process is included at the end of this document.

This report captures the final changes made by the Division based on internal review and discussion with and/or recommendations from GPAC, for implementation during the 2017-2019 biennium.



REGIONAL MOBILITY GRANT PROGRAM

The purpose of the Regional Mobility grant program is to support cost-effective local projects that improve the efficiency of the transportation system and improve connectivity between counties and regional population centers. WSDOT has administered this grant program since 2005.

The Division made the changes listed below to the Regional Mobility Grant program prior to calling for and ranking projects for the 2017-2019 biennium.

Application process changes:

Issue 1: Make it easy for applicants to understand what information is being requested, and only seek the specific technical content needed to score the applications once they are received.

- Both applicants and application evaluators recommended that WSDOT work through the program materials to simplify language and clarify intent. The Division identified several areas where pre-application and application changes should be simplified, clarified, or strengthened. *WSDOT worked to re-write the application to make sure it was clear by potential grantees.*
 - *Changes were made following GPAC input.*

Issue 2: Request a pre-application concept letter that briefly described the project, its location, and any potential use of state highways.

- The pre-application concept letter allows WSDOT regions (primarily traffic engineers) to identify early in the application process where there may be opportunities to increase transportation system performance beyond the initially envisioned project. By increasing collaboration within WSDOT and with partners prior to the formal submittal of applications, the Division helped applicants develop project proposals that increase benefits across the transportation system, resulting in better (more aligned) projects being funded.
 - *Changes were made following GPAC input. WSDOT incorporated a pre-application letter into the process and made this available to WSDOT traffic offices for their input.*

Issue 3: Simplify and reduce the redundancies between evaluation criteria.

- Regarding performance measures, the Regional Mobility Grant program emphasizes funding for cost effective projects that reduce transportation delays and improve connectivity between counties and regional population centers. Rather than treating GHG reduction as a stand-alone measure, the Division recommends using Vehicle Trips (VT) and Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) reductions to address both congestion and GHG reduction, allowing the program to meet the intent of the state's GHG reduction goals while maintaining the focus on the program's specific goals.
 - *Changes were made following GPAC input.*

Issue 4: Address the requirements of RCW 43.19.648 related to fuel usage within the application process. Possibly add extra points for projects with alternative fuel proposals.

- The idea to align applications for vehicle purchases and the requirement that publically owned vehicles will be operated with alternative fuels by 2018 was challenged by GPAC members. There were concerns that implementing a strict policy that funds the purchase of vehicles only fueled with electricity or biofuels does not take into account variables within and beyond the control of the agency. GPAC members suggested that no bonus points should be awarded, as no evaluation criteria exists that this would fit under (for example, an alternative fuel coach would not provide extra VMT reduction compared to a traditional coach). If an applicant were not proposing to purchase an alternative fuel vehicle, it would be reasonable to include a question in the application requiring an explanation as to why it is not practicable to purchase an alternative fueled vehicle per the criteria described in WAC 194-29.
 - *The application was modified to clarify why the purchase of an alternative fueled vehicle was not "practicable."*

Grant process and policy changes:

Issue 1: Allow all expenses related to the construction project to be considered eligible as matching funds, regardless of when expended.

- Allowing all expenses related to the same construction project as matching funds helps support grantee efforts in coming up with the expected match more easily. This also helps WSDOT meet its goal of increasing consent on WSDOT policy decisions and consistency in application of match on construction projects. GPAC members fully supported allowing grantees to use the prior purchase/acquisition of real property as in-kind match for facility projects.
 - *The Division incorporated this allowance in the grant application and other related materials, such as the Guidebook.*

Issue 2: Allow applicants to apply for projects based on project milestones rather than arbitrary program rules; eliminate the second biennium expenditure cap on four-year projects.

- Over time, the Division has found that arbitrarily limiting the amount of funding available to the second biennium of a four-year project creates unnecessary administrative burdens, including re-appropriation requests. Project milestones are a more effective approach to manage project delivery and can be used to ensure progress. WSDOT incorporated a milestones approach into the evaluation process by allowing subject matter experts to assess the likelihood of project milestones being met.

- *WSDOT will increase collaboration with, and technical assistance to, grantees during the first biennium to assist with meeting milestones.*

Issue 3: Reinforce a focus on delivery by placing four-year projects that have failed to make sufficient progress at the bottom of the ranked list for the second biennium.

- The Division has a standing policy requiring projects make sufficient progress by the second year of the first biennium (for four-year projects). Grantees must meet this requirement in order for WSDOT to place the project at the top of the ranked list for the following two years of funding. Feedback from GPAC members for this and the previous recommendation focused on issues faced by grantees that often are beyond their control. Things like service change dates, local construction windows, real estate purchases still in process, and contracts not being executed in a timely fashion all contribute to delays in progress of a project. GPAC members suggested adding application space where applicants can detail outlying factors that may affect getting started on time.
- *Community Liaisons will work more closely with grantees, especially on capital construction projects, during the first biennium. This may reduce the need for reappropriation and help WSDOT understand the local issues grantees face.*



CONSOLIDATED GRANT PROGRAM

The purpose of the Consolidated Grant program is to improve connectivity within and between communities, maintain a safe transportation fleet that moves efficiently, and supports seniors and persons with disabilities accessing their community resources.

The Division made program and/or policy changes (as noted below) prior to the call for 2017-2019 Consolidated Grant program applications.



Application process changes:

Issue 1: Make it easy for applicants to understand what information is being requested, and only seek the specific technical content needed to score the applications once they are received.

- Both applicants and application evaluators recommended that WSDOT work through the program materials to simplify language and clarify intent. The Division identified several areas where pre-application and application changes should be simplified, clarified, or strengthened. *WSDOT worked to re-write the application to make sure it was clear by potential grantees.*
 - *Changes were made following GPAC input.*

Issue 2: Restructuring the method used for assignment of ranking grades to regions (Regional Transportation Planning Organizations – or RTPO) in order to create a more transparent process by partners and fund better projects that are locally significant.

- Applications receive a letter grade of A, B, C or D from their RTPO. These translate to additional points during the evaluation/ ranking stage for projects submitted to WSDOT. The number of regional letter grades allocated to each region is currently based on the number of special population criteria (i.e. number of veterans, number of seniors, etc.) within a region. This has traditionally been sufficient to fund projects that received a B or higher grade in the regional ranking. However, the way that the current formula works, single county RTPOs have a distinct advantage over multi-county RTPOs. In many cases, there are only a handful of projects coming from a single county, with all getting A grades. In the opposite extreme, we have some multi-county RTPOs with projects getting C and D grades. This brings up questions like:
 - Should the number of letter grades assigned to a region be based on special population demographics or some other criteria?

- Is the current methodology geographically equitable and should regional letter grades continue in order to capture local priority or ask regions to hard rank by local priority?
- Should there be a consistently applied baseline for what attributes a project has to have in order to receive an A ranking?
- *WSDOT will follow GPAC's suggestion, working on this throughout the next biennium, with implementation set for the 2019-2021 grant cycle.*

Issue 3: Increase the review completed by WSDOT staff prior to being given to the evaluation panel.

- The goal is to have all reviewers be consistent when applying program criteria to the applications and have a shared knowledge of the program's intent. In order to clarify, simplify, and standardize the evaluation and ranking process for applications WSDOT will expand the assessment of risk, performance measures, and budget evaluation pertaining to the grantee. This information will assist the evaluator's ability to assess all aspects of the grantee's capability to manage a public transportation grant effectively and forward the best applications possible.
 - *The Division implemented and forwarded accurate applications to the evaluation panel.*

Issue 4: Performance measures for projects need to be clear, with more information provided up front.

- Expand and clarify performance measurement data in the application guidance/form so that applicants and WSDOT can establish baseline measures for similar types of projects (e.g., operations, capital, demand response, fixed route). The intent of establishing a baseline measure is to identify where there are gaps in the collection of performance measurement data, and, in the future be able to determine progress/efficiency measures for like-kind services.
 - *The application included the collection of this data to establish baseline measures.*

Issue 5: WSDOT needs to help applicants better understand and adhere to in-kind contributions and match funding when required in the grant application.

- WSDOT hopes to reduce the confusion about what calculations applicants can use toward in-kind match for their projects.
 - *WSDOT enhanced guidance on calculating and use of in-kind match funds. WSDOT provides training, including training provided at the annual conference in September 2016.*

Issue 6: The Governor has directed a transition to 100% alternative fuel vehicles for transit fleets by 2018 to the extent practicable.

- It is difficult for small urban and rural systems to meet the 2018 goal. There is not enough information out there and costs are too high to convert fleets. The group responded, stating the emphasis should be on “do the best you can do”. GPAC members suggested WSDOT should let policy makers know that this executive order is unrealistic for grantees.
 - *WSDOT added a question on the application to help understand the scope of this issue.*

Issue 7: Fully funding selected projects following the WSDOT/Region ranking process.

- Evaluating the legitimacy of the budget request by an applicant prior to final submittal of an application allows for immediate feedback from WSDOT to the applicant and provides for transparency and defensibility in the WSDOT award decisions.
 - *WSDOT reviewed applications during the 10-week review period prior to the application deadline to determine validity of the proposed budget request. If the budgets were identified as impractical or unreasonable, applicants were notified and had until the final application submission deadline to adjust the budget. WSDOT documented the applicant’s response to any suggested corrections. Prior to the application deadline, WSDOT included in the application packet, if provided, any justifications from the applicant that noted a change in proposed budget (such as a funding partner loss after the application submittal) that WSDOT might consider for increased funding request.*

Grant process/policy changes

Issue 1: WSDOT needs to change the FTA Section 5339 distribution methodology by distributing the small urban apportionment using the 5307 formula methodology; and distributing the state apportionment through the competitive consolidated program.

- The Division’s goal is that small urban transits will be able to predict their funding. Rural systems will also gain access to these funds through the competitive process. GPAC members noted several issues for WSDOT to consider in implementing this recommendation. Some rural organizations do not currently have a venue to purchase large coaches. Some rural organizations need maintenance funding or funding for smaller coaches rather than large coaches. Some were concerned that large coaches take up too much of the limited funds. Allow for large coaches as eligible projects for consolidated program but not a funding source set aside or earmarked. Unlike the small urban apportionment, the federal government does not utilize a formula methodology for state apportionment. Rather, each state gets the same amount of funds. WSDOT should use the same formula that the federal government uses for the small urban awards.

- *Based on this feedback, the state portion of the 5339 program is added into the Consolidated grant program; large coaches are added back into the Consolidated grant program as an eligible project. The small urban 5339 funding will be distributed according to the federal government formula methodology.*

Issue 2: WSDOT seeks to improve Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBE) participation in the context of local programs and projects funded through grants.

- The Division supports DBE contracting/purchasing whenever possible. There was a session at the conference on DBE. Applicants can discuss requirements with WSDOT staff at any time. Additionally, WSDOT staff will be in the field providing technical assistance to both grantees and potential DBEs. With DBE, there is a need for more outreach to occur. GPAC members stated that there is a challenge in getting DBEs, especially in more rural areas and operating projects. Potentially eligible contractors and suppliers need help signing up to become DBEs.
 - *Community Liaisons and other WSDOT staff will work with each grantee to find ways to support DBE engagement locally.*

Issue 3: Match for new and continuing projects needs to build community investments over time.

- Keeping the local match ratio lower for new projects (the new project match requirement remains at 5%) encourages partners to submit applications to the grant program. There is also the potential of an increase in service coverage across the state or in traditionally unserved areas. New projects often do not have the community financial support needed in order to meet any increase in local match requirements. However, projects that commit higher local match demonstrating local commitment score better in evaluation.
- Match requirements for returning (operating) projects will increase 5% per biennium until the local match ratio meets the federal match requirements (50%) for similar project types.

	New Operating Projects	Returning Operating Projects
Biennium One	5%	-
Biennium Two	5%	10%
Biennium Three	5%	15%
Biennium Four	5%	20%
Biennium Five	5%	25%
Biennium Six	5%	30%
Biennium Seven	5%	35%
Biennium Eight	5%	40%

Biennium Nine	5%	45%
Biennium Ten	5%	50%

- By increasing the level of local match, it gives the grantees and the community motivation to increase local commitment to and community ownership of the service through local investment. Communities can help fund services and identify the potential for a community to utilize local taxing authority. Additionally, a decreased reliance on WSDOT grant funding increases the sustainability level if/when grant funds are reduced. Traditionally, demand exceeds supply of grant funds available. GPAC members noted that match seems to be a good way to show collaboration, partnership and support from the community. Continuing to increase the local match may be difficult in smaller, more rural communities. Cash is difficult to get. GPAC members suggested using in-kind for operating and cash for capital projects. GPAC members suggest that WSDOT consider a delay in making changes until after the 2017-2019 solicitation since most agencies had already set their budgets based on the existing match requirement.
- *Despite some concerns, the Division implemented a graduated local match for the 2017-2019 cycle. Following award, the Division will analyze the impacts of this policy and specifically examine impacts on non-profits, rural transits, and larger systems.*



COMMUTE TRIP REDUCTION (CTR) PROGRAM

The Commute Trip Reduction program began in 1991 under RCW 70.94. A CTR policy board also started working in partnership with WSDOT to guide the program and recommend policies that support the overall goals of CTR. One of the key foundations of CTR is public/private partnerships between state and local governmental agencies, as well as between local and regional businesses. The program is managed by the Public Transportation Division of the WSDOT.

WSDOT staff work with local and regional transportation planning organizations to update their CTR plans every four years, striving for improved outcomes over time. RCW 70.94.544 authorizes the CTR Board to determine the allocation of program grant funding, including funding for Growth and Transportation Efficiency Centers. Based on feedback from local coordinators and businesses engaged or interested in the program, as well as review of program data, the board has determined the highest priority is to support activities that reduce vehicle trips to worksites affected by the CTR statute.

In addition, pilot projects are underway, looking for ways to broaden the program beyond the commuting public. Through a granting process, these projects are providing information that will help inform how to better reach the program's goals.

The CTR Board has suggested that the state should provide counties with a base allocation to support the costs of required program activities, as well as the maintenance of existing trip reduction performance. Additional funds are provided based on projected trip reduction.



VANPOOL INVESTMENT PROGRAM (VIP)

For the Vanpool Investment Program (VIP), the Division took a different approach. At the regularly scheduled Washington State Transit Association (WSTA) quarterly meeting in March 2016, the Vanpool Committee was asked to respond to the following questions and provide additional advice. Their responses are reflected after each question below, along with narratives about other issues brought forward.

Grant Solicitation

- Should there be one (current practice) or two (the practice prior to the 2013-2015 biennium) formal VIP grant solicitation(s) each biennium?

Response: There was unanimous consensus to continue with the current practice. Committee members also felt that the special one-time solicitation (when un-awarded or unspent funds are left during the biennium) should be continued.

VIP Application

- Should the Division examine or consider revising and adding more substance (especially when it comes to determining replacement van awards) to the current VIP application process?

Response: The group liked where the application process presently stands and many stated that simpler is better. However, they did agree that as the replacement van award criteria task force begins to develop criteria it may be necessary to obtain additional information (though the group indicated they do not know what that may look like at this time) from transit agencies in order to make a determination as to which agencies receive replacement van funding. Currently all agency requests for expansion vans have priority and have always been awarded VIP funding. This method was determined to be sufficient at this time.

VIP Grant Award Process

- Should the Division consider modifying the current WSDOT funding and local match percentages for expansion and replacement vans or are they fine where they have been for the past 2 biennia?

Response: The committee members supported leaving current funding and local match percentages at current levels.

Incentives

- WSDOT developed more guidance around the use of incentives paid for through VIP funds. This issue was discussed agency-wide, in consideration of other programs that have seen negative press related to incentives. Further information and direction was provided to the committee, outlining how funds can and cannot be used for incentives. If there is a direct correlation of the incentive to

actual ridership in vanpools (e.g., reducing the cost to the rider), this could be an allowable expense with funds.

Response: The committee encouraged WSDOT to keep in mind the benefits that exist when incentives are supported by VIP funding. These include support for vanpool participant recruitment, participant retention, and growth in the local program.

Consideration of VIP Grant Funds for Municipal Corporations

- WSDOT posed the question to the committee: “Should other entities (e.g. tribal governments) be allowed to apply for VIP funding?”

Background:

WSDOT has determined that, based on RCW definitions, VIP funds can be awarded to municipal corporations. The legislation states that public transit agencies are defined as municipal corporations. Government entities (e.g. cities, counties) are also defined as municipal corporations, therefore they should be eligible to apply and receive VIP funds.

Response: Committee members felt that the funds available were not enough to meet their current requests for van replacement funds. In prior discussions, transit agency staff indicated that they did not want to see funding diluted and be awarded to others that were not public transit agencies. In addition, during that time, VIP grant funds were reduced during the supplemental budget process from \$7 million to \$6 million. The committee indicated that they would be in support of funds going to other municipal corporations other than public transit agencies if it was relatively small at this point.

Replacement Van Funding Criteria

- The WSTA Vanpool Committee created a task force to develop replacement van award criteria for the next biennium. Meetings of the task force took place in March and May of 2016. Under consideration by the task force and by WSDOT include:
 - Find ways to support agencies that have adopted a replacement van funding plan that demonstrates fiscal responsibility as well as a sound vanpool fare box recovery element.
 - Ensure that WSDOT compares all agency applications in the same manner and with like criteria.
 - Ensure that WSDOT determines fare box recovery in a consistent manner and is able to determine if agencies are not supplanting transit agency funding to support vanpools.
- When new funds were available in 2015, WSDOT needed to disperse the funds quickly, not allowing for as thorough of a process for developing criteria as was desired. WSDOT determined who would be funded by reviewing the application for these elements:
 - Replacing vans increases passenger safety by reducing the amount of in-service fleets past their useful life.
 - Replacing vans decreases maintenance costs associated with aging fleets.

Utilizing this task force helps WSDOT develop more robust and comprehensive criteria. Recommendations from the task force were brought to the WSTA Vanpool Committee for consideration, with criteria still being finalized within WSDOT.



GRANT PROGRAM ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND MEETINGS

NAMES OF ATTENDEES

Allison Taylor
Hollianne Monson
Russ Blount
Cyndy Knighton
Colleen Kuhn
Eric Irelan
Peter Heffernan
Mike Oliver
Danette Brannin
Amy Biggs
Renee Biles
Jan Olliver
Barb Hunter
Lani Fowlkes
Aaron Morrow
Alex Krieg
Connie Mahugh
Jon Morrison Winters
Sara Walton
Mark Hamilton
Melissa Payne
Lynda David
Kate Weigel
Kelly Scalf

Andrea Weckmueller-Behringer
Shonda Shipman
Eric Knudson
Debbie Clemen
Robin Rettew

AGENCY

Catholic Community Services
Catholic Community Services
City of Fife
City of Tukwila
Human Services Council
King County DOT
King County DOT
Mason Transit Authority
Mason Transit Authority
Mt. Si Senior Center
People for People
People for People
Pierce Transit
Pierce Transit
PSRC
PSRC
Rural Resources Community Action
Seattle/King County Aging and Disability Services
Seattle Dept. of Transportation
Skagit Council of Governments
Smith6LLC
Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council (RTC)
The Lighthouse for the Blind, Inc.
TranGO (Transit for Greater Okanogan County Council of Governments)
Walla Walla Valley MPO/SRTPO
Whatcom Transportation Authority
Whatcom Transportation Authority
WSDOT Olympic Region, and Peninsula PTPO Coordinator
WSDOT Public Transportation Division

DATES OF MEETINGS

March 29, 2016
April 6, 2016

April 13, 2016

April 20, 2016

April 28, 2016

TOPICS

Consolidated Grant Program Application and Ranking
Consolidated Grant Program Eligibility, Process and Compliance, and Training
Consolidated Grant Program Eligibility, Process and Compliance, and Training (continued)
Consolidated Grant Program Evaluation and Miscellaneous Items (wrap up)
Regional Mobility Grant Program Application, Compliance, and Evaluation; Transit Coordination Grant Program