

**RE: Proviso directive from Program T in ESSB 5689****TRANSPORTATION PLANNING, DATA, AND RESEARCH—PROGRAM T  
Sec. 219.**

(10)(a) \$250,000 of the multimodal transportation account—state appropriation is provided solely for Thurston regional planning council (TRPC) to conduct a study examining options for multimodal high-capacity transportation (HCT) to serve travelers on the I-5 corridor between central Thurston county (Olympia area) and Pierce county.

(b) The study will include an assessment of travelsheds and ridership potential and identify and provide an evaluation of options to enhance connectivity and accessibility for the greater south Puget Sound region with an emphasis on linking to planned or existing commuter or regional light rail. The study must account for previous and ongoing efforts by transit agencies and the department. The study will emphasize collaboration with a diverse community of interests, including but not limited to transit, business, public agencies, tribes, and providers and users of transportation who because of age, income, or ability may face barriers and challenges. TRPC will provide to the transportation committees of the legislature a study outline and recommendations of deliverables by December 1, 2022

This funding was provided in the 2022 Supplemental Budget and TRPC has requested for the money to be carried over into the 23-25 biennium.

**Study Outline and Recommendations of Deliverables**

This study is a continuation of the Thurston County High-Capacity Transportation (HCT) Roadmap done by Thurston Regional Planning Council with federal and local funds. Highlights of the Phase 1 study are below:

**High-Capacity Roadmap Phase 1 Highlights**

- There is a market for HCT both within Thurston County and between Thurston and Pierce counties.
- The estimated daily boardings (under current conditions) for HCT between Thurston and Pierce counties is 2,500-4,000 boardings.
- This level of potential boardings would support enhanced express bus and expanded carpool/vanpool services.

- With current growth projections for the area, there is not enough ridership potential to support services like light rail. Commuter rail is likely uncompetitive for federal funding support and would be cost prohibitive from a purely local funding perspective. A purpose of this Phase 2 work is to further evaluate the potential costs of such investments and when in the future developing light and/or commuter rail might be prudent from a cost/ridership perspective.
- Traffic congestion on I-5 limits the reliability of express bus, vanpool, and carpool travel. HOV lanes could mitigate these issues.
- Funding for cross-county/cross MPO boundary bus service is also a barrier to implementation.
- Now is the time to clarify the region's preferred HCT option and to build coalitions for implementation. Specifically, working with WSDOT to ensure HCT is incorporated into the future of I-5 in the Thurston region.
- Phase 1 findings support implementation of HOV lanes on I-5 between DuPont and Tumwater.

### **Study Outline:**

- Assess work completed for Phase One of the High-Capacity Pierce/Thurston Work.
- Build on the work of Phase 1 that identified travelsheds and ridership potential of each of the high-capacity transportation modes (express bus, vanpools, light rail, commuter rail) for major employment centers serving the Thurston Region, including centers in Pierce County in addition to JBLM.
- Identify high-capacity transportation modes that should be evaluated for the Thurston Region.
- Examine specific travel patterns of JBLM military and civilian personnel in the region, to include shift change times and the diversity it brings to our travelshed. We will incorporate the need for military personnel readiness into transportation plans for our region. JBLM commuters travel to these locations:
  - 20 percent travel to the Lacey and Olympia region
  - 17 percent travel to Frederickson
  - 16 percent travel to the Lakewood and Steilacoom area
  - 15 percent travel to Tacoma and north
  - 12 percent travel to south of Nisqually and JBLM
  - 9 percent travel to DuPont
  - 5 percent travel east of JBLM (Spanaway)

- Refine comparisons of ridership potential to other metro areas that have developed these types of high-capacity transportation options.
- Examine whether certain modes are better suited for ensuring equitable access to high-capacity transportation options for the region.
- Provide ranges of costs for each of the potentially viable high-capacity transportation modes (enhanced express bus, increased vanpools, light rail, commuter rail). This will include development costs, contingency costs, and long-term operational costs.
- Provide potential funding models to implement each of the high-capacity transportation modes.
- Provide options for who supplies services (i.e., Intercity Transit or other) and what would be required to support that organization in providing the services (e.g., what legislative or contractual changes are needed). For each high-capacity transit mode, identify whether local jurisdictions have authority to move forward absent regulatory changes at the state level.
- Provide cost estimates on a per person or per household basis, for the development of each option to Thurston region residents and/or state residents. Identify at what point in the future each option becomes feasible based on a ridership versus cost comparison.
- Identify efficiencies (e.g., long-term cost savings) in potentially developing more than one of these options at the same time.

**Recommendations of deliverables to be included in final report:**

- Coordinate with regional commuter and light rail providers to link any Thurston County HCT to their existing or planned services.
- Collaborate with business, freight, tribes, transit, vulnerable communities on HCT needs, gaps, and solutions for the region.
- Evaluate the impacts of the HCT services on the community with an emphasis of the effects on vulnerable populations.
- Provide feasibility, costs, and timeframes of different high-capacity transportation options (increased express bus, increased vanpools, light rail, commuter rail) so that the Thurston Region can focus efforts on the most effective and efficient options for the region.
- Improve public understanding of existing transit services, options for connecting Thurston to the North via high-capacity transportation, costs of such investments, and a timeline for developing each of the options.
- Inform design of options to improve I-5 from Mounts Road through Tumwater so that any I-5 improvements can support high-capacity transportation options.