



# Public Health Associated with Homeless Encampments Proviso Report

APRIL 2026

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# Executive Summary

## Authorizing Statute

This report provides the background, context and data about the Public Health Associated with Homeless Encampments on Department owned Rights of Way initiative program to satisfy the reporting requirements in the [2026 Supplemental Transportation Budget, ESSB 6005, Section 215 \(4\)](#):

(a) \$5,000,000 of the motor vehicle account—state appropriation is provided solely for the department to address the risks to safety and public health associated with homeless encampments on department owned rights-of-way. The department must coordinate and work with local government officials and social service organizations who provide services and direct people to housing alternatives that are not in highway rights-of-way to help prevent future encampments from forming on highway rights-of-way and may reimburse the organizations doing this outreach assistance who transition people into treatment or housing or for debris clean up on highway rights-of-way. A minimum of \$2,000,000 of this appropriation must be used to deliver more frequent removal of litter on the highway rights-of-way that is generated by unsheltered people and may be used to hire crews specializing in collecting and disposing of garbage, clearing debris or hazardous material, and implementing safety improvements where hazards exist to the traveling public and department

employees. The department may use these funds to either reimburse local law enforcement costs or the Washington state patrol if they are providing enhanced safety to department staff during debris cleanup or during efforts to prevent future encampments from forming on highway rights-of-way.

- (b) Beginning November 1, 2025, and semiannually thereafter, the Washington state patrol and the department of transportation must jointly submit a report to the governor and the transportation committees of the legislature on the status of these efforts, including:
- (i) A summary of the activities related to addressing encampments, including information on arrangements with local governments or other entities related to these activities;
  - (ii) A description of the planned activities in the ensuing two quarters to further address the emergency hazards and risks along state highway rights-of-way; and
  - (iii) Recommendations for executive branch or legislative action to achieve the desired outcome of reduced emergency hazards and risks along state highway rights-of-way.

## Overview

Homelessness is a complex societal issue that WSDOT is unable to address alone. The ongoing homelessness crisis is a result of lack of affordable housing including both temporary and permanent housing options for people living unhoused. This is a local and national issue – not just to Washington or on Washington State Department of Transportation’s rights of way. While we’ve had some successes stabilizing or clearing some encampment sites on state right of way, WSDOT is not equipped to resolve the underlying causes of homelessness alone. WSDOT’s approach to homelessness recognizes that the agency is but one leg of the stool of services that must be provided to connect people to safe and stable housing and get them the resources they need to achieve housing stability indoors.

While our early efforts and partnerships have been successful in recent years, there is more work to do. Additional resources are needed for all parties involved, including local jurisdictions, social service providers, affordable housing providers and, when needed, law enforcement. This work takes time and cannot be solved overnight. Moving forward, the overall need is for more temporary and long-term housing. This work also comes at a cost. WSDOT will continue to share these concerns with law makers who set agency priorities and budgets.

This report focuses on the work done under the Maintenance Operations Program provisos for WSDOT to address encampments on rights of way. It is important to note that this WSDOT proviso work and funding is separate – though similar – to the work done under the state [Encampment Resolution Program](#), formerly known as the state Right of Way Safety Initiative proviso. The Encampment Resolution Program provided funding to the Department of Commerce and created partnerships with WSDOT, Washington State Patrol and local service providers (see section below for synopsis of ERP work). Some of the WSDOT-specific funding, including city-specific funding – is at times used to support efforts at ERP sites that qualify under both proviso efforts. Because of the ERP proviso funding requirements and costs,

along with the \$4 million reduction in funding for the *Public Health Associated with Homeless Encampments on Department Owned Rights of Way* proviso funding for 25-27 biennium, WSDOT has greatly reduced active cleanup efforts. Instead, WSDOT crews are primarily focused on monitoring previously cleared sites to slow new encampments from developing.

WSDOT maintenance crews are responsible for maintaining and preserving the state’s transportation system. That work includes crews conducting pothole repairs, clearing catch basins or clogged culverts, vegetation management, safety rest area maintenance, mowing for sightlines, snow and ice removal, sign washing and responding to real-time emergencies. Their work is prioritized by safety-critical tasks. WSDOT maintenance crews are not suitable nor the trained subject matter experts to be social service providers, licensed counselors or law enforcement personnel. The department relies heavily on other state agencies, non-profit, local jurisdictional and behavioral health partners to act before a site can be cleaned.

There are four actions that allow encampments to be removed from WSDOT right of way:

1. The offering of shelter and services to people living there
2. Storage of their belongings
3. Safety and security for people on site and work crews
4. Restoration and cleanup of the property

WSDOT’s responsibility and expertise is limited to the last action, the clean-up of state right of way. The largest need is for creation of safe, secure housing options for people experiencing homelessness, which is well beyond the expertise, ability or funding of a transportation agency. WSDOT engages with a variety of partners when there is an immediate safety threat at a particular encampment on our right of way but given the number of encampments and limited resources, the agency is unable to address all of them with the care, compassion, and resources such work requires.

WSDOT continues to see increased pressure from local municipalities to address known encampments on state rights of way, particularly in areas where responsibilities are shared between state, city and county jurisdictions. At the same time, the agency faces ongoing resource constraints, making it challenging to keep previously addressed sites clear while also responding to new concerns. This limits our ability to fully address all locations, despite the importance of this work.

## Law enforcement support and presence of encampment cleanups

The Washington State Patrol plays an important role in assisting people who live along the state rights of way. As the enforcement agency for state highways, WSP troopers provide a more secure environment for WSDOT crews to mitigate a site after it has been posted for cleaning.

Troopers also partner with local law enforcement personnel and first responders to address reported crimes and other public safety concerns at known encampments. As the process of resolving each encampment matures, WSP also coordinates with WSDOT and other service providers on strategies to minimize the likelihood of any re-encampment efforts.

Both agencies acknowledge that it's not safe nor humane for individuals to live along state rights of way, for the unsheltered, the neighboring communities and the traveling public. WSP's approach acknowledges a thoughtful partnership while addressing criminality and public safety concerns.

The current method of preventing re-encampments over time includes site-level modification, monitoring and trespass enforcement. These are not sustainable long-term. Washington's affordable housing crisis is consistent with what other cities, counties and states

experience. Homelessness also has many social and cultural challenges that contribute to an increasing number of people living outside. The current levels of collaboration and focused determination are WSP and WSDOT's best pathways to significant and sustainable resolution.

## Achievements

WSDOT's focus for this specific funding has been to clean new encampment sites while simultaneously monitoring known sites to slow their re-establishment, which is a critical part of this effort. Preventing site re-establishment is difficult with limited resources. The same staff doing site monitoring also participate in leading site modifications, partner response, site postings and debris removal.

Keeping individuals off state rights of way will help maintain their connection to the social services designed to support their long-term success. When new individuals attempt to return to a cleared site, they often leave a "footprint" that must be addressed. Crews must once again clean and repair the area, replace damaged fencing and other assets. Then repost "No Trespassing" signs. WSDOT crews are often the first to notice signs of re-occupation or damage and work closely with law enforcement to help enforce trespass laws and prevent re-establishment. Although repetitive, this proactive approach is more cost-effective than allowing a full encampment to form again. However, ongoing monitoring and repairs remain a continual cost and divert WSDOT and WSP staff from other critical highway maintenance and safety activities.

WSDOT remains committed to addressing the challenges of homelessness on state right of way; however, without additional resources, the department risks losing progress as it becomes increasingly difficult to keep pace and prevent new encampments from forming.

## Interstate 5 near Pike Street express quadrant in Seattle (before and after):



## I-5 near Eastlake Avenue East (before and after):



Cleanup activities vary by site. Most activities include storing personal belongings, removing debris, clearing some vegetation/limbing low hanging trees, bringing law enforcement personnel on site, tracking biohazards, weapons or illegal substances.

## Highlights and challenges

For the 2025-2027 biennium, WSDOT's goals have been adjusted to reflect reduced services following a \$4 million decrease in proviso funding for site monitoring and cleanup activities already underway. Current funding levels do not allow for any new site remediation.

WSDOT is working within existing resources to maintain some forward momentum; however, with significantly reduced program funding, less work is being accomplished. As a result, most new cleanup efforts have been suspended so staff can focus on monitoring previously cleared sites and preventing new encampments from forming. This remains an ongoing and resource intensive effort.

WSDOT's encampment resolution priorities at this point include:

- Previously resolved ERP sites on state rights of way

- Locations that require immediate safety hazard removal (locations inches from travel lanes)
- Suspected criminal activity

During the 2025-2027 biennium, funding for the *Public Health Associated with Homeless Encampments on Department-Owned Rights of Way* proviso was reduced from \$9 million to \$5 million. This reduction requires WSDOT to adjust its approach to addressing encampments located on state rights of way and limits the funding available for agreements with partnering cities and counties. These partnerships have historically provided a stable framework for helping individuals transition from living outdoors on state property to moving toward stable, long-term housing solutions.

In addition to funding reductions, other ongoing challenges include:

- **Limited housing availability:** Lack of enough safe, stable housing for people living unsheltered on WSDOT right of way remains an issue. Housing availability remains the single largest obstacle in resolving the challenge of homelessness.
- **Need for diverse housing options:** Successfully relocating large encampments requires a range of housing types that address individual needs related to mental health, domestic violence, security and privacy. Without these options, some residents cannot transition into congregate shelter settings.
- **Partnership and enforcement coordination:** Strong collaboration with local jurisdictions, law enforcement and behavioral health partners is critical for lasting results. Law enforcement support helps reduce encampment footprints and close sites permanently. Without this coordinated approach, individuals often return to the cleared areas or relocate nearby within hours of cleanup.

## Data

Previous versions of the agency’s reports on WSDOT’s approach to homelessness and progress can be found online at: [wsdot.wa.gov/about/accountability/legislative-reports](https://wsdot.wa.gov/about/accountability/legislative-reports), with the most recent being the November 2025 Report.

WSDOT’s Maintenance Operations Program is appropriated several separate funding amounts to address encampments on state right of way to improve safety. This funding is for the 2025-2027 biennium. Costs include WSDOT maintenance crew and contractor time, equipment and disposal fees and reimbursing WSP for overtime costs to assist with security. The costs reported below are associated with proviso funds specific to *WSDOT’s Maintenance Operations Program* only. There are additional encampment-related costs incurred by other parts of WSDOT, including active construction projects that are not represented in this report.

Appropriation Name	Allocation	Expended July 2025 to February 2026
City of Seattle*	\$ 1,025,000	\$ 196,000
City of Tacoma*	\$ 1,015,000	\$ 154,000
City of Fife*	\$ 1,500,000	\$ 325,000
City of Spokane*	\$ 1,000,000	\$ 169,000
Statewide Public Health	\$ 5,000,000	\$ 1,683,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 9,540,000</b>	<b>\$ 2,527,000</b>

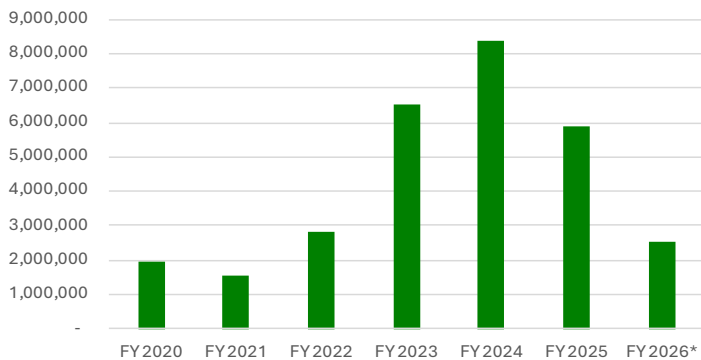
\*Separate proviso but similar scope of work.  
All Expenditure totals from July 2025 to March 2026.

Of the \$5 million “Statewide Public Health” funding listed above, WSDOT partnered with local governments and/or service providers to address encampments. Although the funding provided has been reduced, WSDOT has worked hard to continue the work with most of our important partner cities and counties, but at a very reduced level. Not all partnerships have been successfully maintained.

These agreements included outreach and sharing information on available housing options for people living in encampments. The agreements include funds for site remediation. The agency signs memorandums of understanding with each jurisdiction for the work as funding allows. The funding for the agreements that are successfully reestablished are significantly reduced. Examples of agreements during the 25-27 biennium include:

- Douglas County \$150,000 Agreement
- City of Vancouver \$200,000 Agreement
- City of Wenatchee \$100,000 Agreement

### Statewide Homeless Cleanup Expenditures



\*2026 totals as of July-March

## Encampment Resolution Program

The work conducted under the Encampment Resolution Program proviso administered by the Department of Commerce is similar in overall approach with, but remains distinct from, the Washington State Department of Transportation Maintenance Operations Program funding.

The Encampment Resolution Program is implemented through a coordinated partnership among the Department of Commerce, WSDOT, the Washington State Patrol and various local governments and service providers. This program is supported by a separate legislative proviso with dedicated funding appropriated to the Department of Commerce.

Initial program efforts are concentrated in five counties: King, Pierce, Thurston, Snohomish and Spokane. Each county operates within a unique set of conditions, including variations in housing availability, service provider capacity, local coordination frameworks and encampment characteristics. Consequently, the level and type of resources deployed are dependent on localized availability and conditions.

## Moving forward

Each site and community are different, which is why it's so important to have meaningful, productive partnerships with local governments and outreach groups. The local governments and outreach partners play key roles because they're able to identify their local needs. Local groups also have established connections with area providers who can meet those tangible needs on the ground.

Based on this direction, and where very limited available funding still allows, WSDOT will continue to work with partners who are interested in using this humane and sustainable model. Cleanup and monitoring activities are on-going in areas:

- Where social services have been provided
- Where planned or reactive maintenance work needs to occur
- Where emergent safety concerns have been identified

This includes work in locations with vacated encampments and in situations with immediate danger to WSDOT crews, contracted staff or the public.

## Agency recommendations

Addressing homeless encampments on state-owned right of way should continue to be a partnership and multi-agency response. WSDOT does not have the staff, resources or expertise to combat the underlying causes of homelessness alone – nor is it appropriate for our maintenance personnel to do so. The agency

also does not have a real-time census count of encampments and lacks the resources, staffing and training of the social service providers who can accomplish this task.

This work requires consistent funding in place for all partners – especially including increased and varied types of housing to meet all the needs of the people experiencing homelessness. There is also a recurring expense for ongoing monitoring of existing sites to ensure property is not damaged and sightlines remain appropriate to discourage re-encampment.

The 2025-27 budget bill removed \$4 million in funding dedicated to encampment work. The total funding level of \$5 million will not be sufficient. Without adequate funding, there is a high risk

that previously cleared sites will be re-encamped, undermining gains made to date. Continued investment is essential to maintain momentum, support long-term solutions and protect public safety and infrastructure.

Providing funding directly to partners such as the Washington State Patrol – rather than as pass through that WSDOT must administer – will ensure consistent work can be accomplished and therefore provide more information about outcomes and where efforts may be improved. That additional expertise is needed to help quantify the overall needs at every level (state government, local governments, social services, and community organizations) to achieve the proviso's objectives.