Washington State Transportation Commission

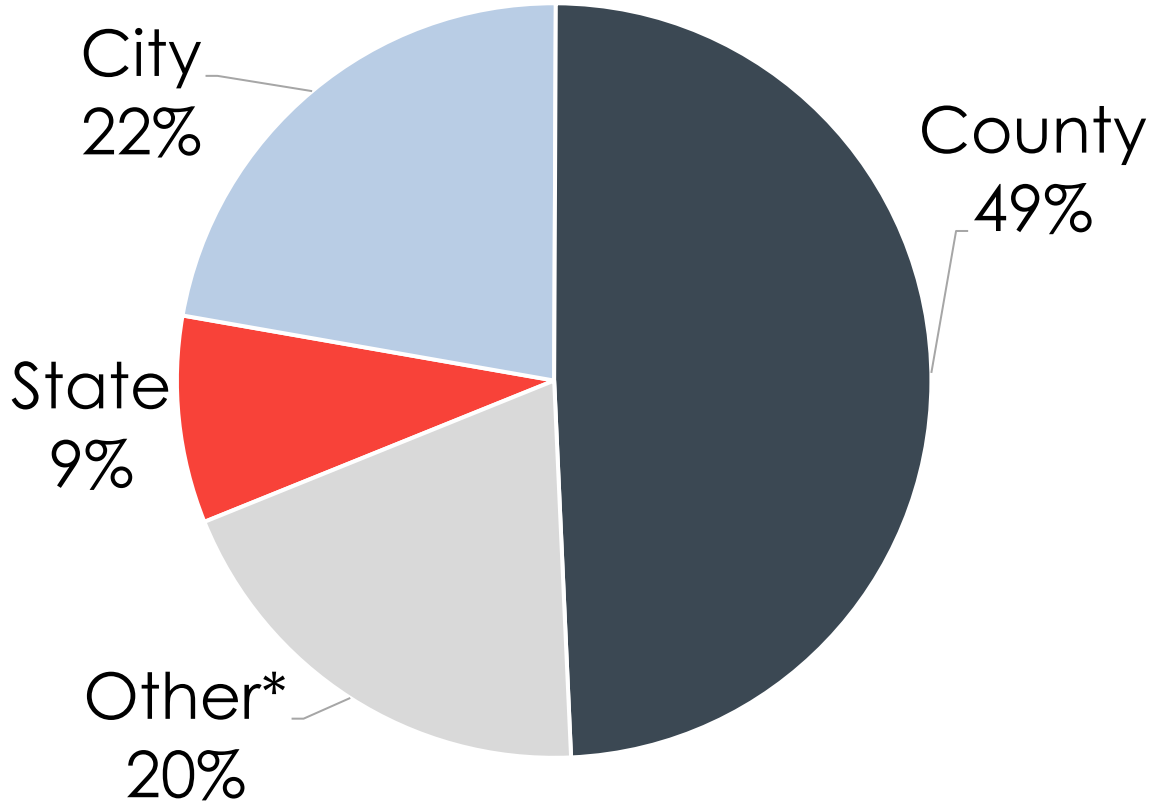
Route Jurisdiction Study
Final Findings & Recommendations

Joint Transportation Committee
December 3, 2025

Jurisdiction of Washington's Roadways

State law requires changes to roadway jurisdiction transfers be assessed by the Washington State Transportation Commission

City Streets, County Roads, State Highways
(center lane miles)



*Other - include state Natural Resources and Parks, federal agencies (e.g., Forest Service, National Parks and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Tribal Nations, and Port Districts

What are Route Jurisdiction Transfers?

- Route jurisdiction transfers (RJT) are used to add or delete a route or route segment from the state system
- State routes are defined in statute (RCW 47.17)
- The Commission evaluates transfer requests from WSDOT, cities or counties against state route criteria in law.
- Three (3) primary characteristics including connectivity, functionality and continuity are assessed by the Commission in transfers.

History of Route Jurisdiction

- **In 1989**, the Legislature assessed the state's highway inventory and local road designations to determine if changes were needed in jurisdictional assignment between the state, county, and city road systems.
- **In 1991**, the Legislature codified study recommendations along with transfer criteria.

35 years later…

- **3 million** more people have moved to Washington State
- There have been **double-digit city incorporations**
- Once-rural **highways are now operating like urban streets**

Legislative Direction to the Commission

- Assess the current state highway inventory and local roadway designations to determine if changes are needed in jurisdictional assignment between the state, county, and city road systems.
- Review current criteria used to define the state highway system to determine whether changes are appropriate.
- Submit a report of study findings and recommendations to the transportation committees of the legislature by July 1, 2025.

Overview of the Study Approach

Assessment of Existing RJT Process

- Stakeholder interviews
- Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis

Assessment of Existing State Highway System

- Data collection and analysis of current state routes

Development of Recommendations

- RJT Process
- Data-Driven Evaluation Methods
- Policy & Network Considerations

Summary of Findings & Recommendations

Key Findings

Wholesale realignment of jurisdictional assignment is not warranted.

There is no need to make wholesale transfers from the current system. The study of state routes revealed 3 strong state route characteristics including connectivity, function and continuity. These characteristics are included in a new analysis tool developed as part of this study.

There are opportunities to improve the RJT process and evaluation methods.

- Clarify the Legislature's role in state route designations
- Identify ways to streamline the current transfer process
- Ensure coordination across agencies for transfers
- Implement an improved, data-driven assessment and analysis process

Recommendation 1:

Update statutory criteria defining a state route

- **Include a high-level principle** that all state routes should exhibit strong connectivity, continuity, and functional characteristics to be part of the state highway system.
- **Update the definition of "*urbanized area*"** to include both cities as well as US Census Designated Places.
- **Remove the term "*regionally oriented through-traffic*"** which is currently undefined.
- **Clarify the Legislature's role in state route designations.** If a highway project results in the decommissioning of a portion of an existing state highway, the Legislature should have final decision-making authority on what happens to the existing state highway segment.

Recommendation 2:

Improve the Commission's route jurisdiction transfer process as follows:

- **Conduct a Pre-request Conference**
  Bring together the impacted parties and confirms a potential transfer request meets statutory RJT requirements before commencing the RJT review process.

- **Utilize a Data-Driven Tool for Analysis**
  Create a new assessment tool to support improved analysis based upon the criteria in statute (RCW 47.17) to provide a more robust, transparent data-driven analysis process and results.

- **Enhance Reporting to the Legislature**
  Results of the improved analysis will increase insights into potential impacts that merit consideration by the Legislature, such as costs, risks, continuity, and connectivity of a potential route transfer.

New Assessment Tool

- Currently evaluation of state highway criteria is often inconsistent due to ambiguous terms including "urbanized areas" and "regional through traffic"
- This new assessment tool replaces ambiguous terms with measurable evaluation factors for a transparent, consistent evaluation

Segment requested for transfer:
SR 501 betweer MP 16.91 and MP 19.88

Requested action:
Transfer from WSDOT to Ridgefield

LOCATION OF SEGMENT REQUESTED FOR TRANSFER

Cross Street or Landmark:

EVALUATION FACTORS	Segment 1	Segment 2	Segment 3
CONNECTIVITY			
NUMBER OF CITIES CONNECTED	High	Low	High
TRANSPORT HUB	High	Low	Low
STATE FACILITIES	Low	Low	Low
PARKS AND REC	Low	Low	Low
COUNTY SEAT(S)	High	Low	Low
TRIBAL SEAT OF GOVERNMENT	Low	Low	Low
TRIBAL RESERVATION ACCESS	Low	Low	Low
AGRICULTURAL ACCESS	Medium	High	Medium
FUNCTION			
SCENIC BYWAY	High	Low	Low
HSS	High	Low	Low
NHS	High	Low	Low
FREIGHT	Medium	Medium	Medium
MAX AADT	High	Low	High
CONTINUITY			
BORDER CROSSINGS	Low	Low	Low
CONNECTIONS TO OTHER ROUTES	High	Low	High

Bolded factors indicate higher weight in roll-up scores below

SUMMARY	Segment 1	Segment 2	Segment 3
	OVERALL RANKINGS*		
CONNECTIVITY	High	Low	Medium
FUNCTION	High	Low	Low
CONTINUITY	High	Low	High

* Rankings indicate how the segment compares to current state routes in each category:
- High = Top third of scores (strong state route characteristics)
- Medium = Middle third of scores
- Low = Lowest third of scores (weak state route characteristics)

Measures 3 Characteristics: Connectivity, Function, Continuity

EVALUATION FACTORS		
CONNECTIVITY	**SEGMENT MEASURE**	**SCORE**
NUMBER OF CITIES CONNECTED	Segment provides city connection(s)	High
TRANSPORT HUB	None	Low
STATE FACILITIES	None	Low
PARKS AND REC	None	Low
COUNTY SEAT(S)	None	Low
TRIBAL SEAT OF GOVERNMENT	None	Low
TRIBAL RESERVATION ACCESS	None	Low
AGRICULTURAL LAND WITHIN 1 MI BUFFER	21%	Medium
FUNCTION	**SEGMENT MEASURE**	**SCORE**
SCENIC BYWAY	No	Low
HSS	No	Low
NHS	No	Low
FREIGHT	T-3	Medium
MAX AADT	24,000	High
CONTINUITY	**SEGMENT MEASURE**	**SCORE**
BORDER CROSSINGS	Does not connect to cross-border state or provincial route	Low
CONNECTIONS TO OTHER ROUTES	Segment connects to other state route(s)	High

Recommendation 3:

Improve Interagency Coordination

- **WSTC, TIB, and CRAB should increase coordination around transfer review and assessment.**
- **WSDOT and WSTC should continue to collaborate to ensure consistent reporting to the Legislature on jurisdictional changes. Recommended steps include:**
  - Establish communication and record keeping protocols between the two agencies to ensure consistent and accessible records.
  - Improve agency staff understanding of RJT and WSDOT administrative transfer processes, possibly through updates to websites and manuals.

Washington State Transportation Commission

Thank you!

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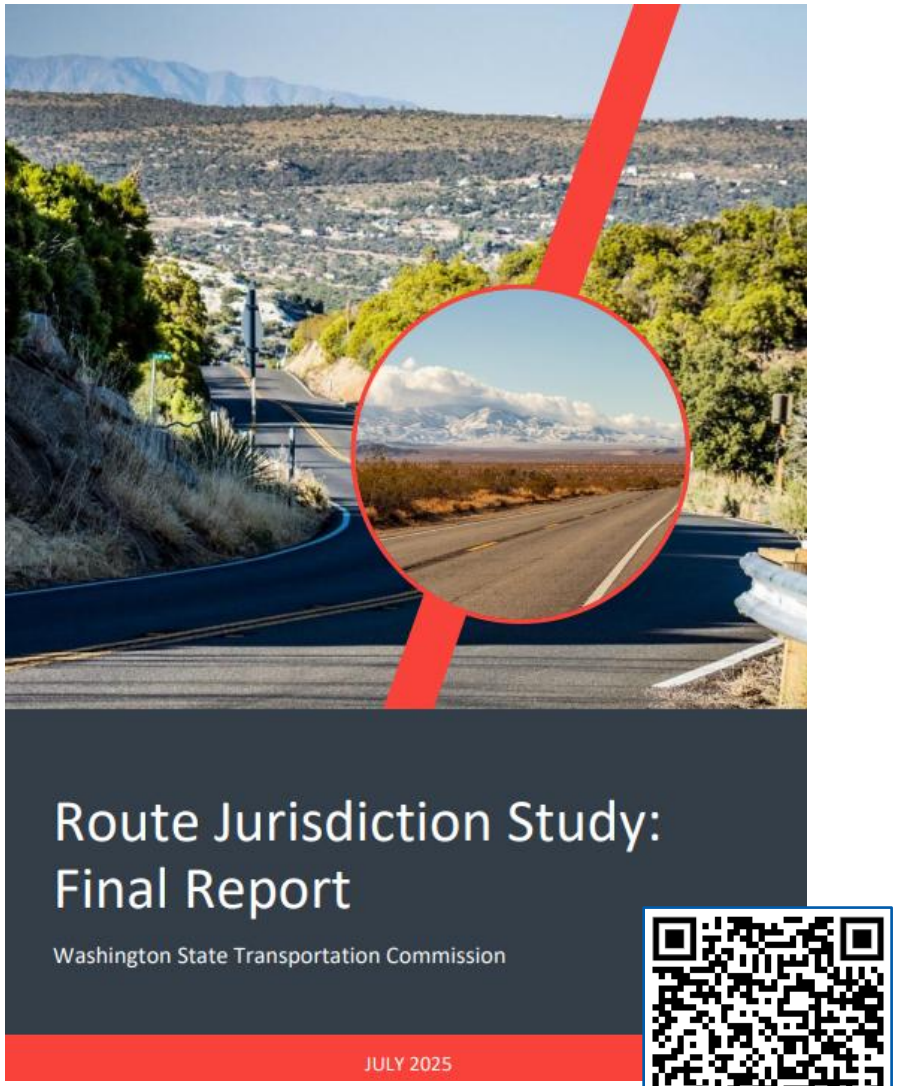

View and Download RJS Final Report online at:
www.wstc.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/2025-07-03-RJT-FinalReport.pdf