State RTPO Funding Increase [13 January 2025]

REQUESTED LEGISLATIVE ACTION:
Increase base funding for Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) activities to $11.7 million per biennium, an increase of $6.8 million, sufficient for every RTPO to fund at least one staff position to maintain the basic legislated responsibilities for coordinated long-range regional transportation planning established in RCW 47.80.

What is the problem? The Legislature is appropriating nearly the same for RTPOs today as in 2004. The $4.9 million currently appropriated for regional planning supports anywhere from 0.2 to 0.4 FTEs in RTPOs across the state. But it takes at least an FTE to maintain basic responsibilities of any RTPO in accordance with legislative intent. ***RTPO representatives from member agencies need staff to:***

- ☐ **Convene** all transportation agencies – cities, counties, tribes, transit agencies, ports, WSDOT, others - to develop and maintain coordinated long-range plans, policies, and programs
- ☐ **Participate** in WSDOT and local planning processes and ensure regionally coordinated perspectives are in alignment with state and local transportation and Comprehensive Plans
- ☐ **Provide** input to WSDOT, FMSIB, and others who regularly request RTPO data and policymaker perspectives on transportation funding priorities and policy matters
- ☐ **Facilitate** the distribution of information to and collection of input from RTPO members regarding various WSDOT processes and those of a growing number of transportation stakeholders
- ☐ **Support** Executive Board and Technical Advisory Committee meetings and handle administrative, public notice, reporting, communications, and compliance requirements of the RTPO

Rural regions are particularly impacted by the RTPO funding deficit since they don't get federal planning funds like urban regions do and rely on miniscule budgets to carry out their respective work programs.

What is the effect of this? RTPOs can't afford to be at the table when statewide plans are developed or participate with members in local planning processes. RTPO members don't get regional support with data or information requests, and there is less interagency exchange of information and ideas. Community engagement is fading to perfunctory requirements. Monthly meetings in many regions have given way to bi-monthly or even quarterly meetings, limiting valuable opportunities for interagency collaboration and timely input to state agency requests. Reducing opportunities for interagency cooperation and collaboration undermines regional resilience, when 21st century challenges demand greater resilience.

What is needed? Base RTPO funding should be increased to at least $11.7 million per biennium so that RTPOs in every corner of the state can afford to do core planning activities, not just urban regions. This level of funding will ensure all 17 RTPOs receive at least $400,000 per biennium to support basic RTPO planning activities and overhead costs, with some receiving much more due to their size or complexity.

How can this be addressed? Appropriate $6,800,000 to the Motor Vehicle Account-State solely for Regional Transportation Planning Organizations. The Department shall allocate the funds to seventeen RTPOs equally, ensuring each receives $400,000 per biennium from this appropriation; this is in addition to weighted distributions received from the original T6-RTPO Funding totaling $4,900,000. This increase will bring total statewide RTPO funding per biennium to $11,700,000 for seventeen regional organizations. ***Climate Commitment Act funds are a defensible alternate revenue source, given the composition and work of RTPOs.***