Strategic Agenda & Action Plan

Confronting Tough Topics in PRTPO's Transportation Outlook for the Peninsula Region

This Strategic Agenda & Action Plan recognizes key concerns PRTPO has identified and the outcomes it supports. Some of those tough topics in PRTPO's Transportation Outlook present major threats that jeopardize safe and reliable travel now or in the not-too-distant future. Others present major opportunities to improve the accessibility, safety, efficiency, or resilience of the transportation system. Concerns identified by Executive Board members are consequential to the transportation system and for travel throughout the Peninsula Region. That is why they are included here.

The Strategic Agenda articulates regional objectives and the concerns driving their inclusion. A small number are highlighted as Featured Objectives. Featured Objectives correspond to priority issues currently on PRTPO's radar and provide more comprehensive context and well-developed activities to support near-term efforts. Though less detailed, the others round out the full range of concerns PRTPO policymakers are tracking and engaged in. Several reflect continuation of current efforts.

Others are ready for more detailed development as issues and opportunities evolve.

The integrated Action Plan identifies specific meaningful steps that PRTPO or others can take to make progress on those objectives. It presents high-level tiered cost ranges, but all are fairly inexpensive. Some could possibly be accommodated within an existing work program budget while others may require supplemental funding. In all cases, final details of the proposed action and actual cost will be scoped based on direction of the Executive Board and availability of funds.

For purposes of this Action Plan, the following cost ranges are used:

Cost Range of Action Plan measures

$	< $25,000
$$	$25,000 - $50,000
$$$	$50,000 - $100,000
$$$$	> $100,000

Together, this Strategic Agenda & Action Plan serve to inform the Board's work program going forward. It will be updated as needed to reflect PRTPO progress, insights, and emerging concerns over time.

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Featured Objective:

Improve Hood Canal Bridge Operations

Concern: Closure of the Hood Canal Bridge to allow passage of recreational sailboats that are too big to pass under the 59' fixed span on the east end causes traffic and economic impacts from Bremerton to Port Angeles. Unpredictable delays of an hour or more impact all travelers using SR 104 - individuals trying to catch a ferry, tourists trying to reach their destination, freight deliveries and other commercial services operating on tight schedules, buses full of passengers, medical transport for those in need. When everything goes well, it takes about an hour from when traffic is stopped to when it resumes. It takes time for the bridge to swing slowly open through the water and lock into place, for the sailboat to pass all the way through at 6-8 knots, and for the bridge to then swing slowly closed and be secured so vehicular traffic can resume.

Over half of all bridge closures in 2023 were to accommodate yacht passage.

Coast Guard policies determine when vehicular traffic must be stopped to let a yacht pass on its way to or from a recreational outing. Those policies should be revisited to ensure the privileges of recreational mariners are commensurate with the economic and congestion impacts borne by all those using SR 104.

Traffic queued on the Kitsap County side of the bridge during closures blocks local access and takes a long time to clear. This creates severe impacts on the adjacent neighborhoods.

Intersection improvements are needed to mitigate conflicts between those waiting for the bridge to reopen and traffic to begin moving, and those who live and work in the area.

WSDOT has little data available to evaluate the effects of bridge operations on economic activity, much less which of those openings are attributable to recreational vessels versus Navy or commercial vessels. Data is needed to quantify the congestion and economic impacts resulting from Coast Guard policies concerning passage of sailing yachts into and out of Hood Canal.

Actions to support this objective

Jump start updates to Coast Guard policies governing Hood Canal Bridge closures for large yacht passage. Host a regional forum for state and federal legislators to learn about the issue and impacts, explore options, and identify one or more champions to carry this forward to the Coast Guard for serious consideration. This could be accommodated within one or more

meetings of the Executive Board, or it could be a stand-alone event. Provide adequate community and regional support to that process as it moves forward.

Cost to Implement: $

Advocate for WSDOT Olympic Region funding to analyze the transportation, economic, and community impacts of lift- bridge operations for the Hood Canal Bridge. Funding will be used to engage a consultant for field data collection, analysis and evaluation, community engagement, and reporting. Work will support interagency discussions regarding bridge opening practices, future placement of traveler information infrastructure, and strategies for critical fish passage, preservation, and safety. WSDOT funding need is estimated at $200,000. This action pertains to support for WSDOT's funding pursuit, and could be accommodated through PRTPO's legislative engagement.

Cost to Implement: $

Request a legislative earmark for WSDOT Olympic Region to evaluate east end infrastructure needs and identify a preferred solution to alleviate state highway impacts on local residents while increasing operational efficiency of the state highway system. This can be done through coordinated efforts between PRTPO and local agencies as a part of the legislative budget process, utilizing PRTPO's *Transportation Outlook*. This can be combined with local agency lobbying efforts to demonstrate this is a regional priority need with broad support. Operational analysis and alternatives evaluation are necessary before any capital funding can be secured.

Cost to Implement: $

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Featured Objective:

Expand long-distance intercity bus service

Concern: Rural and intercity bus services provide vital connections between highly rural communities and connect them to urban services. This is often a lifeline for vulnerable residents needing specialized medical care. Additionally, long- distance intercity bus travel enables members of one tribal community to visit those in other communities, sustaining old family ties and cultural events.

No such service is currently available on the US 101 loop around the Olympic Peninsula. It is possible to get between the east side and west side of the Olympic Mountains by leap frogging between services offered by the four public transit agencies and the six different tribal transit systems, but that takes a lot of schedule planning, coordination, and time.

State funding to provide intercity long-distance bus service is not available. That doesn't necessarily mean such service isn't possible.

Innovative service coordination between the four transit agencies serving that loop - Clallam Transit, Jefferson Transit, Mason Transit, and Grays Harbor Transit - may offer an effective alternative. These

agencies already engage in a high level of service coordination. Preliminary scoping can determine if an "OlyPen" service model is an opportunity worth a closer look.

Actions to support this objective

Facilitate table top exercise to explore opportunities for scheduled long-distance bus service around the Olympic Peninsula. This activity will engage the PRTPO transit partners and Grays Harbor Transit in an exploratory work session to assess the potential for a future scheduled service built on interagency coordination and collaboration, with a brief report out to the Executive Board. This is a preliminary exercise intended to assess likely feasibility and interest, to determine whether a more comprehensive technical study is warranted. If so, participants will help develop a high-level scope of work, cost estimates, and key considerations for a follow-up study, to support future funding pursuits.
Cost to Implement: $

Support improved coordination between Dungeness Line operators and local transit agencies. The Dungeness Line is operated by Greyhound, which has been acquired by Flix, an international transit company. Since that acquisition, communication between Dungeness Line and local transit agencies has grown harder and service coordination has deteriorated, reducing access to this valuable service from outlying areas. Jefferson Transit's Kingston Express service presents new opportunities for system connections, extending the range of transit access for travelers. The Dungeness Line is funded by WSDOT. Coordinated efforts between PRTPO and the region's local and tribal transit partners can bring this to WSDOT's attention to get support in restoring good lines of communication and improved coordination with Dungeness Line operators.
Cost to Implement: $

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Featured Objective:

Restore and enhance ferry services

Concern: With well over half of all ferry trips in Washington State beginning or ending in the Peninsula Region, the flagging operational reliability and structural integrity of those services are a central concern of the regional transportation system. For too long, state ferry services have operated "one boat down," due either to vessels being out of service or a shortage of labor. New vessels are slow to come into service. Ferry terminals are outdated and in need of modernization.

Given the central role of Washington State Ferries (WSF) in meeting the demand for ferry travel, service disruptions impact business, freight, individual travelers, and the ferry terminal communities themselves. Additionally, old questions about Keystone Harbor raise concerns about the long-term viability of this important connection between Port Townsend and Coupeville. Any need for reconfiguration or relocation of Keystone Harbor would likely take many, many years to resolve.

State efforts to increase the labor force and personnel for WSF is a good start, but given projected retirements in the near-term, it's just a start. These are good jobs that bolster the state economy. Training opportunities should be a statewide coordination priority between WSDOT and other agencies.

Marine highways are a vital part of the region's transportation system. Efforts to grow passenger-only ferry service and marine cargo further underscore the need for a coordinated, long-range marine highway strategy.

Actions to support this objective

Convene work sessions with Representative Greg Nance (23rd LD) and Steve Nevey, WSF Director, to discuss measures they are working on and identify specific measures PRTPO can take to support more reliable service.
Cost to Implement: $

Monitor efforts to grow passenger-only "mosquito fleet" ferry services between smaller ports where WSF service is impractical, and engage in study efforts as resources allow.
Cost to Implement: $

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Featured Objective:

Increase transportation resilience in the region

Concern: The ability of any community to respond and recover after an emergency depends greatly on the state of the transportation system after the event. This includes highways and bridges, but also local streets and roads, public transit, ferries and terminals, airport runways and air fields, and marine terminals and even recreational boat launches.

State and federal emergency management planners predict that much of the Olympic Peninsula will be isolated for weeks or even months after a major tsunami or earthquake. The most significant of these is the Cascadia earthquake. The Cascadia earthquake will occur. When that will be is the big unknown. It could be any time.

Resilience of the Peninsula Region's transportation system hinges in large measure on how prepared and coordinated its many different transportation partners are. All four counties have Comprehensive Emergency Management Plans. And in each, transportation is called out for special attention.

It is important to increase coordination and cooperation between all the relevant agencies - cities, counties, tribes, transits, ports, and WSDOT, but also federal land management agencies, state resource agencies and others, across the four county region.

How well do the transportation strategies in each county align with each other? Do mutual aid agreements extend between counties? What about federal and state lands?

The status of essential transportation coordination between the different emergency management plans and agencies across the region is unclear. That is a good place to start in understanding how well prepared the region is and where improved transportation coordination can help.

Actions to support this objective

Ensure PRTPO participation as a member of the Joint Operations Group for the four-county region. A regional "JOG" is being convened to support improved communication and coordination between all the transportation providers and emergency planning agencies across the four county Peninsula Region. Participation on the JOG entails one hour per month for regular meetings.
Cost to Complete: $

Convene a regional emergency management planning awareness forum with local, state, tribal, federal partners to assess coordination opportunities, the status of requisite MOUs for mutual assistance, and potential value of "primitive roads strategy for route redundancy" as a future study need.
Cost to complete: $

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Featured Objective:

Make travel safer for all

Concern: Since the pandemic, much of the progress state and local agencies have made in the last decade to drive down fatal and serious injury crash rates has been lost. Crash rates have rebounded, moving communities away from their aim of eliminating fatalities. Especially troubling is the skyrocketing incidence of serious crashes involving cyclists or pedestrians. All facilities - local, state, and tribal - need to accommodate non-motorized travel safely and reduce conflicts with vehicles.

Main Street is a state highway in many communities across the Peninsula Region. Outdated highway infrastructure often fails to accommodate the needs of walkers, cyclists, and transit.

This is more pronounced in some areas than in others. In some areas, land use activities are generating walk, bike, and transit in accordance with adopted Comprehensive Plans, but the highway is designed to move vehicles, often at high speeds.

WSDOT is tackling this problem as best it can with the resources available to it. There is a range of options for reducing conflicts suitable for different kinds of areas. These "complete street" treatments add features or modify operations to better accommodate walk, bike, and transit trips and enhance safe access for all.

Additionally, the introduction of roundabouts at intersections with high crash rates or turning movement conflicts can greatly reduce the likelihood of serious injuries or crashes. This is in addition to improving the operational efficiency of the intersection and roadway facilities. Increasingly common in more urban areas, roundabouts are only beginning to be widely deployed in rural areas. Greater application in suitable locations can alleviate safety concerns for motorized and non-motorized travelers alike.

Actions to support this objective

Support enhanced coordination between WSDOT and local agencies through a regional profile of Complete Streets Candidates. This activity launched as a part of the 2025 RTP update. It involves an online mapping tool that identifies those locations outside of cities where land uses are generating walk, bike, and transit trips, as well as other factors pertaining to demographics, demonstration of local agency concerns, alignment with statewide transportation policy, and other considerations. The aim is to facilitate the sharing of local knowledge concerning priority complete streets candidates to aid WSDOT in its screening process and help the state understand where land use and transportation infrastructure are out of alignment. Once completed, minor ongoing maintenance will be needed to keep it current. This tool could be adapted to support coordination between WSDOT and local agencies in implementing multimodal level of service objectives currently under development.
Cost to Implement: $

Increase awareness of innovative strategies and funding opportunities that support members in their efforts to improve system safety. This would continue PRTPO's practice of inviting subject matter experts to share information with members and provide them with resources on relevant multimodal safety topics they find useful. The TAC is a productive forum for identifying topics that will have value in addressing issues across the region.
Cost to Implement: $

Featured Objective:

Enhance PRTPO's capacity as an effective regional partner

Concern: PRTPO operates on limited resources. Revenues appropriated by the legislature for regional planning have not kept up with inflation nor the growing responsibilities of RTPOs. This means PRTPO has little capacity to represent the region's interests in statewide planning process or participate on project study teams with members. Its ability to respond to member needs or initiate any of the activities in this Strategic Agenda & Action Plan is very limited.

Actions to support this objective

Seek legislative funding for important regional planning activities that don't fit within the regular budget. PRTPO is eligible to receive legislative earmarks and grants.
Cost to Complete: $

Develop a regional multimodal level of service standard for highways of regional significance. WSDOT is currently developing a MMLOS for Highways of Statewide Significance that may be suitable as a regional standard for other state highways. If not, PRPTO members can develop an alternate standard that better supports regional coordination and investment needs on these other Highways of Regional Significance. Such a policy should also be compatible with locally developed and adopted multimodal level of service policies.
Cost to Complete: $

Engage with non-member organizations that are not specifically transportation related, but which have overlapping interests. Some examples include the North Olympic Development Council (NODC), Western Federal Lands (WFL), Naval Base Kitsap, and the newly forming Joint Operations Group for improved coordination and communications regarding disaster planning. Briefings and discussion with the Executive Board can reveal potential areas for further collaboration and foster new partners.
Cost to Implement: $

Convene a forum for governing Board members from other rural RTPOs to increase awareness of common concerns and explore possible ways to elevate awareness of rural RTPO interests and opportunities at the state level.
Cost to Implement: $

The following objectives and activities address additional priority concerns recognized by the PRTPO Executive Board. PRTPO will support these objectives as resources and capacity allow.

Make efficient use of federal transportation funds

Using state funds to defederalize small local agency projects makes efficient use of limited resources and increases value for the traveling public from existing revenues by concentrating Washington's federal funds onto fewer, larger projects and using state funds which are easier and more cost- effective to administer for smaller local projects.

***Supporting Action**: Continue to monitor progress on the federal funding swap program and partner with allies to advocate for the program or proposed improvements with the region's legislators.*

Honor previous legislative funding commitments for regional projects

Prior funding commitments for *Connecting WA* and *Move Ahead WA projects* need to be honored and projects expedited. Maintaining regional awareness of project status and coordination efforts can help ensure these projects continue to make progress over the long course of project funding and development they entail.

***Supporting Action**: Continue to advocate for Connecting WA and Move Ahead WA funding commitments.*

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Ensure adequate, reliable funding for transportation agencies

Agencies need funding that is adequate and reliable if they are to build, maintain, retrofit, and operate a transportation system that gets people and goods where they need to be, when they need to be there, safely and efficiently. Greater revenue predictability for agencies enables better system management and budgeting.

***Supporting Action:** Continue to promote the need for funding through various regional mechanisms.*

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Support transportation electrification and zero-emission vehicle infrastructure

Transportation electrification is a complex matter involving non-traditional stakeholders and sectors, new project delivery considerations, and abundant funding opportunities, all of which are more complicated in rural settings, and which must be addressed to improve the region's EV-readiness for zero-emission vehicles.

***Supporting Action:** Continue to maintain the EV Resources page on PRTPO's website and periodically convene the EV Infrastructure Exchange group as warranted in response to emerging issues or opportunities.*

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Increase access to high speed broadband service rural residents and businesses

Expanded broadband access is a rural travel demand management measure in that it connects small, far-flung communities and outlying residents to 21st century opportunities while reducing or even eliminating the need for personal travel.

Supporting Action: *Continue to advocate for expanded broadband access as an important transportation concern.*

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Expand access to safe and convenient mobility of those who cannot drive

Increased coordination between mobility service providers – public and tribal transit, non-profit, NEMT, intercity bus - can improve provision of human services transportation options and make travel easier and more efficient for those whose mobility depends on those services.

Supporting Action: *Continue to support collaboration and communication between service providers through periodic updates of the Human Services Transportation Plan, including emergency response and evacuation considerations*.

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Significantly increase revenue dedicated to system preservation and asset management

Pavement preservation is chronically underfunded, resulting in accelerated pavement deterioration and increased safety risks. If there is not enough money to take care of existing infrastructure, there is not enough money to replace it. Increasing base levels of preservation funding is a least-cost approach to keeping life cycle costs down.

Supporting Action: *Continue to promote maintenance and preservation of the existing system as a priority regional need that is grossly underfunded, and which will only increase over time.*

Expand regional trail systems

Regional trails connect communities and support the region's economy, expanding opportunities for active, healthy travel and recreation for all across the Peninsula Region. Regional collaboration and cooperation are the foundation for a regional network.

Supporting Action: *Continue to support regional partnerships and implementation efforts through various regional mechanisms.*

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Correct impacts of transportation infrastructure on salmon habitat

Retrofitting salmon habitat barriers and opening up new habitat involves many partners, not just WSDOT. Infrastructure retrofits for system safety and resilience create opportunities to improve habitat connectivity, too.

Supporting Action: *Continue to advocate for completion of fish passage retrofit projects and support other measures to improve salmon habitat and connectivity.*

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Reduce administrative burdens that outstrip staff capacity

The workforce capacity of agencies and their local labor markets limit their ability to attract and retain staff, obtain and administer grants, and meet increasing state and federal transportation requirements.

Supporting Action: *Support local agencies in their efforts to streamline transportation reporting requirements and be mindful of the impact of PRTPO's own data and information requests on over-burdened local staff.*

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Be prepared for deployment of advanced transportation technologies

How can rural communities prepare for the deployment of advanced technology and connected/highly autonomous vehicles in a region such as this? Technological advancements are accelerating, creating new opportunities as well as new challenges for the region's transportation partners.

Supporting Action: *Forward relevant information to partners about new programs, opportunities, or resources available from state or federal agencies.*

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Ensure future gas tax replacement is equitable for rural places

What are the implications for residents and businesses across the region of replacing the state gas tax with a per-mile fee, and what will this mean for transportation revenue? Washington is actively looking at alternatives to the gas tax, one that may be based on miles traveled. Distances between Point A and B in a rural region are often far and alternatives are impractical. The impact a mileage-based fee structure would have in rural, auto-dependent communities is different than in urban places with shorter distances and more viable travel options.

Supporting Action: *Continue to monitor progress and invite periodic briefings from WA State Transportation Commission staff leading the statewide effort.*

Coordinate data collection efforts across the region where practical

Data collection needs are expanding faster than local agencies can meet them. Regional approaches can alleviate local pressures and often achieve economies of scale that are cost- effective compared to individual efforts.

Supporting Action: *Promote the difficulty of local agencies in collecting specialized data needed for WSDOT reports and where possible, advocate for funding to collect that data in a coordinated way.*

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Ensure completion of long-term, regionally significant projects

In addition to ongoing near-term funding priorities, there are a few very large long-term funding priorities that must maintain forward momentum. These projects may take many years to complete due to their size and complexity. It is important to maintain agency and legislative awareness of these projects throughout the project delivery process.

Supporting Action*: Maintain a record of these projects and update information as needed over time to reflect progress and funding need. Click [here] for a list of these long-term projects.* [Please read: I am building an online map that features these projects, with links to their websites where available. Two projects have been input, so you can see what I'm talking about. Other projects that will be added are: SR 3 Freight Corridor, SR 117 Truck Route, SR 20 - Mill Road Gateway Project, ODT / PS2P, SR 112 Rehabilitation and Retrofit, and SR 305 future phases. Am I overlooking other huge recognized projects that are underway?]