



MEMORANDUM

TO: Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council Board of Directors
FROM: Matt Ransom, Executive Director *MR*
DATE: February 5, 2019
SUBJECT: State Legislative Session Update

AT A GLANCE – INFORMATION

The purpose of this memorandum is to keep the RTC Board apprised of proposed state legislation.

BACKGROUND

The Washington State Legislature convened for its 2019 session on January 14 and is scheduled to complete its full session on April 28. At the outset of the legislative session, RTC staff began tracking bills that would revise laws that govern transportation funding, planning, and RTC operations.

In addition to monitoring proposed legislation, staff are also assisting Legislators and RTC Member agency staff (and their lobbyists) by providing current information in regards to RTC plans and recommended projects through the Board endorsed Regional Transportation Plan (2014) and current Clark County Transportation Alliance 2019-2020 Legislative Policy Statement.

GOVERNOR’S BUDGET PROPOSAL

Governor Inslee proposed several elements for the 19-21 state fiscal biennium that benefit both the interests of agencies in the RTC region, in addition to funding of new programs and activities within WSDOT. Noteworthy project/program start-up and enhancements include:

- \$17,500,000 for start-up of an I-5/Columbia River Bridge project office.
- \$1,000,000 increase in operating funds for RTPO’s to enhance service delivery and regional planning
- Expanded Practical Solutions program activities (multi-modal, traffic and demand management demonstration projects and strategies).
- Automated transportation and technology program start-up activities
- Expanded electric highway infrastructure, charging stations, etc.
- Further study of multi-state high speed rail corridor (Portland to Vancouver BC)

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION BRIEFING

Each year, the Secretary of the Department of Transportation provides a “State of Transportation” briefing to the House and Senate Transportation Committees. Among the diversity of topics covered; this year’s presentation focused again on illustrating how the

Department is working with local government partners to optimize the use of the existing transportation assets. The presentation reported data from the I-405 Express Toll Lane project and how that managed lane system was providing greater vehicle throughput capacity than compared to the baseline condition. The Secretary emphasized the need for transportation system management and demand management strategies aligned with project developed with the practical solutions approach. Lastly, the Secretary continues to emphasize the value and need for regional planning and coordination through the MPO process. (Excerpts of the full presentation will be shared with the Board.)

NEW LAW TRANSPORTION FUNDING AND PROJECT CONCEPT

The Senate Transportation Committee held a public hearing on a DRAFT New Law Transportation Funding Concept and Project List. This proposal is the first public presentation and comment hearing on a proposal to craft a new funding program and project list for needed state and local improvement / maintenance investments. Since the most recent statewide funding program increase (Connecting Washington; 2015), there has been ongoing conversation about crafting a new funding program to address many projects and programs that were unfunded in the Connecting Washington program.

For the RTC region, the DRAFT Project List includes several key projects that are of statewide significance. As presented for public hearing, the DRAFT Project List included the: I-5 Bridge Replacement; and, Columbia River Bridge Replacement/Hood River to White Salmon. These two bridge replacement projects are RTC regional project priorities, as expressed in the agency’s current Regional Transportation Plans (Regional Transportation Plan for Clark County, 2014; and Regional Transportation Plan for Klickitat County, 2018).

RTC submitted a letter of comment to the public hearing, verifying that the RTC region projects (specifically noted on the DRAFT Project List) were listed on Regional Transportation Plans. RTC Vice-Chair, Scott Hughes, attended and provided comment at the January 31 public hearing along with other regional leaders from Clark County. Further legislative action on this proposal is pending. RTC will monitor the development of this program and keep members apprised.

BILL STATUS

As of this report, RTC staff have been monitoring these bills as summarized below. You can access the Bill page by clicking the Bill # hyperlink:

Bill #	Summary	Perceived Impact	Status
HB 1160	19-21 Biennium budget appropriations bill for WSDOT, and local and regional programs.	- RTP Implementation: \$17.5 M listed for opening a project office for I-5 Bridge replacement project. - RTC Agency: \$1 M statewide increase to RTPO program funding. RTC would receive a portion of this funding addition	House Committee Hearing; 1-31

		for operations (based on a statewide formula).	
HB 1584	Would establish new laws affecting RTPO's and tribal consultation requirements.	- RTC agency: Would add a requirement that RTPO's covering certain tribal nation lands provide an opportunity for Policy Board voting participation of eligible tribes. Could require RTC to modify Board structure to accommodate.	- referred to State Government & Tribal Relations Committee
HB 1835	Would direct to the Joint Transportation Committee to commission a study to define a new bridge crossing of the Columbia River west of I-5.	RTC Region: Current regional transportation and growth management plans do not contemplate a new bridge crossing of the Columbia River, within the Vancouver UGA. Growth Management Plan review may be needed by affected agencies.	TBD

CITIZEN INITIATIVE

[Initiative 976](#) (I-976) has been filed and certified for a public vote in November 2019. As filed, I-976 would reduce the annual vehicle registration fees (license tabs) for certain vehicles to a maximum of \$30 per year. This initiative could have wide ranging statewide and local impacts, and could affect the validity of several local Transportation Benefit Districts. As currently formed, the local Transportation Benefit Districts provide a reliable source of funding for city street maintenance and investment projects. Within Clark County, two local Transportation Benefit Districts are in effect: Vancouver and Battle Ground; and two have been authorized to take effect this year: Washougal and Ridgefield.

According to the state constitution, the Legislature does have an opportunity to address a certified initiative by enacting into law the proposal as-is-written during a legislative session. Alternatively, the Legislature can also craft an alternative initiative, to be placed alongside I-976 on the general ballot. To date, RTC staff is unaware of any pending legislative activity. It is likely that I-976 will be presented on the November 2019 ballot.

NEXT STEPS

RTC staff will continue to monitor proposed bills which are currently or may be introduced during this legislative session. In addition to monitoring, RTC staff will provide information and input to the Board, Legislators, and RTC Member agency staff as requested.