Washington State Department of Transportation

Community Transportation Planning Office

E-Newsletter

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Practical Solutions–A New Approach at WSDOT

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Least Cost Planning

Least cost planning is an approach to making planning decisions that considers a variety of conceptual solutions to achieve the desired system performance targets for the least cost. Central to least cost planning is a process that engages the public, applies methods to evaluate planning options, and how to select options.

A key step early in the planning process is to set vision and goals that reflect a community's values and stakeholders agree to support. It is the first opportunity for public stakeholders to provide their input. In order to facilitate collaboration, a review and reflection of local and regional planning goals are also considered. At the system wide level, a broad range of transportation, community, and environmental goals are studied. At a corridor level, the key decision is determined by the goals approved in the system planning process but are tailored to reflect unique characteristics of the corridor under study. This in turn informs the purpose and need for projects in environmental review.

Practical Design

The outcome of least cost planning is a recommended set of multimodal strategies that are cost effective and still meet the goals and objectives set early in the planning process.

Practical design is an approach to making project decisions that focuses on the need for the project and looks for the lowest cost solutions. It engages local stakeholders at the earliest stages of defining scope to ensure their input is included at the right stage of project design.

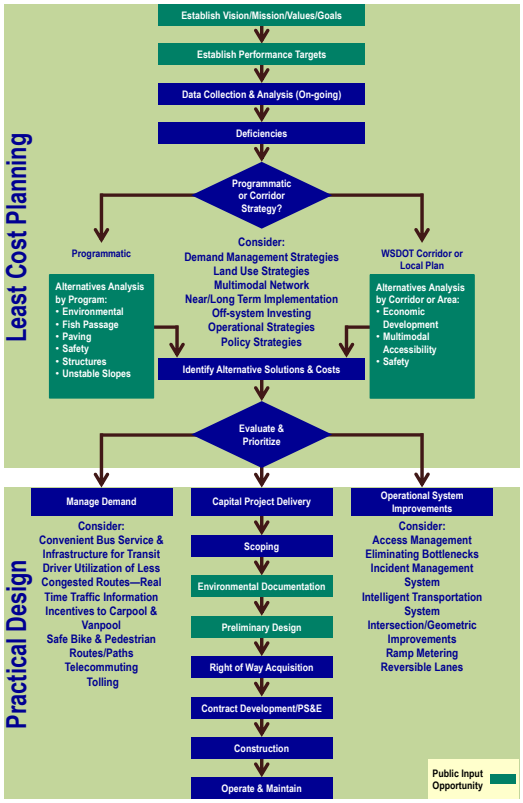
With practical design, decision-making focuses on maximum benefit to the system, rather than maximum benefit to the project. Focusing on the specific project need minimizes the scope of work for each project. The goal is to allow more needs to be addressed system wide by reducing spending on lesser priority items on each project.

Practical design is also an important component in implementing WSDOT's strategic plan since both encourage:

- Innovation and solutions
- No compromises to safety
- Community engagement for decision-making
- Collaboration on a wide array of perspectives

By using practical design, project decisions will build the most efficient solutions for the state's transportation needs.

Practical Solutions
How a Collaborative Transportation Solution is Implemented



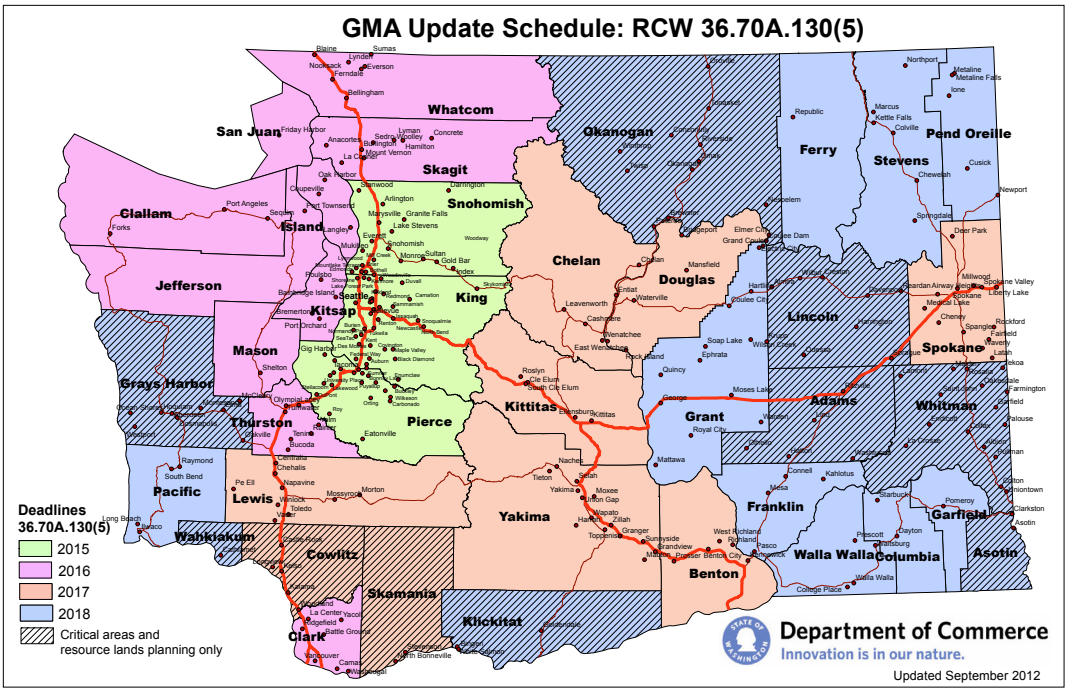
For more information visit WSDOT's **Practical Design website** or contact **Nancy Boyd**, Director, Engineering Policy and Innovation Division or **Elizabeth Robbins**, Manager, Community Transportation Planning Office, 360.705.7371.

Growth Management Act Focus Groups Held in Seattle and Spokane

How can WSDOT help you with your Comprehensive Plan Updates

The Growth Management Act requires fully planning cities and counties to review and update their comprehensive plans every eight years. Two hundred and forty-six jurisdictions in Washington state will be updating their comprehensive plans between 2015-2018. Eighty-one of those jurisdictions are required to adopt updates by June 30, 2015.

Aware of the upcoming update deadlines, WSDOT was interested in knowing what resources and tools local governments thought would be most useful when updating their comprehensive plan. So, we decided to ask them by holding two focus groups—one on the west side of the state and one on the east. The focus group attendees represented nine cities, four counties, two regional transportation planning organizations (RTPOs), and one tribe. During the focus group meetings, attendees identified how WSDOT could best provide assistance, support, and collaboration throughout their update process.



The focus groups indicated they needed assistance with:

- Walkability, main street development, multimodal integration, and demand management
- Concurrency and correspondence across various LOS methodologies
- Links to good examples of policies and plan elements
- Funding and implementation assistance, a list of future projects for modeling purposes, and improved access to data
- Training and technical assistance on a variety of topics and coordination of checklists among the Washington State Department of Commerce, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, Regional Transportation Planning Organizations, and WSDOT
- Improvements to the WSDOT website to better direct users to comprehensive plan resources
- Issue briefs on a variety of topics, quarterly webinars, and better distribution of existing resources, e.g., the **Growth Management Act Contacts**, **WSDOT Local Planning Resources**, and the **Community Planning Portal**

WSDOT has already implemented one of the focus group's suggestions with the creation of a new **Growth Management Act (GMA) Comprehensive Plan Resources website** and is working on a plan to address the other good ideas. If you would like to suggest a comprehensive plan update resource, please contact **Karena Houser** at 360.705.7876.

Travel Model Improvement Program Peer Review

Thurston Regional Planning Council uses the Travel Model Improvement Program's Peer Review Process

In June, 2012 TRPC's current travel model and draft model improvement work plan was the subject of a peer review supported by the Travel Model Improvement Program (TMIP) sponsored by the Federal Highway Administration. TRPC looked to the review panel for advice on a systematic approach to model enhancements and technical guidance on modeling processes to address its key analytic needs. To that end, the five peer reviewers spent one day responding to specific questions from TRPC and its planning partners.

Thera Black, Senior Planner for the Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC), stated "If you are thinking about an overhaul to your agency's travel model, I highly recommend TMIP! We got a lot of value from the process."

Black further explained the preparation and commitment of the TMIP review team was impressive. She noted that TMIP spent an incredible amount of time reviewing TRPC's information, which helped TRPC immensely during its model update. According to Black, the major benefits of TMIP's peer review included:

- An objective, peer-reviewed assessment of TRPC's planned model update that included evaluation of suitability of core model assumptions and proposed structure for the region's intended applications. TRPC did make some changes to the update plan because of the review.
- Enhanced inter-regional coordination and model compatibility between neighboring Puget Sound Regional Council and the TRPC, as well as the expanded capacity that it affords WSDOT for its highway analysis. It fostered bigger discussions about inter-regional collaboration.
- The independent evaluation gave "peace of mind" to the agency that it was on the right track with this model update. Such an update is a major investment of resources and must satisfy agency needs for at least 10 years–it is better to make course corrections before updating the model than try to revise it later.
- Non-modeling planners participated in the process and gained insights that are useful in helping to explain the model and its output to policy makers, other planners, and the public. It also helped the TMIP team ensure the proposed model was well suited to those planning needs.
- It created interest and buy-in to the regional modeling process by members of the TMIP team from the Pacific Northwest, several of whom are still paying attention and offering insights when requested.
- Additionally, the TMIP review considered how the companion household travel survey TRPC was planning to conduct would integrate into the model update. This input helped with the survey as well as the model update.

To learn more about TMIP's peer review of TRPC go to ***Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC) Travel Model Peer Review Report***.

Travel Model Improvement Program

The Travel Model Improvement Program (TMIP) is a cooperative effort among organizations involved in transportation, land use, and environmental protection. TMIP supports the effective use of analytic methods and tools to determine the effects of transportation improvements on congestion, air quality, and land development. TMIP's goals include:

Goal 1: Developing and improving analytical methods in response to the needs of planning and environmental decision making processes
- Identifying analytical needs
- Developing tools, techniques, procedures

Goal 2: Helping planning agencies build their institutional capacity to develop and deliver travel data and analyses
- Delivering training and technical assistance
- Facilitating knowledge and information sharing

Goal 3: Supporting best practices in applying analytical tools to transportation planning decision making
- Identifying effective use of tool applications
- Promoting best practices

WSDOT Community Planning Portal Featured at a Geospatial Data Sharing Peer Exchange

Federal Highway Administration Geospatial Data Sharing Peer Exchange

WSDOT staff members Kyle Miller (CTPO) and Julie Fogde (GIS Office) presented the WSDOT Community Planning Portal at a recent Geospatial Data Sharing Peer Exchange sponsored by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the U.S. Department of Transportation's (USDOT) Volpe Center. The Community Planning Portal is an online forum for state, regional, and local transportation planners to share transportation and land use data. The intent of the portal is to foster collaborative planning to achieve common goals, including the provision of a reliable, responsible and sustainable transportation system for the citizens of Washington state. The Peer Exchange took place in Denver, Colorado on May 28 and 29. Seventeen representatives from FHWA, USDOT, and State Departments of Transportation including Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Iowa, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, and Washington met and discussed the technology used and the lessons learned during implementation of their geospatial data projects.

Throughout the peer exchange, each state presented their own geospatial technologies and participated in the following four discussions:

- Process and Structure
- Technology and Data
- Benefits, Challenges, and Lessons Learned
- Future Directions and Next Steps

Use the links below to explore some innovative uses of geospatial data by state departments of transportation, including WSDOT's own Community Planning Portal:

- Arizona DOT's **Central Clearinghouse of Maps and Data**
- Colorado DOT's **Online Transportation Information System**
- Connecticut DOT's **Connecticut Open Data**
- Iowa DOT's **Geospatia Technologies**
- Montana DOT's **ArcGIS Online**
- Nevada DOT's **Location Division**
- North Dakotas DOT's **GIS Hub Data Portal**
- Washington DOT's **Community Planning Portal**

WSDOT's Community Planning Portal was also highlighted in an article in FHWA's Winter 2014 "**GIS in Transportation**" newsletter.

For more information about this E-Newsletter:

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Karena Houser, Economic and Land Use Branch Manager, Community Transportation Planning Office, 360.705.7876

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