PSRC's Approval Process: Description and Requirements

For Transportation 2040 Regional Capacity Projects, specific steps must be followed in order to be designated as Approved, beginning with a formal request to PSRC by the project sponsor for a change in project status, along with specific required information detailed below. PSRC staff will review the information provided and make a recommendation to the Transportation Policy Board, with final approval granted by the Executive Board.

A checklist is available to assist sponsors in providing the required information. The following describes the criteria for receiving Approval status; in addition, example documentation is provided in the links at the bottom of this page.

Approval Criteria

1. Consistency with VISION 2040 Policies

A statement is required in order to address how the project adheres to VISION 2040 and specifically the range of multicounty planning policies. Refer to Transportation 2040 Appendix C: Multicounty Planning Policies for a list of the planning policies, and Vision 2040 Part III: Multicounty Planning Policies for the full definitions and background.

2. Benefit–Cost Analysis (BCA)

Benefit-Cost Analysis (BCA) is an established framework for evaluating the economic merits of various types of investments and programs, including public works projects and regulatory policies. In accordance with state guidance, PSRC requires that all future corridor studies conducted in the region that are expected to have a final estimated cost of corridor improvements greater than $100 million include a BCA as a part of their alternatives definition through the environmental process. Projects will have different requirements depending on their size:

- Projects with less than $100 million in total costs are considered exempt from this BCA requirement.
- Medium-sized projects (between $100 million and $250 million) have relatively simplified criteria to be used in their BCA.
- Large projects (over $250 million) will need to employ more complex criteria.

The BCA is intended to be useful input for the preferred alternative decision process, so it is important that it be performed prior to the resolution of established decision deadlines, such as within and before completion of the formal environmental process. Candidate projects that are estimated to be over $50 million should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis with the project sponsor to determine the likelihood of the project exceeding the $100 million threshold. This evaluation will be used to determine if the BCA should be used in the environmental analysis or if the planning process may have already passed the critical point of decision.

3. Environmental Documentation

Final environmental documentation from a NEPA or SEPA process shall be submitted to PSRC. Documentation must be current. The final documentation must show that the sponsoring agency has documented completed appropriate public and environmental review processes and has made a decision on the final nature, character, components or design of the given project or program. For federally funded projects the following document(s) shall be submitted where appropriate:

- Environmental Review Summary (ERS) with Categorical Exclusion (CE)
- Environmental Classification Summary (ECS) with Documented Categorical Exclusion (CE)
- Environmental Assessment (EA) with a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)
- Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS); submitting the Record of Decision (ROD) is optional

For private, state or locally funded projects the following appropriate document(s) shall be submitted:

- Environmental Review Summary (ERS) with Categorical Exclusion (CE)
- Environmental Checklist with Determination of Non-Significance (DNS) or a Mitigated Determination of Non-Significance
- Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS)

The preferred alternative must include a description of the alternative in the environmental documentation. If the final nature, character, components or design of the given project or program are not included with the final environmental documentation, then no determination to move a project to Approved status will be made.

4. Planning Requirements

PSRC staff will review additional planning requirements that have been previously identified and agreed to by the Executive Board on a case-by-case basis. This could include such items as Memorandum of Agreements between...
agencies, zoning requirements, meeting conditions noted in a conditional approval, etc. This criterion would normally only apply to large regional projects.

5. Financial Feasibility Review
Sponsors shall demonstrate that the proposed project has the applicable combination of secured funding and funding that is reasonably expected to be secured. There is limited regional financial capacity affecting what can be included in the regional transportation plan. A project financing plan should only contain/propose actions for revenues that can be reasonably projected to be developed or secured at a future date, based upon past trends or relatively well documented public support for such actions. A definition of these terms follows:

Secured funding is demonstrated when identified in an approved budget or appropriation or similar approved funding action. Secured funds include, but are not limited to (1) the WSDOT current law budget, (2) the annual budget of a local city, town, county or public transit agency, (3) projects selected for state Transportation Improvement Board funding, (4) funds supported by a limited improvement district, fee mitigation program, etc. Typically, the first year of a financially constrained six-year comprehensive transportation program (of a city, town or county) or a public transit agency six-year transit development plan is also approved into agencies’ annual budgets. A project proposed to use federal discretionary funds is not considered secured until identified in an approved federal appropriation.

Funds are reasonably expected to be available when identified from sources historically available, and/or currently authorized but not appropriated, and/or otherwise explicitly identified for programming from agencies or organizations with project selection (award) authority. New funding sources and “innovative” funding is considered reasonably expected to be available if identified in sufficient detail and with a reasonable expectation/demonstration of public support. Funds reasonably expected to be available include, but are not limited to funds (1) beyond a current approved budget or appropriation, but consistent with a projected extrapolation based on historic levels of such funds, (2) identified in an approved authorization but not yet approved into an appropriation, (3) from new funding sources when identified in a specific financial plan and described in sufficient detail on the actions to be taken to obtain the new funding—including “innovative financing techniques” and the actions to implement those techniques. Funds identified in the second through sixth year of financially constrained six-year comprehensive transportation programs (for cities, towns or counties) or public transit agency six-year transit development plans are considered to be reasonably expected to be available.

In reviewing financial plans for major capacity projects, PSRC will review how user fees were evaluated and considered as part of a financing strategy. Upon request from a project sponsor, PSRC will provide assistance in establishing a framework for evaluating user fees.

If PSRC is unable to determine if the funding for a project is the appropriate mix of secured and reasonably expected to be secured funding, then no determination to move a project to Approved status will be made.

6. Air Quality
Projects are reviewed for significant changes to their scope as outlined in their original Candidate project submittal to Transportation 2040. If significant changes are found in the final recommended project, a new air quality conformity analysis may be required. The federal Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 and the Washington State Clean Air Act require that regional transportation plans and TIPs be prepared in conformity with the State Implementation Plan for Air Quality.

Example Documentation
- Example letter: Approval Request, roadway project (WSDOT) [pdf]
- Example letter: Approval Request and description change, roadway project (locally sponsored) [pdf]
- Example letter: Approval Request, Non-Motorized project (locally sponsored) [pdf]
- Example: Consistency with Multicounty Planning Policies Statement [pdf]
- Example: Financial Summary Statement