



Puget Sound Regional Council

SCOPE OF WORK FOR THE 2026-2050 REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN

Approved by PSRC's Executive Board December 5, 2024

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1. Introduction

The 2022 RTP includes the following direction for the next transportation plan under “Administrative Procedures and Processes:”

Updating the Regional Transportation Plan

Per federal and state requirements, development of the RTP occurs every four years. By the time the next Regional Transportation Plan is due, the regional transportation system and the region's transportation needs will be significantly different than today. Specifically, the expansion of the high-capacity transit system, the changes in regional travel patterns due to the pandemic and the increase in remote work, continued regional growth, the climate crisis and the significant changes in the federal and state funding environment mean that the next RTP will need to respond to a different set of challenges and opportunities. To do that, the next RTP should be prepared as a major update that includes environmental analysis. To prepare for the effort of preparing a major update, a Board work group should be convened following the adoption of this RTP to develop a roadmap and timeline for the next RTP. In doing so, the Board work group should consider innovative approaches to regional planning, including surveying other national or international regional planning agencies. This roadmap and timeline should also consider the importance of aligning the RTP with state and federal funding cycles.

To meet this call, PSRC has been conducting pre-development work for the next RTP since February 2024, including the following preliminary work:

- Gathering board feedback on policy priorities and research and analysis needs.
- Updating inventories and data collection of the transportation system.
- Updating models and tools to align with the policy priorities noted above and from 2024 board feedback.

- Conferred with other MPOs around the country on key topics such as safety and climate, as well as processes and outcomes for conducting sensitivity analyses including those that address work from home levels and changing travel behaviors since the pandemic.
- Reviewed peer agency and international regional transportation plans for new ideas and best practices.
- Began development of the [Regional Safety Action Plan](#).
- Partnered with the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency on developing the [Priority and Comprehensive Climate Action Plans](#) funded through EPA's Climate Pollution Reduction Grant Program.
- Consulted with the agency's SEPA attorneys, Cascadia Law, to review the appropriate level of environmental documentation based on expected analysis needs, potential changes and recently completed environmental analysis for VISION 2050.

In addition, an RTP Steering Committee was established in 2022 and served as the "Board work group" identified in the text above. In October, the Executive Committee chose to merge the work of the RTP Steering Committee into their portfolio moving forward.

2. Scoping Approach

The primary basis for the scope of the next RTP is VISION 2050, which has the following transportation goal:

The region has a sustainable, equitable, affordable, safe and efficient multimodal transportation system, with specific emphasis on an integrated regional transit network that supports the Regional Growth Strategy and promotes vitality of the economy, environment and health.

Key investments that are integral to achieving this goal that are included in the current plan include the significant expansion of high-capacity transit and expansion of supportive local transit service, as well as achieving state of good repair goals for maintaining and preserving the existing and future system. Board feedback to date on policy priorities for the next plan have confirmed the commitment to this vision, including the priority focus on climate, safety, equity and support for the regional growth strategy, among other elements.

In addition to these foundational priorities, per the Administrative Procedures direction referenced above and board feedback to date, there are several significant changes and advancements that are expected to be transformational for the next RTP:

1. **Safety**: The first ever Regional Safety Action Plan (RSAP) is under development and will be adopted in spring of 2025. Board direction will be sought on how the RSAP will inform investments, direction or actions in the next RTP, as well as future project selection processes.

2. Climate: The first ever regional Comprehensive Climate Action Plan (CCAP) is under development, in partnership with the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency, all four counties and key cities throughout the region. The CCAP will be completed by the end of 2025, but preliminary results specifically related to Transportation are expected to be shared with the boards earlier in 2025 to inform development of the next RTP. Similarly, board direction will be sought on how the CCAP will inform investments, direction or actions in the next RTP, as well as future project selection processes.
3. Finance: The board has directed a more comprehensive reevaluation of the RTP Financial Strategy, taking into account current assumptions on the feasibility of a Road Usage Charge (RUC), impacts of significant levels of electric or other alternatively fueled vehicles and impacts of the possible repeal of the Climate Commitment Act. More realistic and conservative financial scenarios will be discussed by the boards, leading to discussions of possible reduced or revised investments included in the next RTP. Scenarios and sensitivity testing is anticipated to occur between fall of 2024 and late spring of 2025, as directed by the board, with further iterations through the fall as necessary.
4. Equity: The next RTP will continue to improve upon the analysis and tracking of all measures related to equitable outcomes and PSRC's six equity focus areas. This will include continued work on the new [Equity Tracker](#).
5. Analysis: Modeling, analysis and monitoring improvements have been underway and will continue for the next RTP. These include tracking of measures and indicators through the [RTP Dashboard](#) and improved data and analysis regarding changing travel behaviors since the pandemic, particularly related to work from home levels and transit ridership recovery. In addition, more detailed information on local transit service frequencies and accessibility to transit around the region is being developed, as well as an identification of needs and gaps.
6. Stormwater: The next plan will incorporate information on the current state of the practice for addressing stormwater, particularly related to emerging issues such as 6PPD, in partnership with state and other regional agencies. Efforts will also be made to account for the financial and other impacts of this work in the RTP.
7. Local Plans: The plan will incorporate land use assumptions and transportation investments from 2024 comprehensive plans, based on VISION 2050 and newly adopted growth targets.
8. Health and Health Equity: PSRC will continue to seek improvements in how health is addressed in the next RTP, including the nexus to equity, active transportation and air quality / climate. Staff will collaborate with the Health Departments of the four counties on this work program.

The new elements identified above are substantial changes from prior regional transportation plans, in support of achieving the overall VISION 2050 goals for the regional transportation system and its users. In addition, the next RTP will be reimagined and framed to lead with identified VISION 2050 outcomes and policy

priorities, with clear information provided on plan performance as well as challenges to implementation.

3. Environmental Review

The State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) requires consideration of the environmental impacts related to plans and projects. PSRC conducts detailed analyses of long-range plans based on the board-directed scope and range of potential actions, through a variety of system performance and environmental metrics. These are documented through the agency's adopted SEPA procedures to support final board decisions.

To determine the appropriate level of environmental documentation for the next plan, PSRC consulted with our SEPA attorneys, Cascadia Law, in July 2024. Information was reviewed on the history of SEPA analyses for previous regional transportation plans and VISION, including the breadth of alternatives and scenarios included in these environmental analyses and the “bookends” of impacts analyzed. Also discussed were the primary tenets for developing the RTP based on the direction from VISION 2050 including the focus of supporting the Regional Growth Strategy with a high-capacity transit network, among other key policies. The breadth of analysis and performance measures that PSRC conducts on the plan, and feedback heard to date from the boards on policy priorities, was also discussed.

In consultation with our attorneys, an Addendum was determined to be applicable for the 2026-2050 RTP, based on the following:

- Per SEPA rules, an Addendum is applicable unless new significant adverse environmental impacts would be expected (see Attachment 1).
- PSRC performs robust analysis, regardless of the level of SEPA documentation, covering transportation, land use, emissions and equity measures (see Attachment 2).
- Based on VISION 2050 direction and board feedback to date on policy priorities, it is not anticipated that the board will move significantly away from the current focus of a high-capacity transit network with supporting local transit service or move dramatically towards a more car-focused investment portfolio. Further,
 - The diversity of investment scenarios analyzed in the original Transportation 2040 EIS was quite broad, capturing various levels of investment in roads, transit and system efficiencies¹. Based on the above premise, it would not be expected that the next plan would result in new significant adverse impacts.

¹ The [Transportation 2040 EIS](#) analyzed 7 alternatives, a Baseline scenario and 6 action alternatives, based on differing levels of efficiencies and strategic expansions: 1) Emphasize Efficiency of the Existing System, 2) Emphasize Roadway and Transit Capacity Expansion, 3) Toll Revenues Expand Capacity and Improve Efficiency, 4) Combine Traditional Revenues and Tolls to Maximize Efficiency 5) Reduce Emissions with Limited Highway Investment and a Focus on Regional Tolling 6) Preferred Alternative [more transit service, more walking and biking facilities, additional passenger ferries, completion of missing links and limited roadway expansion].

- A wealth of analysis has been performed on VISION and the RTP over the last two decades. This has included refining and honing the regional vision for growth and transportation, and responding to improved tools, methodologies and metrics (including those related to climate and equity, in particular). The most recent Supplemental EIS was conducted for the 2020 adoption of VISION 2050.
- More specific project-level analyses have and will be conducted by project implementers, such as by WSDOT and Sound Transit.
- Scenario and sensitivity testing is planned to occur as part of the next RTP, to provide the boards a greater level of data and detail to inform their decisions. Each scenario or sensitivity test, which are expected to address various levels and/or types of investments based on financial and policy priority discussions, will include information on system performance outcomes that would generally also be included in the final environmental analysis (see Attachment 2).

However, should the board change direction and pursue a plan alternative that does not fall within the above parameters (i.e., a plan scenario that is outside of anything included in a previous RTP or VISION environmental analysis that might be expected to result in new significant adverse impacts), staff would quickly pivot and conduct a higher level of SEPA documentation. Based on the timing of board scoping decisions and sensitivity analyses as identified in Section 4, we anticipate the latest this decision could occur is spring of 2025. Attachment 1 illustrates the SEPA decision making process.

4. Board Engagement, Plan Schedule and Next Steps

The TPB has been discussing the pre-development of the next RTP since February 2024. Feedback to date on policy priorities and discussion items have included the continued focus areas of safety, climate and equity, maintenance and preservation, transit and accessibility, ferries and decarbonizing the ferry system and recognizing the diverse needs and community contexts around the region. The board has also discussed analytical needs for the next plan, such as addressing changes in travel behavior since the pandemic, reevaluating the financial strategy, providing more detailed analyses by county and city and tracking progress over time.

Staff met with the TPB chairs in August to discuss next steps for the remainder of 2024, leading up to adoption of an RTP Scope of Work by December. This included key feedback heard from the boards to date and the prominent issues identified that require further board discussion. The intent of the Scope would be to identify the key direction for staff and the boundaries within which plan development and analysis would occur beginning in 2025. Staff also reviewed with the chairs the discussion with PSRC's SEPA attorneys and the proposed approach moving forward, which would also be included in the RTP Scope in December.

Plan Schedule and Next Steps

The TPB recommended approval of this scope of work at their meeting in November, and action was taken by the Executive Board at their meeting on December 5th.

Subsequent more detailed discussions on the financial strategy assumptions and implications will continue through early 2025, as necessary. Board discussions on the corresponding level of investments, and/or possible changes to types of investments, can be held in the spring and early summer of 2025. This timing will also coincide with board discussions related to the Regional Safety Action Plan and Comprehensive Climate Action Plan and how they may inform final plan investments.

Staff will gather information on the proposed investments requesting entry into the plan in the spring of 2025. These investments, derived from local, transit and state planning processes identifying infrastructure to support local growth plans, will include both Regional Capacity Projects as well as information on programmatic projects and operations, maintenance and preservation, and transit service and operations data.

As a reminder, the plan consistency measures by which every Regional Capacity Project is reviewed are still in place and are being updated to bring up to currency. The Executive Board approved this scope of work in July 2024. Each Regional Capacity Project requesting submission into the plan will be assessed for consistency with adopted regional policies and priorities and this information and a summary of all requests will be provided to the board prior to the modeling stage for board consideration.

Based on board direction, modeling and analysis of the proposed investments, or different scenarios of investments, will occur in the summer of 2025. Performance outcomes and financial impacts will be reviewed with the boards in the fall and further refinements or revisions discussed. Upon final board direction, the draft plan will be developed and released for public comment in the winter of 2025/2026.

	2024				2025												2026					
	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	
Financial Strategy Reevaluation and Scenario Development																						
Project and Investment Submittals for Board Consideration																						
Identification of Draft Plan Alternatives																						
Policy Direction on Draft Plan Elements (incl. Safety & Climate Action Plans)																						
Draft Plan / Alternatives Modeling																						
Review of Modeling Results / Board Discussion and Plan Refinements																						
Draft Plan Public Review Process																						
Board Review of Public Comments / Final Plan Development																						
Transportation Policy Board / Executive Board Recommendation of RTP																						
General Assembly Action / Adoption of RTP																						

Attachment 1 – SEPA Decision Making Process

(Excerpted from the WA Department of Ecology [SEPA Handbook](#))

An environmental impact statement (EIS) is prepared when the lead agency has determined a proposal is likely to result in significant adverse environmental impacts. If the impacts associated with a new proposal have been adequately evaluated in a previously-issued SEPA or NEPA document, the document can be adopted to satisfy SEPA requirements.

SEPA documents do not have arbitrary expiration dates and can be modified — including revised Determinations of Nonsignificance (DNS), EIS Addendums, or Supplemental EIS — to better inform a pending agency decision. Additional analysis in a supplemental EIS or in an addendum can be used to address any portions of the final proposal that lie outside the analysis in the EIS.

While a lead agency may adopt all or part of the information and environmental analysis in the adopted documents, they will need to make a new threshold determination, using the following previous SEPA documents:

Adoption / determination of significance (DS)	Issued when an existing EIS addresses all probable significant adverse environmental impacts and reasonable proposal alternatives.
Adoption / DS and addendum	Follows the same procedure as the adoption / DS, except an addendum adding minor new information is circulated with the adoption notice.
Adoption / DS and Supplemental EIS	Is used when an existing EIS addresses some, but not all, of a new proposal's probable significant adverse environmental impacts. The EIS can be used as the basis for a new supplemental EIS and the adoption notice must be included in the draft and final supplemental EIS.
Adoption / Determination of Nonsignificance	Is used when existing DNS and environmental checklist, NEPA environmental assessment, or documented categorical exclusion is adopted for a new proposal using the combined adoption / DNS template.

Attachment 2 – SEPA Metrics and PSRC Analyses

SEPA METRICS	PSRC ANALYSES INCLUDED IN RTP
Transportation	
Transit Boardings, per operator & mode	X
Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT), total and per capita	X
Households near High-Capacity Transit (HCT)	X
Jobs near HCT	X
Travel time and delay	X
Congestion	X
Mode Shares - work and non-work	X
Federal Performance Targets	X
<i>Note: metrics include a variety of geographies and equity populations</i>	X
Land Use, Population, Employment and Housing	
Estimated growth in population/employment	X
Future land use and development patterns	X
Air Quality & Climate Change	
Criteria Pollutant Emissions	X
Greenhouse Gas Emissions	X
Conformity Analysis	X
Environmental Justice	
PSRC Equity analyses, metrics	X
Water Quality and Hydrology	<i>Partial</i>
Energy	<i>Partial</i>
Human Health	X
BROADER SEPA METRICS ADDRESSED PROGRAMMATICALLY, or at Project Level	
Noise	
Visual and Aesthetic Resources	
Ecosystems and Endangered Species Act Issues	
Earth	
Hazardous Materials	
Public Services and Utilities	
Parks and Recreation Resources	
Historic and Cultural Resources	