MEMORANDUM

TO: Transportation Policy Board
FRO: Veena Tabbutt, Deputy Director
DATE: March 4, 2020
SUBJECT: SFY 2021 Unified Planning Work Program

PURPOSE

The purpose of this agenda item is to review the draft State Fiscal Year 2021 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) and provide feedback to staff.

Summary:

- TRPC’s regional transportation work program operates on a state fiscal year basis.
- Development of the work program is a requirement to receive federal and state planning funds.
- Federal requirements of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) and state requirements of Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPO) govern much of the transportation work program. TRPC also incorporates regional transportation planning priorities into the work program for review by TPB and approval by Council.
- The UPWP also includes other federally funded planning projects in Thurston County.
- Council will review the draft UPWP at their April meeting.
- Federal Highways, Federal Transit Authority, and Washington Department of Transportation will review the UPWP in mid-April, prior to Council taking final action in May or June.

REQUESTED ACTION

Review the draft UPWP and provide feedback to staff on UPWP Work Program Elements and Regional Transportation Planning Priorities.

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BACKGROUND

As the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO, federal) and the Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO, state), TRPC must carry out a regional transportation program that complies with federal and state requirements. These rules govern much of the transportation work undertaken by the agency.

The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) describes that regional transportation work program in a manner compliant with state and federal requirements. The next UPWP covers the State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2021 (July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021.)

The major elements of the UPWP are the following:

Required Elements (funded through directly allocated pass-through federal and state funds)

1. Program Management
2. Project Programming and Tracking
3. Multimodal Transportation Planning
4. Data Collection, Analysis, and Forecasting

Regional Transportation Planning Priorities (funded through Surface Transportation Block Grant funds)

5. Ongoing Activities
6. Major Initiatives

Table 1 (page 6) provides a breakdown of funding sources.

Required Elements

Required Elements are those activities needed to meet state and federal requirements. The federal requirements are common to MPOs across the country. The state requirements are common to RTPOs across the state. Required items are grouped into four major areas of activity.

1. Program Management includes the essential functions needed to manage federal transportation funds. Jurisdictional staff often say that it's easier to receive federal funds than spend federal funds, and the breadth of required tasks under program management illustrate this point. They include:
   - Administrative tasks relating to budgeting, accounting, developing the indirect cost proposal, and preparing for, and participating in, audits.
   - Program support and maintenance, including supporting the Council, Transportation Policy Board (TPB), any designated subcommittees, and the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC).
   - Personnel management, including managing and recruiting transportation personnel.
   - UPWP development, including developing the annual UPWP and integrating it into the agency work program.
   - Required reporting such as the annual report, self-certification, and Title VI reporting.
   - Professional development and training for transportation staff.
   - Fixed costs including modeling software annual license, membership dues to the national organization of MPOs, travel, printing, legal notices, etc.

2. Project Programming and Tracking includes tasks related to programming out and monitoring federal funds from the Surface Transportation Program (STP), Surface Transportation Program Enhancements (formerly Transportation Alternatives Program - TAP), and Congestion Relief Mitigation Program (CMAQ). They include:
   - Programming federal funding, including developing and maintaining funding criteria, programming funding, and providing support to funding recipients to comply with federal and state requirements.
   - Federal funding obligation tracking, including working with the state to monitor obligation authority, monthly coordination with funding recipients regarding project obligation status, and tracking and reporting on projects through project completion.
MEMORANDUM
Page 3
March 4, 2020

- Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP), including developing the annual four-year Regional Transportation Improvement Program, conducting amendments, developing the six-year list of planned projects, and developing an annual list of obligated projects.

3. Multimodal Transportation Planning includes tasks relating to federal and state planning requirements, including:
   - Tribal, local, state, and federal agency coordination, which includes participation in the state’s MPO/RTPO Coordinating Committee, participation in the activities of the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organization, consultation with local, tribal, state, and federal officials, supporting public transit planning, and maintaining and implementing the Regional Coordinated Public Transit and Human Services Transportation Plan.
   - Coordination and outreach as appropriate for planning and programming activities.
   - Review of state and local transportation plans.
   - Monitoring and responding to federal and state transportation legislation.
   - General compliance, such as, updating the federal functional classification system, and updating the freights and goods classification.
   - Updating and amending the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and associated documents, such as the Regional Trails Plan.
   - Providing planning support for specific transportation planning projects. In particular, state RTPO funds can be used as match for federal funds for specific projects.
   - Other emerging issues.

4. Data Collection, Analysis, and Forecasting include activities required by federal and state partners, including:
   - Developing and reporting on federal performance measures.
   - Estimating air quality emissions and complying with air quality standards.
   - Transportation modeling to support performance measures, air quality monitoring, and the regional transportation plan.
   - Annual population estimates and population, employment, and commute forecasts.

Estimated revenue for the UPWP elements comes from several federal and state planning funds distributed by the state. Federal planning funds have a required 13.5 percent of total cost match which is funded by TRPC member dues. State planning funds do not require matching funds. The state provides estimates of funds for each MPO and RTPO annually.

Regional Transportation Planning Priorities

The federal and state funds do not support TRPC’s entire transportation work program. Since 1995, Council has allocated additional planning funds for Regional Transportation Planning Priorities. These funds support adequate staffing levels for TRPC to not only conduct mandatory activities and planning, but also enable the kind of coordinated and integrated transportation planning and decision-making that has characterized this region’s program since the mid-1990s. Examples of the types of planning programs supported through this funding in the past include the Vision Reality Task Force and Urban Corridors Task Force. This funding supports both on-going activities that our members rely on, and specific initiatives identified by 1PB and Council.

5. On-going activities include:
   - Support to local transportation planning staff and inter-regional coordination.
   - Multimodal planning including school-based programs.
   - Model development and maintenance.
   - GIS and IT maintenance.
   - Communication and outreach, including responding to public, member, and media requests.
   - Security and safety activities, such as coordinating the update of emergency routes.
   - Policy Board and Technical Advisory Committee Support.
   - Sustainable Thurston monitoring and implementation.
   - Response to emerging issues.

6. Major initiatives, which may span over several work programs, include:
• Land Use and Transportation Integrated Planning. This includes activities relating to urban centers and corridors, and neighborhood centers, such as convening the Urban Corridors Task Force.
• Update of State of our Transportation System reports. This includes developing the second State of our Transportation System report.
• Update of the Regional Trails Plan. The update of the Plan will begin in 2019 and conclude in 2021.
• Climate Mitigation Plan – Transportation Strategies. This includes implementing strategies identified in the regional Climate Mitigation Plan related to transportation.
• Update of the Process of Programming Federal Funding. This includes exploring alternative ways to competitively program and award federal funding. The process must result in a multi-year project list that meets regional policy maker priorities and allows the region to meet the assigned obligation targets.
• I-5 System Partnerships. This includes participation in, and working on, a variety of planning studies around the I-5 Corridor, including contributing technical and planning support for the I-5 Tumwater to Mounts Road Study.
• Explore Multimodal Level of Service. Begin exploration of a regional approach to developing a multimodal level of service.

Unfunded Needs

In addition to program activities that we can accommodate within the existing regional transportation work program, the region has identified a number of transportation-related actions that will require additional funding through grants or other means. The UPWP categorizes these actions as “Unfunded Needs.” Staff actively look for additional funding resources to accomplish needs above and beyond the regular work program and have long included such a list in the UPWP. Having a list of specific needs helps provide clarity for on-going grant searches and enhances the stature of applications submitted by TRPC or its partners. Priority “Unfunded Needs” identified in the previous UPWP, and proposed to be included in the new UPWP include the following:

• Funding for a High Capacity Transportation Project Development study has been a long-standing unfunded need of interest to the region’s stakeholders. Phase I would examine options for new/expanded modes of travel within our urban areas and connecting to the urban areas to the north, considering options such as bus-rapid transit, passenger rail, and commuter rail, with the goal to develop high-level options and a broad timeline for implementation. Phase II would involve developing a locally-preferred alternative and completing the Federal Highway Administration’s process for Project Development in order for the project to be eligible for federal construction funds.

• When I-5 or US101 shuts down due to major collisions, flooding, or other blocking emergencies, traffic is detoured to local streets and rerouted to the freeway to bypass the incident. To better manage traffic impacts from such incidents, TRPC, WSDOT, and local agency public works and law enforcement stakeholders have identified nearly 50 pre-determined emergency detour routes with special instructions for intersection control, temporary signage, and other instructions to direct traffic and maintain safety and efficient operations of the detour route. A State Route and Interstate Emergency Incident Management Detour Route Improvements Study will identify opportunities to improve the operational efficiency of the detour routes, make them safer, and strengthen the routes to protect them from excess use. Modeling and operational analysis will consider the effectiveness of modifications such as traffic signal timing, roundabouts, road reconstruction, increasing vertical clearances, placement of variable message boards, and other options that could reduce delay and strengthen the network to accommodate higher volume detour traffic demands.

• TRPC and local partners will build off existing community plans and studies to develop a Countywide Bicycle and Micromobility Strategy. The effort will evaluate both design considerations for the variety of small electric powered personal vehicles and their operational compatibility with traditional bicycles and e-bikes. The strategy will also evaluate opportunities to fill gaps to develop a regional network with a range of facilities that could serve a broader group of users with varying comfort levels for riding in and around traffic.
TRPC relies on accurate household travel data to keep our modeling tools accurate and current. Our last Household Travel Survey was conducted in 2013, and ideally we’d like to conduct one every 10 years. The cost estimate is for a consultant firm to conduct a survey that includes all of Thurston and parts of adjacent counties.

The Thurston Region is vulnerable to major earthquakes and other hazards. A Regional Transportation Recovery Plan would assist local, tribal, and state government prepare for and manage the transportation recovery process following a major disaster. The overall objective of this plan is to develop a strategy to promote a recovery process for transportation networks and services – and communities – that results in a greater level of resilience.

A Freight Mobility Strategy is needed to address the unique characteristics, needs, and impacts of freight mobility within our region. The strategy will help us understand why freight is so important to the region, and examine the challenges of moving freight, and develop solutions to address the challenges. The Strategy will focus both on urban and rural truck freight movement to support the region’s increasing demand for goods and services in a safe and reliable manner.

A priority goal of the Sustainable Thurston Project was to create vibrant centers, corridors, and neighborhoods while accommodating growth. The corresponding target was: by 2035, 72 percent of all (new and existing) households in our cities, towns, and unincorporated growth areas will be within a half-mile (comparable to a 20-minute walk) or an urban center, corridor, or neighborhood center with access to goods and services to meet some of their daily needs. Policymakers identified the need for a Neighborhood Centers study to research and develop strategies to increase access to goods and services in existing and planned neighborhood centers.

Regional policymakers have expressed the desire to move towards a Multimodal Level of Service that will set performance goals for transit, bicycle and pedestrian facilities in addition to vehicles. This study will build off the Regional Trails Plan, Bicycle and Micromobility strategy, and TRPC’s current side-walk inventory to develop a comprehensive way of measuring multimodal level of service. It will provide essential information to prioritize and select transportation infrastructure projects in the future.

While included in many areas of TRPCs transportation work program, Justice and Equity is not a specific lens by which the region evaluates specific actions, including those identified in the Regional Transportation Plan and the distribution of federal transportation plans. The Council has expressed a desire for a deeper dive into viewing actions and strategies through such a viewpoint. The Environmental Justice and Social Equity in Planning and Implementation work program would convene community partners including schools, community organizations, advocacy groups, elected officials, and others to clarify Justice and Equity goals, develop performance measures, and identify potential data sources to track progress. The project would also work to overcome barriers in participation by traditionally disadvantaged groups.

Next Steps

TPB’s discussion will focus on the Regional Transportation Planning Priorities and Unfunded Needs, although staff welcome feedback on all aspects of the UPWP. The TPB discussion will inform changes to the draft UPWP prior to it being presented to Council for first review.

State and federal officials will review the draft UPWP to ensure it satisfies their needs before Council approves it in May or June. The UPWP work program elements will then go into effect on July 1.
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FHWA: Federal Highway Administration  
FTA: Federal Transit Administration  
MPO: Metropolitan Planning Organization  
RTPO: Regional Transportation Planning Organization  
TRRPC: Thurston Regional Planning Council  
WSDOT: Washington State Department of Transportation