

Transportation Resource Manual

(Updated January 2009)

Introduction

Washington's transportation system is an elaborate network of roads, routes, and runways, governed and operated by public and private entities, and supported through a myriad of funding combinations comprised of federal, state, and local taxes and private capital.

Function of the Transportation Resource Manual

Understanding Washington's complex transportation system and its decentralized governance can be as intimidating as it is time consuming. For those who would like to know more about any aspect of transportation policy, finance, or governance, legislative and agency staff have written a comprehensive primer, the Transportation Resource Manual.

The manual carefully outlines each step of policy development. It begins with the budget and follows with taxes and fees, funds and accounts, state and local agencies, modes, and a summary of transportation plans. The manual concludes with a glossary of terms and acronyms prepared to jog the memory of the experienced policy maker, as well as to inform the interested novice. To ensure its continued usefulness, the authors revise the hard copy version each biennium, and sometimes annually.

There is also a searchable electronic version of the Transportation Resource Manual available on the JTC website. The address is:

<http://www1.leg.wa.gov/JTC/TRM/>

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Overview of Washington's Transportation System

The state is responsible for planning, maintaining and enhancing 7,045 miles of highways that support over 4.5 million Washington drivers who drove over 57 billion miles during 2007. Washington operates 16 airports and provides technical and financial assistance to many others. The state operates a fleet of 23 ferries that carry each year over 10.8 million vehicles and 13.1 million riders. Its state patrol monitors highways, while other agencies license vehicles, help local governments, and manage traffic safety programs.

Regional and local governments also have significant responsibilities related to the transportation system. Regional transportation planning organizations (RTPOs) review and coordinate city and county land-use and transportation planning. Counties plan, maintain, and enhance 39,902 miles of county roads and cities do the same for 16,421 miles of streets. All city and county governments construct and maintain bridges and trails, while some operate ferry systems. Twenty-eight transit systems, which travel throughout their respective regions, operate fixed-route systems and provide transportation for the elderly and disabled. In 2005, these systems provided over 160 million bus trips. Many of them also coordinate vanpool and carpool programs.

Not all of the transportation system is operated by the government, however. Private companies provide intercity bus and commercial air services, and private trucking firms carry vast quantities of consumer goods and raw materials. They also operate freight rail lines, airports, taxi cabs and airports.

Washington depends heavily on federal funding for most of its transportation system. Before the 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), the federal government's programs favored highways and did little for congestion management or air quality. Since then, federal funding has helped Washington's policy makers support multimodal transportation policy plans that are also environmentally sensitive. The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA 21), enacted in 1998, carried forward the ISTEA philosophy. The most recent Federal six year authorization, the Safe Accountable Flexible Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), enacted in 2005, maintains the Federal approach. In addition, the new act enhances project flexibility for project implementation, provides more accountability for project costs, and enhances safety and freight programs.

Policy makers draw upon nearly 60 sources of state funds to support their transportation system; the largest is the motor vehicle fuel tax which provides state and local governments with \$860 to \$975 million per year. The Legislature appropriates the state's share of this tax money in its biennial and supplemental budgets, and the rest is distributed to local jurisdictions by formula.

The Legislature has also given local governments the authority to raise taxes for their own transportation programs and transit agencies are permitted to use locally generated tax revenues to support their services.

We are always trying to improve the content and utility of this resource manual. As you use it, we would appreciate any suggestions you have for improving the content and organization, as well as any technical corrections. Please forward suggestions to Paul Neal at JTC, (360) 786-7327, or neal.paul@leg.wa.gov. Corrections to the on-line version will be made on an on-going basis.