



Assessment of the Washington State Transportation Commission

Presentation to the Joint Transportation Committee
By Morningside Research and Consulting, Inc.

November 15, 2017



Consultant Team

- **Shari Holland**, Project Manager. President, Morningside Research and Consulting, Austin, Texas
- **Joey Longley**, Sunset Solutions, 30 years at Texas Sunset Advisory Commission including 14 years as Director
- **Karl Spock**, Spock Consulting, 40 years evaluating operations of state and local government agencies, including 20 years at Texas Sunset Advisory Commission



Directive

A **budget proviso** in the 2017 transportation budget directed the Joint Transportation Committee (JTC) to conduct an assessment of the roles and responsibilities of the Washington State Transportation Commission (WSTC or Commission). Full text included in report appendix.

The JTC issued a competitive **Request for Proposals (RFP)** and selected Morningside Research and Consulting, Inc. (Morningside) to conduct the assessment over a four-month period beginning in July 2017.

Study Process

- **Four-month study** began July 5; draft report presented to staff workgroup October 31, 2017
- **Staff Work Group** participated throughout the study
 - 14 staff from the House and Senate Transportation Committees including caucus staff and staff from the Joint Transportation Committee, OFM, WSDOT, and the Transportation Commission
 - Four staff work group meetings to review white papers and offer comments: July 26, September 12, October 25, November 7

Goals and Objectives

Review the roles and responsibilities, operations, budget, and Commission membership of WSTC to identify any areas that need adjustment, specifically:

Task 1: Current membership, functions, powers, and duties
(except tolling, ferries, and Road Usage Charge study)

Task 2: Overlap and duplication

Task 3: Budget

Task 4: Alternative roles

Task 5: Recommend changes as appropriate

Methodology

A qualitative assessment consisting of onsite fieldwork and observation, interviews, document review, and collection and aggregation of information from research.

- Commission meeting observation
- Interviews (54)
- Electronic questionnaire (44 respondents)
- Data and document review
- Benchmarking of all 50 states

Limitations

Assessment does not include Commission responsibilities for:

- Setting toll rates
- Adopting ferry fares and pricing policies
- Road usage charge study and pilot project

However, these functions have budget implications and interact with other agency responsibilities.

For these reasons, this report includes descriptions of toll rate and ferry fare functions.

Task 1: Responsibilities

Chapter 3 of the draft report describes the organization and programmatic structure of WSTC, which are to:

- Develop and advise on transportation policy
- Conduct outreach and community engagement
- Prepare a comprehensive and balanced statewide transportation plan
- Develop ferry fares and toll rates
- Undertake special studies and projects
- Carry out several smaller programs

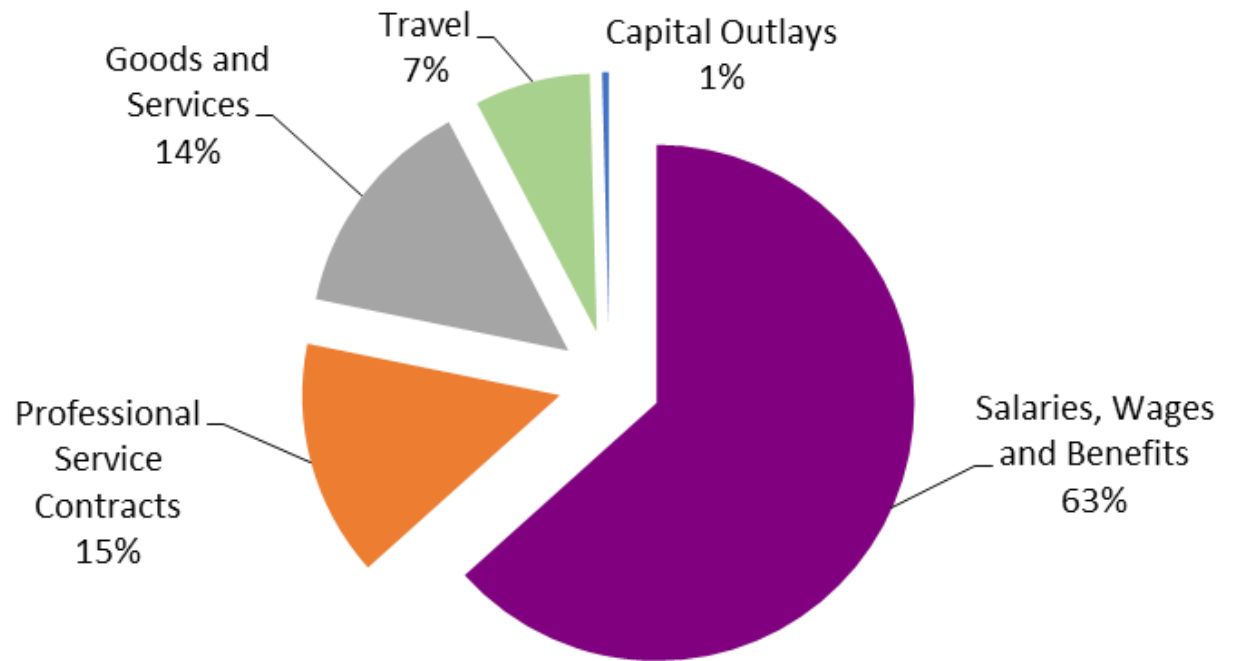
Task 2: Budget

Current Funding

2017-19 Budget:
\$2.536 million

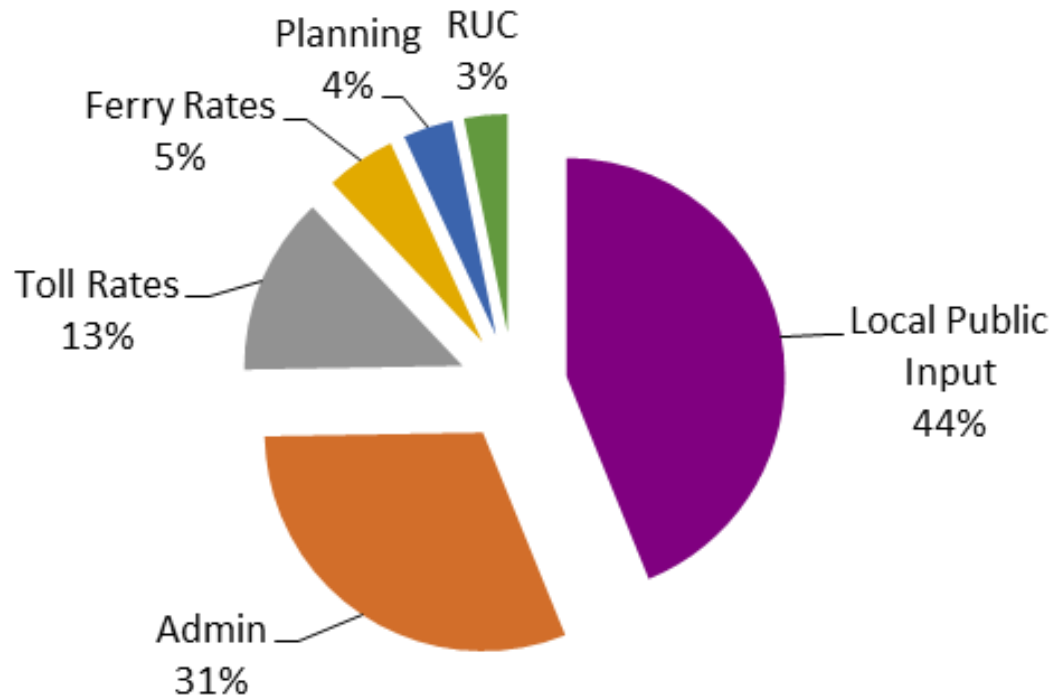
FY 2018: \$1.2M

FY 2019: \$1.4M



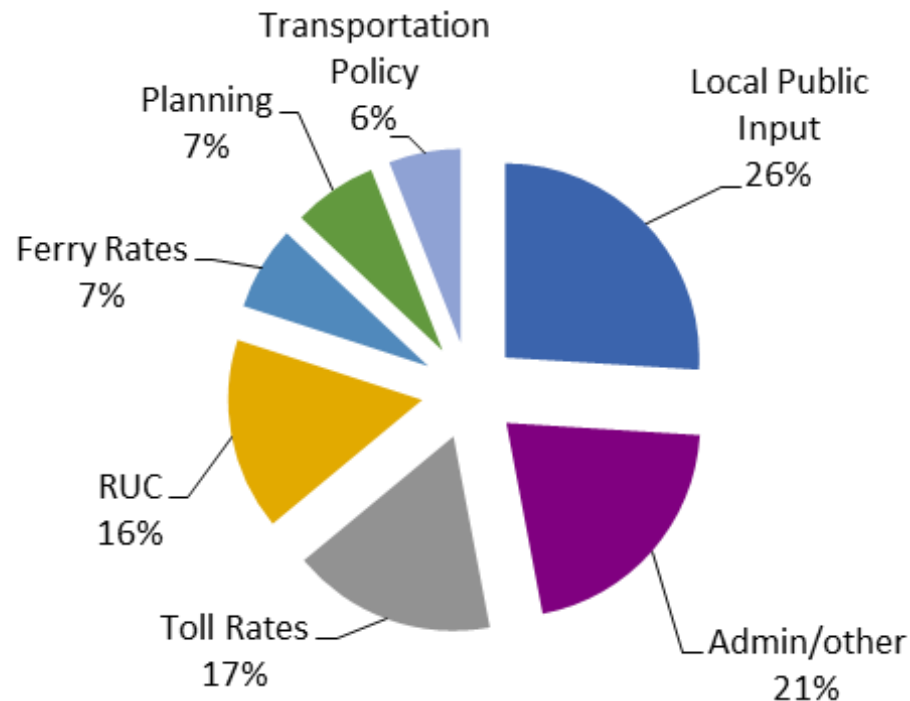
Commissioners Time Allocation

Based on an analysis of meeting agendas, the Commissioners spend their time as follows:



Staff Time Allocation

Because the Commission does not budget by program, we analyzed the budget by function based on staff time allocations:



Task 3: Overlap and Duplication

Directive: To what extent do current Commission powers and duties overlap and/or duplicate those of other agencies, or are of limited value to the Legislature and the Governor?

We identified three areas of overlap and duplication:

- Transportation policy and planning
- Outreach through community engagement
- Special studies and projects

Task 3: Overlap and Duplication

Findings:

- Overlap and duplication of policy and planning resulted from legislative changes in 2005 that continue today, creating WSDOT as a cabinet agency and removing the Transportation Commission from its role as a board of directors over WSDOT
- Noted in 2011 JTC study evaluating state-level planning
- WSTC transportation policy and planning is comprehensive and inclusive
- WSTC plans, reports, and outreach have questionable value

Task 3: Overlap and Duplication

Findings, con't:

- Coordination between WSDOT and WSTC is challenging
- Overlap in planning, policy, and outreach creates confusion among stakeholders
- Multiple consultations with stakeholders by multiple agencies on similar topics is not a best practice
- Little overlap and duplication with special studies

Task 4: Alternative Roles

Directive: “Identify potential alternative roles for the Transportation Commission”

Benchmarking of 50 state transportation commissions found:

- 20 states do not have a transportation commission
- 16 states have a transportation commission that governs the department of transportation (DOT) and selects the Secretary of Transportation
- 3 states have a transportation commission located within the transportation department
- 11 states, including the state of Washington, have an independent transportation commission

Task 4: Alternative Roles

Findings:

- WSTC is unique in the country and very different from the 10 other independent transportation commissions, with a more limited role
- None of the 10 are involved in toll or ferry rate setting.
- None of the 30 state tolling authorities are structured like WSTC, with responsibility solely for rate setting
- WSTC does not serve in a “watch dog” role or “check and balance” WSDOT
- Consultant team does not suggest adding functions to WSTC

Task 5: Findings and Recommendations

The consultant team has developed findings and recommendations related to three main topics:

1. Statewide Transportation Planning
2. Transportation Policy Development and Community Engagement
3. Commission Governance and Administrative Operations

Task 5: Findings and Recommendations

Statewide Transportation Planning Findings:

- Unclear roles for the Commission's WTP and WSDOT's multimodal plan
 - No updated statutory framework for the plans since 2005
 - Unclear which state entity should prepare and submit a federally compliant transportation plan
 - Inconsistent timeframes for WSTC and WSDOT plans
- Commission-developed statewide transportation policy plan does not drive transportation decision-making
- A 2011 JTC study identified similar issues with the bifurcated transportation planning structure

Task 5: Findings and Recommendations

Statewide Transportation Planning Findings, con't:

- No other state has an independent transportation commission similar to that of Washington and none have responsibility for the type of transportation plan the Commission develops
- Some stakeholders expressed concern about the commitment of WSDOT to incorporate broad transportation planning, particularly local issues and concerns, in their planning efforts

Task 5: Findings and Recommendations

Statewide Transportation Planning Recommendations:

- R.A.1 Transfer from the Commission to WSDOT the responsibility for developing the statewide transportation policy plan.

- R.A.2 Require WSDOT to adopt a rule specifying a timeframe for its review and update of the integrated statewide transportation plan referenced above.

Task 5: Findings and Recommendations

Transportation Policy Development and Community Engagement Findings:

- The Commission offers a welcoming venue for local organizations to voice their thoughts
- The work of the Commission does not receive significant attention from policy makers, including the Legislature
- WSTC policy and planning activities provides questionable value
- WSTC local meetings lack a clear focus and outcome
- WSDOT currently does not achieve the same level of connection across governments and transportation sectors

Task 5: Findings and Recommendations

Transportation Policy Development and Community Engagement Findings, con't:

- Commissioner turnover is high compared to other state commissions.
- Local meetings contribute to this turnover and take up too much time for the value they produce
- The local meetings overlap and duplicate the outreach effort every four years for the WTP
- WSDOT consults with many of the same stakeholders as the Commission

Task 5: Findings and Recommendations

Transportation Policy Development and Community Engagement Recommendations:

- R.B.1. Eliminate the involvement of the Commission in transportation policy development and associated community engagement efforts.

- R.B.2. Require WSDOT to assume the responsibility for the local meetings, whose purpose is to provide an opportunity for local officials to present information about transportation issues important to their communities.

Task 5: Findings and Recommendations

Governance and Administrative Operations Findings:

- Need a more defined and formal operating structure for the governance and internal operating structure for WSTC
- WSTC is overly reliant on the institutional memories of long-time employees
- No comprehensive set of adopted policies and procedures that establish an objective and ongoing framework for implementing statutory requirements

Task 5: Findings and Recommendations

Governance and Administrative Operations

Recommendations:

- R.C.1 Formalize communication among the Commission, the Legislature, and the Governor's office.
- R.C.2 Adopt internal policies and procedures for engaging the Legislature and Governor on the issues within the purview of the Commission.
- R.C.3 Match expertise of Commission members to the roles and responsibilities of the Commission.
- R.C.4 Focus Commissioner orientation and training more sharply on substantive roles and responsibilities.

Task 5: Findings and Recommendations

Governance and Administrative Operations

Recommendations, con't:

- R.C.5 Ensure the Commission is complying with open meetings requirements for the entire time that a quorum of Commissioners is present.
- R.C.6 Clarify the differing roles of Commissioners and staff.
- R.C.7 Conduct an annual review of the executive director of the Commission.
- R.C.8 Create separate and complete administrative rules for the Commission.

Task 5: Findings and Recommendations

Governance and Administrative Operations

Recommendations, con't:

- R.C.9 Update, expand, and periodically review internal policies and procedures.
- R.C.10 Revisit the base budget of the Commission to determine whether agency programs are appropriately funded.
- R.C.11 Develop performance measures for the agency covering the breadth of its operations.

Fiscal Impact of Recommendations

- **Planning:** Reduction of \$350,000 in funding for WTP every 4 years
- **Policy and outreach:** Reduction of about \$400,000 in on-going annual expenditures and possible elimination of two staff positions
- **Governance and administrative operations:** Possible one-time, up-front costs to put administrative structures in place

Overall Impact on WSTC

- Implementing recommendations would result in a narrow set of responsibilities for WSTC
- The consultant team could not review the toll rate and ferry fare setting and RUC functions of the Commission
- The consultant team is therefore unable to make recommendations on these functions or the viability of the agency without transportation planning and outreach responsibilities.
- The disparate functions that remain with the Commission may be able to be performed by other state entities and the Legislature may wish to consider this possibility

Next Steps

- Written comments from Staff Work Group
- Revise report based on verbal and written comments
 - Revise program budget calculations
 - Clarify some areas of the report
 - Respond to Staff Work Group feedback
- Revised report due to JTC staff on December 4, 2017
- Presented to JTC for vote at meeting on December 14, 2017

Questions?

Shari Holland, President
Morningside Research and Consulting

Karl Spock
Karl Spock Consulting

Joey Longley
Sunset Solutions, LLC