Study Overview: **Alternative Mechanisms to Fund Sidewalks**

Presentation to the JTC

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BERK

Introductions

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About BERK Consulting

Public policy consulting firm founded in 1988 and based in Seattle.

Our Mission: Helping communities and organizations create their best futures.

Today's Presentation

- Provide an overview of the study
- Share the current state of sidewalk funding in WA
- Answer JTC member questions

Study Overview

Objective: Recommend alternative methods for local governments to sustainably fund sidewalk improvements, maintenance, and construction

Timeline: Sep 2025 – Jun 2026

Process:

Gather info	Evaluate	Recommend
▪ Statewide survey ▪ Interviews ▪ National research	▪ Model mechanisms in 8 WA jurisdictions ▪ Assess using evaluative criteria ▪ Legal assessment	▪ Develop recommendations ▪ Develop report

Engage the JTC, HTC, and STC | Coordinate Staff Technical Team

Proviso Language

2025-2027 Transportation Budget

(6) $200,000 of the motor vehicle account—state appropriation is for the joint transportation committee to **conduct a study and make recommendations on alternative new methods for local governments to fund sidewalk improvements, including but not limited to establishing a sidewalk utility**. The study must review revenue options utilized in other states and make evaluations based on fairness, stability, adequacy, regressivity, simplicity, and the effect on economic vitality.

Sidewalks Overview

- **Definition:** a paved path between a roadway and an adjacent property that is primarily intended for pedestrians
- **Purpose:** an essential element of Washington's multimodal transportation system
  - Link homes, schools, parks, and transit stops
  - Support statewide goals around safety, health, accessibility, climate
- **Extent:** 22,370 miles in WA (per Legislative-funded UW Taskar Center analysis)

Current State of Sidewalks

We will share a "Sidewalks 101" document by end of the year

- **Construction:** varies
  - **Private developers** as part of frontage improvement requirements for new developments or large scale redevelopment
  - **Local, regional, and state governments** as part of capital improvement projects
- **Maintenance responsibility:** varies
  - **Counties** maintain sidewalks in unincorporated areas
  - **Cities and towns** may maintain their sidewalks, or may assign that responsibility to an adjacent property-owner (per RCW 35.69.020)
- **Condition:** jurisdictions' awareness varies

"Sidewalks 101" Contents

- Purpose of sidewalks
- Current landscape of sidewalks in WA
- How sidewalks are funded
- Key funding challenges

Overview of Sidewalks Funding in WA

- Sidewalks in WA typically lack a dedicated funding source
- Local governments rely on a mix of unrestricted and restricted revenues (see right)
- Legislature has invested $250 million in pedestrian and bicycle investments in 2025-2027 biennium via TIB and WSDOT grants
- Challenges
  - Limited total funding
    - Lack of funding availability for existing urban/suburban neighborhoods without sidewalks
  - High cost of ADA retrofitting
  - Legal landscape in WA

Existing Funding Mechanisms

- Developer fees in lieu
- General fund
- Impact fees
- Latecomer fees
- Local Improvement District (LID)
- Real estate excise tax (REET)
- State and federal grants
- State gas tax
- Transportation Benefit District (TBD) (car tabs or sales tax)
- Voter-approved transportation levy

Funding Mechanism Examples from Other States

Examples that don't exist in WA:

- Fees
  - Sidewalk fees
    - Citywide – Denver, CO
    - Defined Improvement Districts – Ithaca and Syracuse, NY
  - Transportation Utility Fee – Hillsboro, OR
- Taxes
  - Parcel Tax – Berkeley, CA

Key Study Concepts

- Consider sidewalks and connected pedestrian infrastructure (e.g., signals, crosswalks)
- Include both municipalities and counties
- Focus on mechanisms that generate funding for local jurisdictions
- Learn from what already works in WA and supplement with models from elsewhere
- Per the proviso, consider options that are not authorized under current statute

What's Next

Continued analysis

- Statewide survey of cities and counties closes on November 30
- Selecting, modeling, and assessing funding mechanisms in case study jurisdictions
- Legal analysis of selected mechanisms as needed

Upcoming deliverables

- Dec 15, 2025: Preliminary Draft Report
- By EOY 2025: Overview of current state of sidewalks funding ("Sidewalks 101")
- Jun 22, 2026: Final Report

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Questions and Feedback

Appendix

Potential Funding Mechanisms: Selection and Evaluation

Select Potential Funding Mechanisms

- **National:** Draw from other states and adapt to WA's context
- **Local:** Use existing funding mechanisms as a building block

Evaluate via Case Studies

Understand how each funding mechanism might function in actual communities, including:

- How much could a funding mechanism generate?
- How does this compare to the need?
- Is this option feasible in this community?

Selection Methodology for Case Study Jurisdictions

Case studies will reflect a distribution across:

- **Type:** Cities (6) and counties (2)
- **Population sizes**
  - Cities: small, medium, large
  - Counties: rural, urban
- **Geography:** WSDOT's six transportation regions

Purpose of Case Studies

Understand how each funding mechanism might function in actual communities, including:

- How much could a funding mechanism generate?
- How does this compare to the need?
- Is this option feasible in this community?

Evaluative Criteria for Funding Mechanisms

Effectiveness

- **Adequacy.** Ability to generate sufficient revenue in various jurisdiction sizes
- **Stability.** Reliability over time, including resilience to economic downturns or shifts in political support
- **Simplicity.** The practicality of use, including staff capacity needs; data and systems needs, and ability for the public and local jurisdiction staff to understand

Community impact

- **Fairness.** Distribution across populations, given ability to pay, use of sidewalks, and historical disparities in infrastructure investment
- **Regressivity.** Any direct or indirect disproportionate impacts to residents with lower incomes, renters, and historically underserved communities
- **Effects on economic vitality.** Potential impacts to business activity, property values, development, and the broader local economy

Viability

- **Political acceptability.** Likelihood of support from key stakeholders, including elected officials, property owners, advocacy groups, and the public
- **Legal viability.** Current consistency with state law and the degree of legal risk it poses, such as potential conflicts with constitutional limitations, statutory authority, or precedent (e.g. Covell v. Seattle)