

Recommendations to Streamline Local Project Delivery

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Agenda

- Study introduction
- Research and key findings
- Recommendations
- Next steps



Source: iStock, kozmoat98, 2007.

Study Team

Consulting Team



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Workgroup Membership

Representative(s)	Workgroup Membership (Per the Proviso)
Roscoe Slade, City of West Richland	City with population >5,000 and <50,000
Katherine Miller, City of Spokane (through 4/25/2025)	City with a population >50,000
Phil Wallace, Kiewit (through 12/1/2024)	FMSIB
Brandy DeLange, FMSIB	FMSIB
Steve Johnson	County Road Administration Board
Ryan Morrison, Whatcom County	County with a population >100,000 and <400,000
Brian Johnston, Pierce County	County with a population >400,000
Jonathan Nichols, Sound Transit	Regional Transit Authority
Peter Stackpole, Intercity Transit	Transit serving an urban county
Brad Windler, Island Transit	Transit serving a rural county
Ashley Probart	Transportation Improvement Board
Terry Drochak, Jay Drye, Kyle McKeon, Melanie Vance	WSDOT
Chris Herman	Washington Public Ports Association

Study Background

[Engrossed Substitute House Bill 2134](#) (2024)

- **To convene a project delivery streamlining work group to review streamlining options and recommend practices that support expedited [local] project delivery**
- Review options that include, but are not limited to, those listed at right
- Identify opportunities for pilot projects to test some of these options

Options to Review

- Preapplication communication
- Partnership agreements
- Contracting processes
- Fund sources
- Mitigation
- Land use
- ROW
- Permitting
- Shared technology

Study Overview

Objective

Eliminate process duplication and inefficiencies in project delivery to:

- Use taxpayer resources more efficiently
- Increase delivery of tangible community benefits, such as enhanced mobility and improved safety

Balance

Regulations to protect the environment and public welfare



Efficient project delivery

Methodology



Work group



Desk research

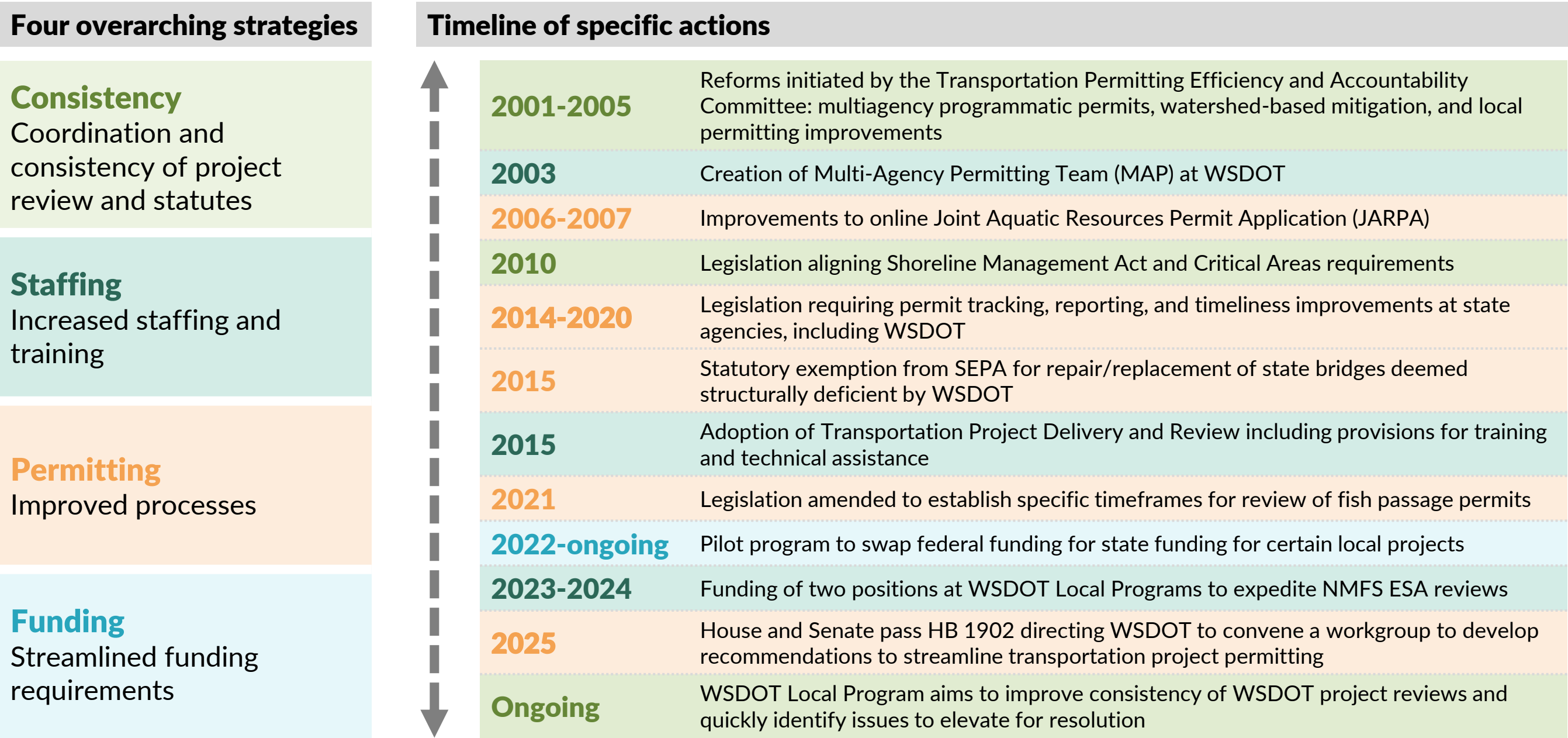


Interviews with WA stakeholders and other states



Survey of local jurisdictions

History of Streamlining Efforts in Washington State



Sources: BERK, 2025; MRSC, 2025; Performance Plane, 2025.

Research and Key Findings

Survey of Local Governments: Most Significant Barriers to Project Delivery

Requirements associated with federal funding



State review processes and regulations



Our study
primarily
focuses here.

Achieving full funding



Staff vacancies



Right-of-way acquisition



State bidding and procurement



Lack of institutional capacity



State apprenticeship requirements



Who responded?

- 47 cities or towns
- 27 counties
- Broadly representative of the sizes of WA jurisdictions

Local Transportation Projects: Local, State, Federal Regs

Local Requirements and Regulations

May include:

- Permit requirements, such as land use, grading, drainage, utility
- Critical areas regulations
- SEPA and Shoreline compliance
- Flood risk assessment
- Other relevant local standards

State and Federal Requirements and Regulations

Applies to any project that meets 1+ criteria:

- Receives federal funding
- Is included in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program
- Is located within the Interstate Right of Way
- Impacts the State Highway System
- Includes bridge construction

May include:

- National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA)
- Endangered Species Act (ESA)
- Clean Water Act
- Hydraulic Project Approval
- Construction Stormwater General Permit
- Apprenticeship
- Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE)

Deeper Dive: Delays Due to Federal Funding Requirements

“Federalized” project: a project that receives federal funds and must adhere to federal requirements

- These rules and regulations may not otherwise apply, and requirements are becoming increasingly onerous
- Desk research shows that federalization increases costs and timelines across the US
- Federalization is especially inefficient for:
 - Projects with small amounts of federal funding. Significant # of these projects in planning phase in WA.
 - Agencies without Certification Acceptance to use federal funds on their own

Most challenging requirements for WA local jurisdictions:

- Endangered Species Act
- Disadvantaged Business Enterprise

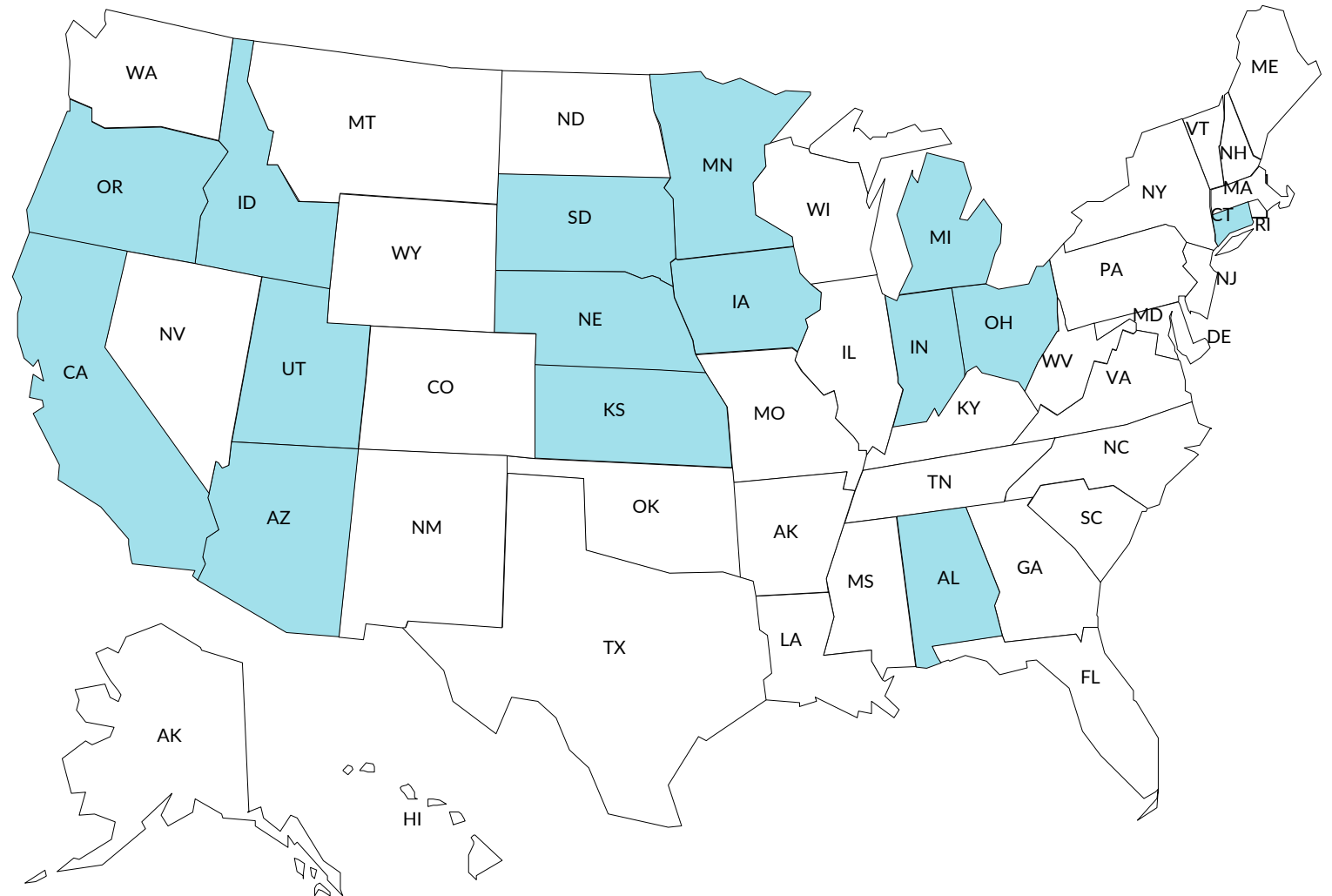
Federal Funds Exchange: Other States

Federal fund exchange: a method of exchanging federal dollars for state dollars

- Can occur at program or project level
- Operates within a state
- At least 15 states have active programs

“The Florida DOT reviewed its portfolio to understand how federal requirements impacted cost and timeline and found that the pre-construction phase was 1.8 to 3.5 times longer than for projects without federal funding.”

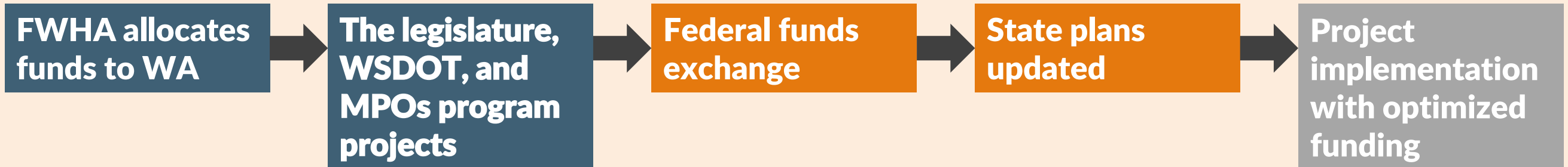
Source: Texas A&M Transportation Institute, 2020.



Sources: [USF Center for Urban Transportation Research](#), 2020; BERK, 2025; MRSC, 2025; Performance Plane, 2025.

Federal Funds Exchange: After vs. Before Project Selection

After Project Selection



Before Project Selection



Sources: BERK, 2025; MRSC, 2025; Performance Plane, 2025.

Deeper Dive: Delays Due to State Review Processes

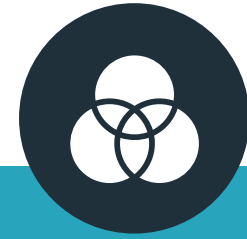
State review and permitting processes are onerous, often inflexible, and are characterized by:



Lack of coordination and communication



Inconsistent standards



Overlapping regulations



Delayed WSDOT review



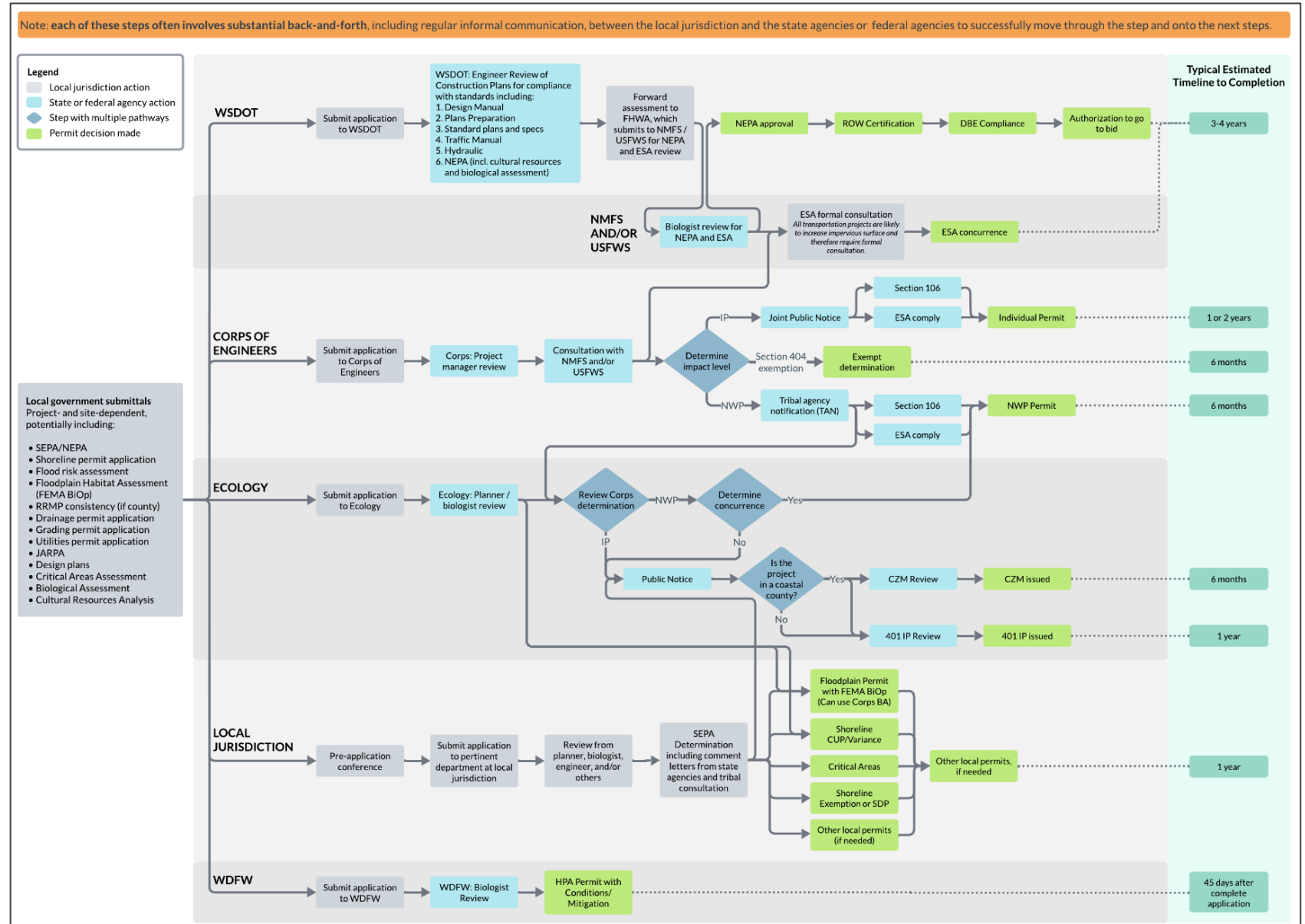
Understaffing of federal and state agencies



Lack of understanding by local jurisdictions and their consultants

Local Transportation Projects with Federal Funding

- Local transportation projects with federal funding must engage several state and federal agencies
- Processes are concurrent and at times interdependent



Sources: Washington State Department of Ecology, 2025; Multi-Agency Review Team, 2022; WSDOT, 2025; BERK, 2025; MRSC, 2025; Performance Plane, 2025.

Recommendations

Recommendations Overview

Criteria for Recommendations

- Changes that are within the State's influence
- Actions that will have a meaningful impact
- Topics that the work group could substantively advance by June 2025 to provide the Legislature with actionable next steps

Six Recommendations

1. Improve federal funding allocation to local projects and create a permanent federal fund exchange program
2. Improve timeliness of WSDOT review
3. Coordinate and simplify interagency environmental review
4. Continue WSDOT's efforts to refine DBE requirements
5. Offer technical assistance to local jurisdictions on best practices in managing projects and consultants
6. WSDOT should collect project-level data across its regions

1. Improve federal funding allocation to local projects and create a permanent federal funding exchange program

Step 1. Prepare

- Authorize a stable funding source for the federal funds exchange pilot program and expand its reach
- Expand TIB's role in facilitating federal funds exchange
- Fund and commission a data analytics and permanent program design study

Step 2. Implement

- Could exchange funds either after or before project selection
- Use TIB and WSDOT's inventories of more than 1,600 local projects to reallocate federal funding from smaller projects to larger federalized projects

2. Improve timeliness of WSDOT review

A. WSDOT should comprehensively evaluate its review process to identify and eliminate friction points

- Establish performance standards
- Remove inconsistencies in review standards and interpretation from one reviewer to the next
- Eliminate application of new standards or processes to projects that are already under review, unless required by law
- Determine the appropriate scale of staffing and resources
- Establish requirements for project initiation meetings
- Improve communication with local governments
- Streamline HQ review of decisions made by WSDOT regions

B. WSDOT should adopt an online permit review and tracking system to improve transparency and coordination across all regions and reviewers

- Permit tracking software will:
 - Increase transparency
 - Offer aggregated reporting to identify bottlenecks
- Collaborative plan review software would
 - Minimize repetitive steps
 - Enable real-time coordination among reviewers

3. Coordinate and Simplify Interagency Environmental Review

A. For complex local projects, appoint a permit facilitator who acts as the single point of contact for the local government applicant

- Facilitator would reside within an Executive agency (e.g., ORIA, WSDOT)
- Convene decisionmakers to resolve issues

B. Convene a well-resourced, multi-agency effort to expedite project delivery

- Needs backing by State leaders
- Process improvement effort supported by LEAN assistance
- Examples of work to consider:
 - Update the JARPA submittal form to reduce duplication
 - Standardize rule interpretation
 - Limit review standards to only those in place at time of submittal

C. Support WSDOT's efforts to complete the programmatic permit with NMFS and expand it to include the US Fish and Wildlife Service

- Provide additional funding for WSDOT to implement this work

4. Continue WSDOT's efforts to refine DBE requirements

- Base DBE goals on the capacity of DBE contractors
- Expand efforts to build the capacity of less-experienced DBE contractors

5. Offer technical assistance to local jurisdictions on best practices in managing projects and consultants

- 85% of survey respondents noted that training on project delivery would be helpful
- Focus on small jurisdictions that rely heavily on consultant for their projects

6. WSDOT should collect project-level data across its regions

- Focus on staff workloads, response times, duration of review, bid vs. actual costs, and frequency of resubmittals
- Will pinpoint need for future improvements

Next Steps: Carry this Work into the Next Effort

Use the findings and recommendations of this report as a foundation for ESHB 1902

- Review survey data and comments
- Prioritize and fund data collection to measure the extent of the problem and any progress
- Discuss operationalizing the relevant recommendations

ESHB 1902

Requires WSDOT to convene a work group of state, local, and tribal representatives to develop recommendations to streamline the permitting of transportation projects.

Thank you!