



PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION DIVISION – CONSOLIDATED GRANT PROGRAM

Providing continuity of funding for sustaining operations and mobility-management projects.

ISSUE

Should WSDOT allow sustaining operations and mobility-management projects to be funded for more than one biennium?

BACKGROUND

WSDOT's Consolidated Grant program uses one application process to award both state and federal public transportation funds from several sources. This blend of funding sources allows a wide range of eligible applicants and project types to apply for funding, but it also adds to the complexity of the application process. In previous grant cycles, this has led both applicants and WSDOT to invest thousands of hours participating in and conducting the competitive application process for the grant program. Additionally, approximately 80 percent of program awards were made to applicants for sustaining operations and mobility management projects each biennium.

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) requires all providers receiving federal funds to provide significant advance public notice if sustaining service projects are to be drastically reduced and/or discontinued. WSDOT makes awards as soon as the state transportation budget is passed; however, due to budget cycle timing, this does not always occur within the advance notice timeframe mandated by FTA.

In addition, feedback from service providers indicates that holding the competitive application process so often makes it difficult for them to plan their budgets, services and customer communications.

PROCESS

Over the course of several months in 2017 and early 2018, stakeholders from 10 organizations representing rural public transit, tribal transit, non-profit special needs transportation, and regional transportation planning organizations (RTPOs) met to discuss whether WSDOT should allow sustaining operating and mobility management projects to be funded for more than one biennium. Through consensus and informed consent, they recommended the following:

- Service providers may apply for sustaining operations and mobility management projects for two consecutive biennia of funding. The second biennium award depends on the passage of the second biennium funding package.
- Eligibility includes transit agencies, tribes, nonprofits, general and local government grantees that have received past biennia funding through the Consolidated Grant program.
- A grantee awarded funds for four years will be required to reapply after two biennia.
- Capital, new, or expansion projects would be eligible only for a two-year (i.e., one biennium) application, and not for a four-year application.

OUTCOMES

Performance measures were established to determine if a project qualifies as sustaining or expansion for the first biennium, as well as whether a project qualifies for a second biennium of funding without requiring re-application. RTPOs and WSDOT may determine at the time of original application and/or before the end of first biennium whether a project qualifies for a two- or four-year funding cycle. This will be based on whether the project is meeting its stated performance targets and each RTPO's planning priorities. As a result, grantees will be informed prior to years 3 and 4 whether reapplication is needed for second biennium of funding.

For more information on how projects applying for four years of funding affect regional ranking grades, see the white paper titled *Consolidated Grant Program: Updating policy and process for regional transportation planning organization engagement in ranking and selection of projects*.

PERFORMANCE METRICS TABLE

What qualifies as a sustaining project eligible to apply for two biennia of funding?				
Compares what was pledged and evaluated in the most recent application (2017-2019) with requests in the 2019-2021/2023 application.				
Project type	What gets measured?	Change ratio	Output	Outcome
Traditional measures	Grant funding request	≤ 5 percent	No explanation needed	Continuing project
		≥ 5.1–10 percent	Explanation needed	Passes or fails reasonableness test
		> 10 percent	Considered expansion	Submit 2019-2021 expansion application for that portion
	Revenue vehicle hours Revenue vehicle miles	≤ 5 percent	No explanation needed	Continuing project
		≥ 5.1–10 percent	Explanation needed	Passes or fails reasonableness test
		> 10 percent	Considered expansion	Submit 2019-2021 expansion application for that portion
Non-traditional measures	Grant funding request	≤ 5 percent	No explanation needed	Continuing project
		≥ 5.1–10 percent	Explanation needed	Passes or fails reasonableness test
		> 10 percent	Considered expansion	Submit 2019-2021 expansion application for that portion
	Objectives as stated in application (e.g., no. of trainings or outreach, no. of passengers served)*	≤ 5 percent	No explanation needed	Continuing project
		≥ 5.1–10 percent	Explanation needed	Passes or fails reasonableness test
		> 10 percent	Considered expansion	Submit 2019-2021 expansion application for that portion

* There may be some projects for which traditional performance measures (revenue vehicle hours/trips) do not apply. If the applicant would like the evaluation panel to consider the value of the project based on another measurement, quantifiable objectives can be used in place of traditional performance measures. In order to be eligible to apply for two biennia of funding, the project must have documented those same measures in the previous application.

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NEXT STEPS

During the 2018 Public Transportation Conference, WSDOT and stakeholders will revisit the formulization concept.

WSDOT and stakeholders will evaluate the four-year funding cycle following the 2019-2021 grant awards.



PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION DIVISION – CONSOLIDATED GRANT PROGRAM

Updating policy and process for regional transportation planning organization engagement in ranking and selection of projects.

ISSUE

Should the formula for assigning ranking spots to Consolidated Grant applications from regional transportation planning organizations (RTPOs) be adjusted?

BACKGROUND

Since 2005, awards for public transportation grants for rural and special needs populations have been derived from a locally developed coordination plan. As part of the planning process, RTPOs influence the selection of awarded projects by identifying those with local significance.

Historically, each RTPO has been given a number of ranking spots, depending on grant-targeted demographics (raw numbers and per capita) for each of the categories below:

- Rurally isolated
- People with disabilities
- Veterans
- People living in poverty
- Seniors
- Youth

From these ranking spots, RTPOs receive a corresponding number of A, B, or C grades for projects in their region. Each RTPO assigns a grade for projects identified in their coordination plan. These grades translated into additional evaluation points for project applications, and were taken into consideration when WSDOT developed a ranked list of projects.

Increasingly, concerns have been raised about the methodology used for A, B, C grade distribution, resulting in requests to update the way that the demographics were measured and ranking spots allocated. One of the concerns was that single-county RTPOs appeared to have a disproportionately higher share of ranking spots related to the number of projects submitted to WSDOT for consideration from their region. Consequently, areas with very large populations and/or multiple counties felt they were grouped with RTPOs that were not similarly sized. In addition, measures for rural populations did not match Federal Transit Administration definitions, and people ages 85 and over were not taken into consideration.

PROCESS

Over the course of several months in 2017 and early 2018, stakeholders from 10 organizations representing RTPOs and metropolitan planning organizations, rural public transit, and tribal governments met to discuss whether the formula for assigning ranking spots to Consolidated Grant applications from RTPOs should be adjusted. Through consensus and informed consent, the stakeholders recommended the following:

- Adjust rural population measures to match FTA definitions.
- Add demographic data for the population over age 85 into the calculations.
- Use a combination of methodologies to account for both the raw numbers and per capita populations when evaluating demographic data as it relates to allocation of ranking spots by region.
- Develop a process for adjusting grades to accommodate projects (sustaining operations or mobility management) applying for two biennia of funding.
- Ensure the population data is updated biennially, when more recent data is available.

OUTCOMES

Ranking spots: In the majority of the cases, planning organizations with very large populations now receive slightly more ranking spots. Planning organizations with lower populations (single-county organizations) retain the number of ranking spots they previously received.

These ranking spot allocations shifted due to three key factors. The first two—redefining “rural population” and adding categories for people 85 and over—were previously explained under the process section above. In addition, ranking spots were distributed more proportionally to the special needs* demographics, to better ensure equitable distribution among areas with high populations and low populations. WSDOT retained the previous methodology (high, medium, low) for percentage of population categories.

* *People who cannot provide transportation for themselves due to age, disability, or income.*

Four-year funding cycle: For four-year projects, RTPOs have the option near the end of the project’s first biennium to decide whether the project will continue into its second biennium with the same or lower grade.

If the project continues through both biennia with the same grade, the RTPO loses the original grade for a new project in the second biennium.

If the project receives a lower grade in the second biennium, the RTPO can reassign the project’s original grade to a new project in the second biennium. Projects receiving a lower grade will need to reapply to WSDOT for the second biennium.

Regional ranking spots: This table reflects the projected ranking spots and grades for the next two biennia:

Regional ranking spots by planning organization	2019-2021 ranking spots	Grades			2021-2023 ranking spots*	Grades		
		A	B	C		A	B	C
Benton-Franklin COG	14	5	5	4	14	5	5	4
Chelan-Douglas TC	17	6	6	5	17	6	6	5
CWCOG/SWRTPPO	24	8	8	8	24	8	8	8
Island RTPO	9	3	3	3	9	3	3	3
NEW RTPO	17	6	6	5	17	6	6	5
Okanogan COG	9	3	3	3	9	3	3	3
Palouse RTPO	15	5	5	5	15	5	5	5
Peninsula RTPO	21	7	7	7	21	7	7	7
PSRC	21	7	7	7	21	7	7	7
Quad-County RTPO	17	6	6	5	17	6	6	5
San Juan County	9	3	3	3	9	3	3	3
Skagit COG	9	3	3	3	9	3	3	3
Spokane RTC	9	3	3	3	9	3	3	3
Southwest Washington RTC	17	6	6	5	17	6	6	5
TRPC	9	3	3	3	9	3	3	3
Walla Walla Valley MPO	9	3	3	3	9	3	3	3
Whatcom COG	9	3	3	3	9	3	3	3
Yakima Valley COG	9	3	3	3	9	3	3	3
Total	244	83	83	78	244	83	83	78

* *Assumption: The demographic data underlying the allocation of regional ranking spots remains constant.*

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