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Introduction

The Yakima Valley Metropolitan and Regional Transportation Plan (M/RTP) establishes the strategic framework for meeting the Yakima Valley region's existing and future transportation needs. The M/RTP serves as the link between local agency transportation plans and the Washington State Transportation Plan (WTP). It was developed with extensive coordination with affected agencies and opportunities for public input. The plan was developed to comply with federal and state requirements to ensure M/RTP projects will be eligible for funding through the widest range of programs.

There are specific federal and state requirements related to regional transportation plans. The federal requirements require preparation of a Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) for the metropolitan area in and around the greater Yakima-Selah-Union Gap-Moxee urbanized area. The Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA) sets forth the requirements for the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) for all of Yakima County.

The Yakima Valley Conference of Governments (YVCOG) is responsible for meeting both the federal and state transportation planning requirements for the Yakima County Region. YVCOG's member agencies understand the need to view transportation issues and needs collectively, so the MTP and RTP have been combined into a single regional transportation plan.

Both the federal and state requirements for the MTP and RTP require public participation in developing the plan. YVCOG and its member agencies support public input, because the success of any plan depends on the support of the community it serves.

The combined M/RTP examines the region's transportation needs over the next 25 years. It builds on strategies identified by state and local agencies to address short-, mid-, and long-term transportation needs for the region. The M/RTP is, however, constrained by available funding. Therefore, it identifies the mission, goals, policies, and strategic framework for defining and selecting improvement projects and programs. It is a multimodal plan, with individual projects and strategies often serving more than one travel mode and meeting a range of regional priorities. Strategies for expanding funding for regional transportation needs are also identified.

Yakima Valley Conference of Governments

The Yakima Valley Conference of Governments (YVCOG) is an intergovernmental organization composed of local jurisdictions within Yakima County. The YVCOG was established over 45 years ago to coordinate on regional issues, including transportation.

Since 1974, YVCOG has been designated as the federal Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the cities of Yakima, Selah, Union Gap, Moxee, and their adjacent unincorporated urbanized areas. Federal regulations require MPOs to develop coordinated transportation plans to ensure regional consistency and efficient use of federal funds.

YVCOG is also designated as the lead agency for the Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) under the Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA). The RTPO encompasses all of Yakima County. This designation was established in 1991. The map at the end of this section shows the boundaries of the RTPO and MPO. It also shows the local communities covered by the M/RTP.

Agency Collaboration and Regional Priorities

The Yakima Valley region has embraced working collaboratively and cooperatively to identify and address the highest priority regional transportation needs. This cooperation has led to the creation of two regional transportation planning coalitions – TRANS-Action in the metropolitan area and north Yakima County, and Driving Rural Yakima Valley's Economy (DRYVE) in



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the mid-lower valley. The M/RTP builds from and supports the WTP, local agency transportation plans, and the TRANS-Action and DRYVE prioritization efforts.

To guide the development and funding of the regional transportation system, the M/RTP established the following mission, goals and priorities. Implementation of the M/RTP is also guided by a range of policies.

The mission of the M/RTP is:

“To develop and preserve a regional multimodal transportation system that provides for the safe and efficient movement of people and goods; supports the economic growth of the region; and is compatible with land use plans and the environment.”

The highest priorities for the regional transportation system include:

- **Preservation**
- **Safety**
- **Economic Vitality**
- **Freight Mobility**
- **Transit Enhancement and Transportation Demand Management**

Transportation Goals and Strategies

The mission and goals in the M/RTP lead to strategies for identifying improvements that best meet the transportation needs of the region. The goals supported by the mission statement include:

Preservation

Preservation of the existing transportation system and services will extend the life and utility of prior investments. Preservation of the system includes resurfacing roadways, ensuring safe bridges, resolving drainage problems, and improving overall operations through maintenance of traffic signs, markings, and signals.

Safety

Improving the safety and security of the regional transportation system is paramount to the M/RTP strategies. Almost all of the highest priority improvement projects and programs improve the safety of regional transportation customers and the transportation system. Improvements at freeway interchanges and arterial intersections are designed to reduce collisions. Roadway widening and reconstruction projects include design standards to reduce conflicts between travel modes. The M/RTP can also prioritize improvements that address and improve the region’s emergency preparedness. Enforcement and transportation safety education are identified in the M/RTP strategies.

Economic Vitality

Transportation projects support, enhance, and stimulate the economic development of the region. Optimizing mobility of people and goods on the transportation system supports economic development by reducing delays, improving operations, opening access to new areas of development, and addressing safety issues.



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Freight Mobility

Enhancing freight distribution by truck, rail, and air is a priority for economic recovery and growth. The M/RTP supports future growth in commercial and freight air service by enhancing inter-modal connectivity through-out the region. The M/RTP includes an unfunded but prioritized study that could reduce conflicts between freight and localized traffic in the lower valley, which could increase freight efficiency between an Interstate and State Route and provide residential safety. Railroad grade separation projects and other rail system improvements such as a study for the feasibility of a trans-load facility are also included in the M/RTP.

Transit Enhancement and Transportation Demand Management

Strategies to enhance transit and transportation demand management (TDM) programs are important elements of the M/RTP. These strategies include expanding fixed-route transit, paratransit, and Commute Trip Reduction (CTR) programs in the greater Yakima metropolitan area. Expanding the availability and types of transportation choices in and between communities throughout the Yakima Valley is a priority for the region.

Recently, Selah Transit and Union Gap Transit were formed as results from successful Yakima Transit route expansions. In the last M/RTP, a pilot program was highlighted that expanded a commuter transit route into Kittitas County with cooperation from HopeSource; the route found a steady and dedicated ridership and continues today. The Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation's (Yakama Nation's) Pahto Public Passage began in 2007 and expanded to serve Yakima, Prosser, Sunnyside, Grandview, Wapato, Zillah, Toppenish, Harrah, Goldendale, and White Swan before service ended briefly between 2010-2012. Services have resumed, although the routes are now somewhat reduced as a result of a steady FTA Tribal Transit fund.

Reducing congestion along regional corridors such as I-82 and US 97 or at spot locations such as interchanges and intersections enhances the efficiency and safety of all modes of transportation. Decreasing delays on city arterial systems likewise reduces reliance on the regional highway system for local trips and avoids premature and expensive highway widening. The M/RTP incorporates Transportation Systems Management (TSM) and Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) strategies to improve the efficiency and safety of the transportation system. These transportation demand management strategies include controlling access to highways and arterials, improving traffic signals and timing, and continued implementation of driver information systems.

Transportation Improvements and Programs

The M/RTP includes state highway and local agency regional transportation systems improvements. The projects highlighted in the M/RTP are defined either as being in the fiscally-constrained plan or as being other high-priority projects. Fiscally-constrained projects are those that are likely to receive reasonably anticipated funding to complete, operate, and maintain the project. The maps in Section 6 show the locations of these projects and more detailed descriptions and discussion of these high priority M/RTP projects are presented there as well. The M/RTP also acknowledges other state, regional, and local projects that are regionally significant but are not reasonably expected to be funded at this time. These unfunded improvements are in Appendix F for illustrative purposes.

State Highways

State highways are the foundation of the Yakima Valley regional transportation system. These highways connect the region with other parts of Washington and serve intra-county travel. Therefore, safe and efficient operation is critical.

Because I-82 is such an important transportation corridor to the region, several significant improvement projects are either under way or planned. These include maintenance, safety improvements, interchange upgrades, and planning for future widening of I-82



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in the metropolitan area. Key capacity, operational, and safety improvements include major revisions at I-82 interchanges within the metropolitan area. These include addition of capacity, improved signals, and modifications to the on- and off-ramps.

The M/RTP includes a range of improvements along US 12. The most significant operational improvements are in the metropolitan area. Construction of a new interchange at US 12/ Old Naches Highway is highlighted as a high priority. Preservation and safety enhancements have been built on this highway since the last M/RTP update and more are identified for the near future in and west of Naches.

Improvements included in this M/RTP update to US 97, SR 22, SR 241, SR 223, and SR 821 focus on preservation, safety, and other spot improvements. These include pavement upgrades, bridge repairs or replacements, and intersection improvements. The lower volume of traffic along these corridors outside the metropolitan area will not require significant capacity improvements during the 25-year planning horizon.

Regional Priorities by Subregion

The M/RTP summarizes regionally significant, local agency projects by seven subregions as shown on the Plan Subregions map in Section 6.

Northwest Subregion

The Northwest subregion is located along US 12 west of the Yakima metropolitan area. The focus of the transportation improvements and strategies for the Northwest subregion is to improve connectivity to the regional highway and arterial systems. Yakima County recently completed projects to reconstruct and upgrade S. Naches Road and Naches-Tieton Road south of the river to Naches Heights Road. These improvements included a hill climb lane which reduces delays due to trucks and other slow-moving vehicles. The corridor provides an improved connection between Tieton and the surrounding orchard areas and US 12 and Naches. Current high-priority projects with secured funding sources in this region are sponsored by Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and focus on preserving and upgrading the existing roadways. There are no local agency projects for Yakima County, the City of Tieton, or the Town of Naches with secured funding at the time this M/RTP was drafted.

Although there are no secured local projects, there are several planned projects for Naches, Tieton, and Yakima County. There is a need to expand demand response transit service in this area and to coordinate with existing and rural transit service to regional services and facilities. In addition, expanded promotion of ridesharing is appropriate to serve the forecasted residential growth in the Northwest subregion.

North Subregion

The North subregion covers both rural and urban areas north of the City of Yakima. Transportation projects in the North subregion focus on addressing safety and operations issues in Selah, improving connections to the regional highway system, and improved corridors within the subregion.

WSDOT and City of Selah have secured transportation projects identified in Section 6. Improvements within Selah include widening existing roadways and adding sidewalk to enhance driver safety and walkability. WSDOT has identified four preservation projects along US12 and one new construction project at the Intersection of



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West Subregion

The West subregion covers rural and agricultural areas west of the City of Yakima and south of Tieton and Cowiche. The West subregion for the M/RTP is not the same as the west valley area of the City of Yakima which is within the MPO boundaries and is included in the Central subregion.

The low densities and location in the region do not result in any existing or forecast capacity or major operational deficiencies. However, north-south travel in the West subregion is difficult and circuitous because of the lack of continuous arterial routes. Thus, Yakima County and its TRANS-Action partners, at different times in the past, have defined needs for future north-south corridors serving the areas west of Yakima. While not funded and not actively promoted as an identified project with scope for construction in the 25-year M/RTP, segments of these corridors should be preserved and constructed as properties develop. This process will reduce the ultimate agency-funded cost of these improvements.

Additions of demand-responsive and expanded paratransit services are also identified to support transportation needs for the West subregion.

Central Subregion

The Central subregion includes the cities of Yakima and Union Gap. It also includes unincorporated areas of the metropolitan area. Being the heart of the metropolitan area, the Central subregion experiences a wide range of traffic operations, safety, and preservation issues. These issues are a result of significant levels of commuter traffic, access to/from the regional highways, freight movement, and access to regional shopping areas and services. The City of Yakima also is the region's center for major medical centers and the main campus of the community college. The regional airport – McAllister Field – is located along Washington Avenue in the south part of Yakima, west of Union Gap.

WSDOT and the local agencies have agreed to the need for several improvements to interchanges on I-82 and US 12. These state highway improvements directly connect with the most significant regional arterials in the Central subregion. Improvements may add turn lanes, widen roadways, improve intersections, improve interchanges, construct new road infrastructure, enhance transit operations, and improve non-motorized facilities.

Improvements for the major east-west arterials are critical to the operation of the regional transportation system. A new east-west connection between unincorporated Terrace Heights and north Yakima along with additional surface street connection will provide access to a new mixed use development at the gateway to the Yakima Valley. These include improvements in downtown Yakima, connectivity to the I-82 freeway interchanges, access to the airport and adjacent employment areas, and access to major commercial districts. Local agencies have already completed widening parts of the Nob Hill Boulevard, Valley Mall Boulevard, and Ahtanum Road corridors and the M/RTP establishes a priority for completing the ultimate corridor improvements. Construction of the Union Gap Beltway to improve connections between Ahtanum Road and the airport and I-82 is also a priority in the M/RTP.

Recommended strategies for Yakima Transit include expanding the hours of operation, improving frequency on high ridership routes, maintaining Sunday service, securing fixed-route service to Ellensburg, expanding demand response service in the growing areas of west Yakima and expanding the vanpool program.



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East Valley Subregion

The East Valley subregion includes the City of Moxee and surrounding rural residential, industrial and agricultural lands. The focus of improvement strategies for the East Valley subregion is on east-west capacity and connections to I-82 and the metropolitan area west of the freeway. Because only two routes – SR 24 and Terrace Heights Road – currently cross the Yakima River, operations and safety of these routes is a priority. Construction of a new east-west corridor over the Yakima River is included in the M/RTP as secured-funding project, and is discussed in greater detail in the Central Subregion.

WSDOT has one secured project which will add a southbound right-turn lane at the intersection of Birchfield and SR24.

The City of Moxee has two secured projects for new construction in the M/RTP which are connected. The projects will construct a new intersection on SR 24 in the alignment of the new Moirier Lane. This new intersection will add another access point off of SR24 to the City of Moxee, which will provide new economic development opportunities and provide relief on local roads for freight traffic.

Expanding transit and ridesharing services in this area and connecting to a wider regional service has been identified as a regional need. A strategy to mitigate some of the growing congestion on SR 24 between Moxee and Yakima is to implement a park-and-ride and commuter transit service between the two communities. A fixed-route transit service could also serve employers in Moxee.

South Central Subregion

The communities of Toppenish, Wapato, Harrah, and Zillah are within the South Central subregion. West of the Yakima River and I-82, most of the South Central subregion is within the Yakama Nation.

The primary focus of the M/RTP improvements in the South Central subregion is reconstructing and upgrading roadways to accommodate increased traffic volumes and movement of freight. These include multiple intersection improvements on US 97, an at-grade railroad crossing on SR223, rehabilitation to the I-82/Yakima Valley Highway Bridge, and the replacement of the SR22.Yakima River crossing near Toppenish just to name a few. The M/RTP also includes improvements to rebuild and upgrade existing arterials that serve freight and commercial land uses. Extension of several corridors to provide alternative routes for freight and reduce travel distances are also identified as regional priorities. The M/RTP also includes a range of preservation and safety improvements within the South Central subregion.

The South Central subregion is served by Pahto Public Passage and Community Connector transit services, which connects Prosser and Yakima. There is a need to expand demand response service in this area and to coordinate with existing and expanded rural transit service to regional services and facilities.

Upgrades to 21 miles of track along the Toppenish, Simcoe, and Western Rail line between White Swan and the BNSF mainline northwest of Toppenish. will improve efficiency and safety for rail traffic serving two Yakama Nation sawmills. Rail crossing improvements within Toppenish are also important.

Southeast Subregion

The Southeast subregion includes the communities of Granger, Sunnyside, and Grandview along I-82, and Mabton along SR 22. City arterials and county collector roads connect the communities to the state highways and serve local travel patterns. The improvements focus on regional access and connectivity. They also address existing or forecast safety and operations needs along regional corridors. WSDOT has secured funding for several projects, including plans to improve three intersections along SR241,



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one intersection along SR22/SR223, reconstruct a bridge on SR241 near Mabton, and reconstruct a portion of the SR241 corridor north of Sunnyside. These improvements will greatly enhance safety at rural state-route intersections and improve freight/vehicle traffic in the lower valley.

The Southeast subregion is served by the People for People Community Connector, which connects Prosser and Yakima. This subregion is also served by People for People paratransit service for the Job Access Transportation program and the Medicaid transportation services program.

Environmental Constraints

The M/RTP identifies potential impacts improvement projects may have on the environmental according to the type of project. The environmental constraints analysis for the M/RTP is not intended to identify specific environmental impacts of road projects included in the M/RTP, or to be used in determining environmental mitigation. Instead a matrix of potential impacts is provided to raise awareness of anticipated or potential issues that may affect implementation or costs of transportation projects.

An entire appendix of natural resource maps and tables is included in the M/RTP that highlights locations of environmental designations such as water and wetlands, floodplains, plants and animals, and historic properties. Analysis of specific direct and indirect impacts and potential mitigations will occur as individual transportation projects and programs are further defined and permitted.

Financial Constraints

Federal and state regulations for Metropolitan and Regional Transportation Plans require a financial analysis to demonstrate how the transportation improvements and programs can be implemented with reasonably expected funds. The M/RTP is fiscally constrained by only including projects and programs that are reasonably expected to have sufficient funding to complete, operate and maintain. Regional priority projects and programs that have funding assumed for all or part of the identified costs are included in the fiscally constrained list.

Estimates of future transportation revenues are projected to be less than the required amount of funding needed to keep the transportation systems and programs in good repair. Inflation is expected to erode the purchasing power of existing transit revenues to the point that they will not be sufficient to sustain the present level of service in the future without fare and sales tax increases.

The difference between the available funding and costs of identified improvement projects and programs requires the region to set priorities and strategies for addressing critical transportation needs.

Total forecasted transportation revenues from all sources for the 2014-2040 period exceed \$2.7 billion. Anticipated expenditures for transportation projects, programs and services within the fiscally constrained plan are approximately \$1.7 billion.