

Section 4 Plan Priorities and Framework



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A wide range of transportation improvements and strategies have been identified by WSDOT, local agencies, Yakama Nation, Yakima Transit, People for People, and others in the region. As noted previously, TRANS-Action and DRYVE have assembled lists of regional transportation improvements for the upper and lower valleys. When taken together with WSDOT plans and projects, these programs and improvements create a comprehensive, multimodal transportation system to serve the region for 20 or more years.

However, as discussed in Section 8, the total costs of these improvements and programs far outstrip the likely available future funding. Because not all projects and programs can be funded over the next 25 years, the region established priorities for its transportation improvements. The priorities were used in the technical evaluation to establish a framework for the M/RTP. The framework essentially identifies the core transportation needs which other regional improvements will tie into. The framework was defined to help guide the development of a financially-constrained M/RTP; however, the framework for the M/RTP was not constrained by available funding.

Regional Priorities

The M/RTP established five broad priorities for guiding the development of the Yakima Valley regional transportation system. The M/RTP priorities are based on input from DRYVE, TRANS-Action, Yakima County Special Transportation Needs Coalition, WSDOT, local agencies, and existing plans. The region's priorities blend the priorities of the Washington Transportation Plan 2035 (WTP 2035), the emerging principles of livability and sustainability, and the Transportation Elements of local agency comprehensive plans. The priorities will be used to help direct available funding, including grant monies, toward specific projects and programs. The regional priorities are generally consistent with the six transportation policy goals of the WTP 2035. The five highest priorities for the Yakima Valley M/RTP are:

Preservation

Preservation of the existing transportation system and services will extend the life and utility of prior investments.

Safety

Improving the safety and security of the regional transportation system.

Economic Vitality

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.

Freight Mobility

Enhancing freight distribution by truck, rail, and air is a priority for economic recovery and growth.

Transit Enhancement and Transportation Demand Management

Expanding the availability and types of transportation choices in and between communities throughout the Yakima Valley is a priority for the region to meet the travel demands and provide access to basic services.



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While these are the top five goals, the M/RTP also considers a range of other factors in the selection of transportation improvement projects and programs. These factors, some closely aligned with FHWA's livability and sustainability principles, include:

- Regional connectivity
- Costs
- Funding availability
- Non-motorized transportation
- Environmental impacts and mitigation
- Land use plans
- Security and emergency response needs

These factors can influence the measure of benefits of a project or program to the region. The region will strive to ensure that transportation projects and programs enhance communities while maintaining consistency with least-cost planning practices.

In the future, the M/RTP will identify federal, state, and regional performance measures and targets against which regional leaders will evaluate the federal, state, and local investments made in the Valley. Some performance measures have already been used in previous YVCOG M/RTPs and remain in place to align the transportation strategies to the region's priorities. The setting of targets was mandated in MAP-21 and is being continued in FAST Act. Although the setting of federal and state targets has experienced significant delay, Yakima Valley targets are anticipated to be in place for the next M/RTP update in 2020.

Framework for the Metropolitan/Regional Transportation Plan

A framework for the M/RTP was prepared based on the regional goals. The framework establishes the key improvement projects and programs for the region. Other regional projects and programs were then added to the framework to complete the financially-constrained M/RTP.

The framework for the M/RTP was prepared through evaluation of alternative strategies, which are described below. An evaluation of the alternative strategies was used to identify the most cost effective improvements to address existing and future transportation demands and deficiencies for the region. The major improvements and programs from each strategy that best achieved the priorities were combined into a recommended regional strategy. Based on review and input from the YVCOG member agencies, the framework for the M/RTP was established. The framework was then used as the basis for identifying other high priority transportation strategies for the region and subareas for the next 25 years. The other projects build on and complement the overall framework for the M/RTP.

Overview of Alternatives Evaluation

Regional priorities are classified into two different types of projects: fiscally constrained and other planned high priorities. Of the two types, only those projects with committed funding are focused on for modelling for the forecast year of 2040. Each jurisdiction was asked to provide their expected local improvements to be included in the 2014 and 2040 base models. Then the



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identified priority projects with committed funding were added to create the 2040 build scenario. The overall mileage of the highway and arterial system is projected to increase by approximately six percent or less during the next 25 years region-wide.

Total travel demands (as measured in vehicle-miles traveled) in the metropolitan area are projected to increase by 45-47 percent over 2010 levels under the Build 2040 scenario. This compares with the forecast growth in households (31.5 percent) and employment (27 percent), in the communities covered by the MPO travel demand model for the metropolitan planning area. The vehicle miles of travel within the metropolitan planning area is forecast to grow at a faster rate than the growth in households or employment. This results from more people and cars per household, which in turn results in more trips within the area. The Yakima metropolitan area also is continuing to serve many of the regional needs for residents outside of the metropolitan area. This results in more travel between the metropolitan area and the smaller outlying communities within Yakima County or adjacent counties. The increases in through traffic on I-82 also results in the vehicle miles travel increasing at a faster rate than households and jobs in the MPO planning area.

The total vehicle miles traveled in the metropolitan area do not change significantly with the addition of the widening and new corridor improvements. This means that the widening projects and new corridors serve the desired travel patterns, instead of having traffic divert to avoid congestion in other corridors. Therefore, constructing some of these projects will provide efficient solutions to regional travel needs.

The biggest differences are found in the overall level of congestion in the system. Between 2014 and 2040, the overall level of delays due to congestion is projected to more than quadruple with only the 2040 Build scenario. This is a direct result of the 45 percent increase in vehicle miles traveled and only a one to two percent increase in the highway and arterial system lane miles in the metropolitan area.

Outside of the metropolitan area, significant regional projects were modelled based on the secured priorities to establish the M/RTP framework. These include improvements that address preservation, safety, and economic growth. Projects that improved access to the regional state highway system or improved flow of freight traffic in communities were identified as part of the framework for the plan.

Plan Framework

The framework for the M/RTP uses the strategies outlined in Table 1 when prioritizing the project list from all agencies and jurisdictions in Yakima County.

Baseline Improvements

Already funded or partially funded significant regional improvement projects and programs that can reasonably expect to receive full funding form the baseline for the M/RTP.

Key Corridor

In addition to the Baseline improvements and Efficiency strategies, the M/RTP framework identifies the need for the creation of several new key corridors or widening of existing corridors to address future transportation demands of the region. These include:

- Development of a new east-west arterial connecting Terrace Heights to developing land just west of I-82 in the City of Yakima. This improvement is taking shape as partners from WSDOT, Yakima County and City of Yakima are proposing



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an Interchange Justification Report and supporting infrastructure in a project known in it's infancy as the East-West Corridor.

- Upgrades to a proposed freight corridor that connects I-82 with US 97 south of and outside of the metropolitan area.

Transit Enhancement and Transportation Demand Management

The M/RTP framework includes strategies for expanding transit to meet the future travel demands throughout the Yakima Valley region. Strategies to reduce peak period travel demands also are included. The transit and transportation demand management (TDM) strategies include:

- Improving transportation services for people with special needs.
- Expanding fixed-route service coverage in the metropolitan area.
- Extending service hours to address nighttime and weekend needs.
- Targeting service to larger employers or groups of employers.
- Enhancing service to regional destinations such as colleges, medical facilities, and regional commercial areas.

Non-motorized Transportation

Many of the improvements in the Baseline scenario will also include enhancements for pedestrians and bicyclists. The framework for the M/RTP supports the completion of high-priority missing links to the non-motorized system, where roadway or other improvements are not identified as high priorities for the region. This will support growth in non-motorized travel options, will improve safety, and will enhance access to transit. YVCOG is involved and continuing to support local and regional programs and projects in the categories of Complete Streets and Safe Routes to Schools.

Other Projects

The M/RTP acknowledges that there are a range of needed improvements (both regional and local) that are desirable to meet the overall, transportation needs of the region. These projects are referenced in the M/RTP to help ensure that the total system needs are acknowledged and to support increases in future funding to help implement these projects.