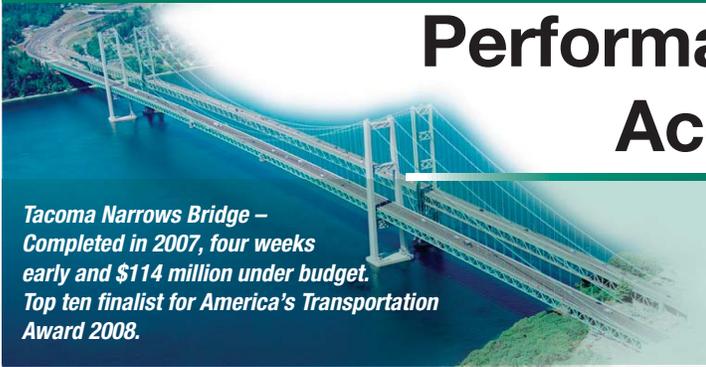


# Performance Management and Accountability at WSDOT

January 2010



*Tacoma Narrows Bridge –  
Completed in 2007, four weeks  
early and \$114 million under budget.  
Top ten finalist for America's Transportation  
Award 2008.*

## WSDOT: Early adopter, recognized leader

Since 2001, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) has been recognized as a leader in performance management and accountability. Taking performance management seriously, and integrating it into day-to-day work, has enabled WSDOT to **deliver on its promises and build public confidence and trust**. WSDOT is committed to working with the federal government to help build a reporting and accountability system that is relevant and adds value to the delivery of critical state transportation services and projects.

### WSDOT's vision

WSDOT believes that performance management and accountability will help build a transportation system of the future that is:

- **Reliable:** improved travel times for drivers; more choices for travelers; increased inter-city transit opportunities.
- **Responsible:** safer roads, and fewer fatalities and serious injuries; cost-effective asset maintenance and preservation; more integrated highway, transit, and ferry travel options; increased special needs transportation and access to jobs and lifeline services.
- **Sustainable:** cleaner air and water; strategic and balanced approach to climate change; predictable funding and affordable improvements and operations
- **Trustworthy:** honest, no-surprises reporting; demonstrated commitment to open and accountable business practices to both citizens and government.

## Accountability matters – to voters, WSDOT employees, government partners, and stakeholders at every level

In 2001, WSDOT instituted a program of regular performance measurement, reporting, and accountability to improve results and build trust. Polls taken over the next three years showed a change in attitude: when asked if they trusted WSDOT to spend tax dollars wisely, nearly 75% of voters said no in 2001, but by 2004, 88% said yes.

**As a direct result, the Legislature approved gas tax increases in 2003 and 2005** that are supporting the largest transportation construction program in the state's history. Further, a citizen initiative to repeal the 2005 tax increase was rejected by voters.

WSDOT's performance management work supports both internal and external accountability activities. **Performance is monitored by agency executives** and senior managers, then used for decision-making. Progress towards achievement of strategic goals is reported throughout the agency. **WSDOT's comprehensive and tested performance management, analysis, and communication practices make information accessible and useful.**

WSDOT's Secretary, Paula Hammond, and Director of Strategic Assessment, Daniela Bremmer, are recognized national and international leaders in performance management. WSDOT's experience can help pave the way for more robust and constructive performance management and accountability systems across the United States.

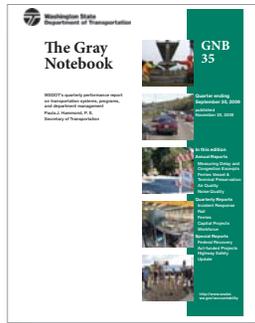
### WSDOT contacts for more information:

Paula Hammond, P.E.  
Secretary of Transportation  
(360) 705-7054  
HammonP@wsdot.wa.gov

Larry Ehl  
Federal Relations Manager  
(206) 910-4142  
EhlL@wsdot.wa.gov

Daniela Bremmer  
Director, Strategic Assessment Office  
(360) 705-7953  
BremmeD@wsdot.wa.gov

# WSDOT's experience: Performance management and accountability helps ensure results and prepare for future success



Performance management and accountability is more than checking a box or completing a report. It is about ensuring that citizens receive real results from their tax dollars. Over the past decade, performance management at WSDOT has evolved to include **state-of-the-art performance assessments of projects and programs – referred to as “before and after” studies – to verify that intended results were achieved**

**and learn how to improve results in the future.** WSDOT leads the nation in systematically analyzing the results of its work, paving the way for other states to follow. Here are a few examples.

## Highway Safety Projects

Since 1995, WSDOT has installed 181 miles of cable median barriers on divided highways. Additional cable barriers are being installed using federal economic Recovery Act funds (ARRA). WSDOT's before and after analysis of over 15,000 collisions indicate that cable median barriers have reduced the rate of serious and fatal injury collisions in or across the median by 58%. Based on this work, WSDOT is evaluating cable median barrier applications to highways with medians greater than 50 feet.

## Congestion-Relief Projects

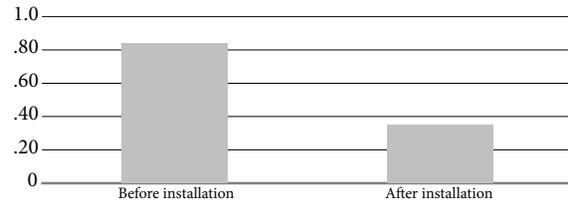
WSDOT recently completed a low-cost project (less than \$100,000) to reduce congestion and improve traffic flow on Interstate 5 through Everett, Washington. The project included installation of ramp meters, and signage and striping to permit hard shoulder running during peak evening traffic. These improvements cut travel time through this area by more than 50%.

## Highway Operations: Incident Response

WSDOT has expanded and is closely monitoring its highway incident response program. Incident clearance times decreased from more than 30 minutes in 2002 to 12 minutes in 2009.

## Cable median barriers installed since 1995 have reduced the rate of serious injury and fatal crossover collisions by 58%

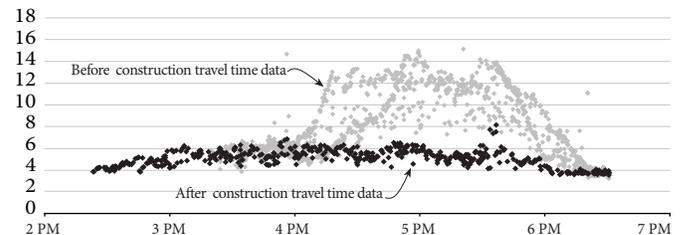
*Collisions per 100 million vehicle miles traveled*



Data Source: WSDOT Maintenance and Operations Office.

## Travel times improve on I-5 to US 2 in Everett as a result of hard shoulder running and ramp metering

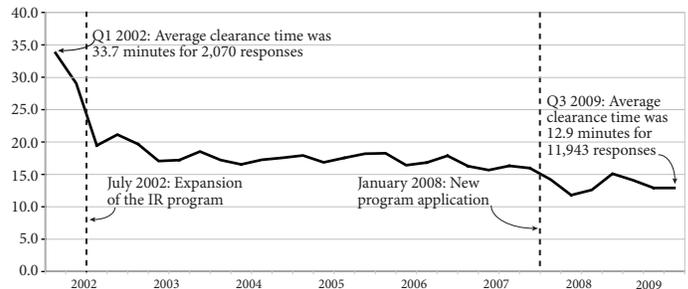
*Afternoon commute: NB I-5 at 41st to the US 2/SR 204 Interchange  
Individual vehicle travel times scatter plots; Travel time in minutes*



Data Source: WSDOT Northwest Region.

## Significant reduction in statewide overall average clearance time for highway incidents

*In minutes: as of September 30, 2009*



## What others have said...

“What sets these reports apart in content and intended audience are their ability to bridge the gap between the technical and promotional, between the professionally knowledgeable and the average public.”  
AASHTO, October 2009

“WSDOT provides excellent public reporting through its *Measures Markers and Milestones (Gray Notebook)* which is aimed at ‘supporting WSDOT’s “no surprises” reporting focus’... WSDOT is a national leader ... in measure[ing] and track[ing] congestion ... the [Congestion Report] provides useful insights to the performance of the agency and the transportation system.”

Washington State Auditor, October 2007 and January 2008

“... Discussion about performance [is] part of the management process and not just a mechanical step of producing a report.”

Washington Joint Legislative Audit & Review Committee, August 2005

“... The *Gray Notebook* is one of the nation’s leading examples of effective statewide performance monitoring. WSDOT continuously improves the *Gray Notebook* to better communicate how it is addressing transportation issues.”

Federal Highways Administration, September 2005

“Washington State DOT’s (WSDOT) Office of Accountability provides a comprehensive performance measurement methodology that frames the strategic decision-making of the entire organization.”

Wisconsin Department of Transportation, June 2005

“TPAB finds that WSDOT has taken the issue of performance measurement and benchmark development very seriously.”

Washington State Transportation Performance Audit Board, January 2005

# WSDOT's performance management and accountability processes and products could serve as templates for other states

WSDOT has learned important lessons in the course of developing its measurement and communication tools, some of which are described here. Many are available on line – check the Resources table on the back cover. Other state DOTs have used many of WSDOT's products and processes as examples for their own work, and continue to seek input from WSDOT as they develop their programs.

The **Gray Notebook** (GNB) provides quarterly in-depth review of agency and transportation system performance and is the basis for WSDOT's accountability reporting. It covers 100+ measures and all aspects of the state transportation system. The GNB uses clear, easy-to-understand language and performance journalism techniques to communicate results to a diverse audience, including the Governor, Legislature, general public, media, federal, local, and state agencies, and transportation partners around the world.

WSDOT engages in quarterly meetings with the Governor and the Executive Cabinet during **Government Management, Accountability, and Performance Program (GMAP)** forums, to discuss high-priority transportation initiatives.

WSDOT maintains comprehensive, public **accountability web pages** that include accountability data and reports, indexed by subject area.

WSDOT supports the Governor's budget office in producing the comprehensive biennial **Transportation Performance Progress Report** on the attainment of the state's five policy goals for transportation.

WSDOT publishes extensive information on the **delivery of capital projects**, including those funded by the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act.

WSDOT leads the nation in systematically analyzing the results of completed safety and mobility construction projects in its **Before and After studies**. For example, one study found that the installation of cable median barriers resulted in a 58% reduction in fatal and serious injury crossover collisions. Another study found that 15 mobility projects increased travel speed by 7 mph and reduced peak period travel times by 15%. Before and after analyses are aggressively being expanded and refined.

WSDOT's **reports on traffic congestion** are recognized internationally as among the pre-eminent congestion and system analysis reports.

WSDOT prepares extensive annual **asset management reports** on the condition of and activities related to pavement, bridges, and ferry vessels and terminals.

---

## Reporting that is timely, accurate, cost-effective, honest: WSDOT examples

### Safety

WSDOT analyzes and reports statewide collision and fatalities information, which is used by WSDOT engineers and partner agencies to make data-driven decisions and deploy the most effective strategies to improve highway safety. Measures include:

**Traffic fatalities** Number and rate of traffic fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles traveled.

**Collision reduction** Percent reduction in injury- and damage-causing collisions following safety improvements.

### Preservation

Annual assessments of pavement, bridge, and ferry conditions are used by agency management and policy-makers to understand and address preservation needs for tens of billions of dollars worth of highway and ferry assets. Measures include:

**State highway pavement and bridges** Percent in fair or better condition.

**State highway maintenance** Percent of targets met.

**Ferry vessels and terminals** Percent of ferry vessels and terminals in fair or better condition.

### Mobility (congestion relief)

WSDOT's comprehensive Annual Congestion Report, covering the Puget Sound and other regions, assesses whether strategies and projects are having an effect on congestion, determines the magnitude of that effect, and helps guide future decisions.

The State Auditor recognized this analysis and reporting as a 'best practice' among state DOTs. Key measures include:

**Travel times** on the most-congested state highways.

**Reliable travel times** on the most congested highways.

**Hours of delay** on state highways.

**On time performance** for WSDOT Ferries System and Amtrak *Cascades* passenger rail

### Environment

WSDOT closely tracks its environmental work, as well as progress and challenges in meeting environmental requirements. Information is provided on key issues such as:

**Fish passage** Number of culverts fixed and miles of stream habitat opened up.

**Stormwater** Number of stormwater treatment facilities built.

**Environmental compliance** Agency compliance with federal and state environmental regulations.

### Stewardship

WSDOT's reporting on capital project delivery covers on time and on budget performance, delivery challenges, and project effectiveness. Key measures include:

**Capital project delivery** Percent of projects funded by the 2003 and 2005 revenue packages, and by the federal economic stimulus initiative, completed on time and within budget.

**Achievement of key milestones** in project delivery.

**Detailed quarterly analysis** of major projects.

# WSDOT is positioned to help support a federal process that works

WSDOT participates in several national forums to advance transportation system performance management and accountability.



**Washington State Secretary of Transportation Paula Hammond** is the president of the Western Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials and chair of the AASHTO Climate Change Steering Committee. **Daniela Bremmer, WSDOT's Director of Strategic Assessment**, is the chair of the Transportation Research Board's Performance Measurement Committee,

and has been invited to Japan and China to share her expertise. She also consults with various AASHTO committees in their performance management work. Both are recognized leaders in the field, and will continue collaborating with other state DOTs to

advance this work at the national level.

Secretary Hammond was invited to participate in President Obama's Jobs Forum on December 3, 2009, where she made a case for both infrastructure funding and accountability. She also actively participates in performance management discussions associated with federal reauthorization.

WSDOT's highly regarded **accountability website** provides one-stop shopping for a broad array of useful information – from performance management reports on specific WSDOT programs, to the latest research on performance management best practices. Washington State was singled out for praise for its web-based accountability information on Recovery Act projects and spending.

WSDOT often hosts delegations from other states and countries to share lessons learned. The agency has considerable experience in advising its peers on **creating and sustaining robust performance management and accountability systems**.

## Lessons learned: What to do and what not to do

Performance management and **accountability initiatives can foster improved management, investments, and efficiency. They can't make up for insufficient funding.**

**There is no "one-size-fits-all" system** or measure. Sometimes multiple measures are needed to clearly analyze service delivery.

It's vitally important to **build performance measures incrementally over time** – especially on a national scale – to establish a solid foundation and a track record of success.

Accountability mandates should adhere to a **"no surprises" philosophy**, be coordinated across federal agencies, and be stable over time.

Performance measures must **reflect the on-the-ground realities of delivering transportation programs**. They should not live in a vacuum or be "measurement for measurement's sake."

When selecting performance measures, it is critical to **understand how they will be used and their relevance for decision-making**. Choosing performance measures just because they are available ("low-hanging fruit") can lead to unintended consequences.

Focus on **long-term trends, not short-term targets**.

To foster success, performance and accountability systems should **provide incentives, not penalties**.

Data for many national metrics are collected differently across states. States should be given time to **develop and implement new approaches to measurement to enable national "apples to apples" analysis**.

The federal government should establish key policy goals and directions, and then **work in partnership with states to develop meaningful measures of performance** in achieving those goals.

Performance **targets should be based on current conditions, federal funding levels, and what is achievable**. Entities that deliver transportation services are in the best position to establish meaningful targets in collaboration with their federal partners.

Developing and reporting good measures, and engaging in **solid analysis, takes time, ongoing management commitment, and consistent allocations of staffing and data management resources**.

Only by making performance measures useful, and using them, will the **benefits of performance management and accountability outweigh the costs** of collecting and analyzing data.

### On line resources

### Internet URL

WSDOT Accountability website

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/accountability/>

The *Gray Notebook*

[http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Accountability/GrayNotebook/gnb\\_archives.htm](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Accountability/GrayNotebook/gnb_archives.htm)

Government Management and Accountability Program (GMAP)

<http://www.accountability.wa.gov/reports/default.asp>

WSDOT Delivers Results folio

[http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/NR/rdonlyres/88F371BD-73B9-4EEB-BC4C-C6C8E816F0C5/0/2009\\_Project\\_Delivery\\_Folio.pdf](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/NR/rdonlyres/88F371BD-73B9-4EEB-BC4C-C6C8E816F0C5/0/2009_Project_Delivery_Folio.pdf)

Transportation Performance Progress Report

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Accountability/PerformanceReporting/Attainment.htm>

History of Performance Measurement at WSDOT

[http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/NR/rdonlyres/91089378-E709-49EF-AE42-AE80BC44A91C/0/TRB\\_Performance\\_Folio.pdf](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/NR/rdonlyres/91089378-E709-49EF-AE42-AE80BC44A91C/0/TRB_Performance_Folio.pdf)

WSDOT Recovery Act website

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/funding/stimulus>

Research papers, including two important TRB papers: *Performance Journalism* and *Making the Case for Funding*

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Accountability/Publications/PerformanceDocuments.htm#reports>

Washington State Recovery Act website

<http://www.recovery.wa.gov/>