



03/01/2026

TO: WSDOT Project Development Engineers,
WSDOT Region RES Managers
WSDOT Region Local Programs Managers
WSDOT Region Construction Engineers

FROM: Mark Gaines, State Design Engineer *MG*
Development Division Director

SUBJECT: Project Delivery Memo #25-02 – Turnback Process

Purpose

This Project Delivery Memo outlines the updated policy and process for identifying and completing Turnback Agreements.

Background

In 2024, a formal process improvement effort was initiated, leading to significant enhancements to the process. Three primary issues of concern were design concurrence, communication throughout the construction phase, and the final transfer of property.

Direction

For all projects that have not obtained Design Approval by the date of this Project Delivery Memorandum, Design Manual Chapter 510 is supplemented with the following:

510.02 Turnback Agreements

510.02(1) General

A turnback is the process where WSDOT transfers properties or areas of right of way acquired for road improvements to a local agency such as a city, town, or county. This process ensures that local road improvements made as part of a WSDOT project are integrated seamlessly into the local infrastructure. See Exhibit 510-1 for turnback procedures.

The Turnback Agreement facilitates this transfer of jurisdiction and ownership from WSDOT to the local agency. Upon project completion, WSDOT conveys certain properties to the local agency by quitclaim deed, prepared by HQ Real Estate Service. The relinquishment (turnback) of property is shown on the right of way plan.

Use logical termination points to set turnback limits. Consult region maintenance, real estate, traffic operations, and the local agency to find the best turnback boundaries. WSDOT must keep

enough right of way for highway maintenance and operations. The remaining property is turned back to the local agency to maintain and operate.

510.02(1)(a) Limited Access in Turnback Agreements

For turnbacks within limited access that are also inside incorporated cities or towns, WSDOT may relinquish any portion of the improvements acquired by the state which are outside the limited access facility. Where limited access rights have been acquired from the abutting property owners, access rights will continue to be required for highway purposes. Therefore, the limited access rights (rights of ingress and egress) will not be included as part of a turnback agreement (see also chapter 47.52 RCW). Unincorporated city or town (county) of limited access facilities, property acquired by the state from a third party will ultimately be maintained or operated by a county as a county road; a turnback agreement is needed.

Title to streets, roads, etc., in a city or town that are within the limits of a limited access facility become the property of the state without the need for a deed from the city or town.

The right of way plans are reviewed against the agreement to verify the location of limited access, the quarter, section, township, and range of all areas to be turned back. When preparing the deed for a turnback, special attention is given to limited access locations. The deed must accurately reflect any limited access areas and any special exceptions, such as easements granted by WSDOT to others.

510.02(1)(b) Managed Access in Turnback Agreements

Where managed access rights have been purchased, property acquired by the state from a third party that will ultimately be maintained or operated by a county as a county road requires a turnback agreement.

Where managed access rights have been acquired from the abutting property owners in incorporated City/Towns, the property becomes the property of the city pursuant to RCW 47.24.020(15) and so noted on the right of way plans. No turnback agreement is needed.

If the property is already owned by the county and is to remain a county road, work is performed under a permit and no turnback agreement is required. If any portion of the existing county road lies within the new state highway, a deed is required from the county for that portion of the county road within the facility, which will become part of the highway. A non-highway property acquired by the state as an uneconomic remainder must be surplus and cannot be part of a turnback agreement.

The right of way plans are reviewed to ensure that the property rights for transfer to the local agency have been acquired, both fee and easement, and that those areas match the

designations shown on the exhibit to the agreement. When preparing the deed for a turnback, special attention is given to managed access locations. The deed must accurately reflect any managed access areas and any special exceptions, such as easements to others granted by WSDOT.

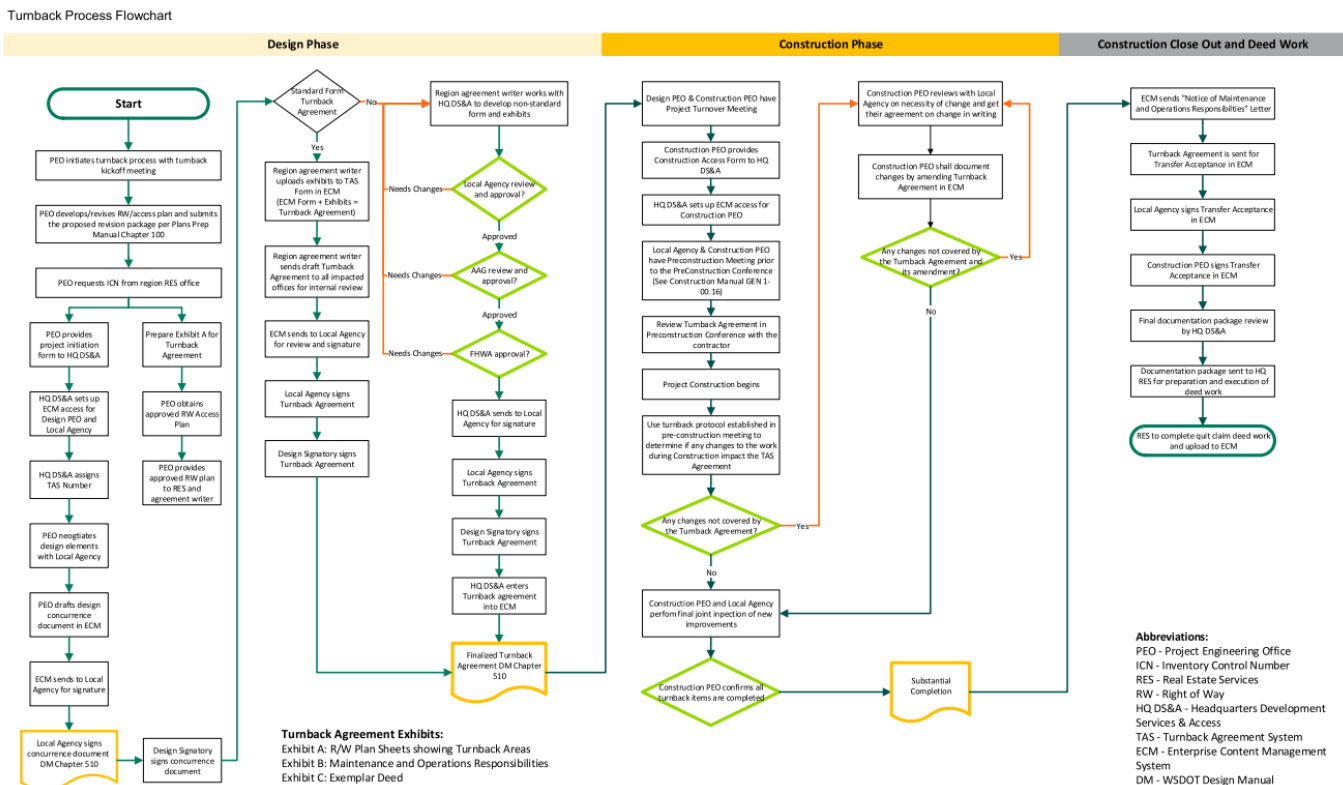
510.02(2) Non-executed Turnback within Project Limits

After a project has been initiated and is in scoping/pre-design the project team coordinates with HQ Development Services and Access (HQ DS&A) Office. HQ DS&A will check for previous existing turnback agreements that were never executed. If there is one within the project limits HQ DS&A will restart the process in ECM. When feasible, and with concurrence from region Program Management, the project team will restart the process and work with the local agency to get an agreed upon concurrence document and ultimately a turnback agreement, following the process to completion.

510.02(3) Turnback Process

The process for completing a turnback is outlined in Exhibit 510-1. The process map and other resources will also be available on the [turnback document SharePoint site](#).

Exhibit 510-1 Turnback Process Map



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510.02(3)(a) Roles and Responsibilities (Standard Form Turnback Agreement)

The turnback process involves many offices and teams. The following are the basic roles and responsibilities of each office or team.

Scoping and/or Pre-design Team:

- Consult with HQ DS&A to identify any incomplete Turnback Agreements.
- Identify the need for new Turnback triggered by the project.
- Begin coordination with the local agency.
- Establish and maintain a Turnback File with all correspondence and meeting notes regarding the turnback area coordination. Transmit this file to the Design PEO at the completion of the pre-design.

Design Project Engineering Office (Design PEO):

- Hold Turnback Process Kick-off meeting (see section 510.02(3)(b))
- Request Turnback documentation initiation in Enterprise Content Management (ECM) system from HQ Development Services and Access (HQ DS&A) Office.
- Request Inventory Control Number (ICN) from region Real Estate Services (RES) office
- Develop a Communication and Coordination Plan with the local agency, outlining the approval authority for the local agency and the type and frequency of communication and meetings.
- Maintain the Turnback File with all correspondence and meeting notes, including any local agency requirements or processes for acceptance of the turnback post-construction.
- Coordinate with the local agency to determine the design guidance to be used within the Turnback area.
- Coordinate with local agency and WSDOT Region Utility Office to determine if any utilities inside the Turnback area will be impacted. If so, gather any necessary franchise, easement, or other accommodation documents from local agency.
- Prepare a preliminary ROW plan showing the proposed Turnback Area for use as an exhibit to the TB Concurrence document.
- Coordinate with the local agency to document their requirements for acceptance of the turnback post-construction, including any local agency specific processes.
- Coordinate with local agency and region maintenance to establish maintenance and operational responsibilities of elements within the turnback area.
- Enter details and exhibits for a TB Concurrence document in ECM. When finalized, the signed TB Concurrence document is included in the Design Approval or Conceptual Design Approval package.

- Prepare a right-of-way (ROW) plan showing the Turnback area in accordance with the Plans Preparation Manual. Create a legal description of the turnback area. The right-of-way plan with the details of the Turnback agreement is a Turnback Area ROW Plan.
- Create an exhibit from the approved ROW plan for the Turnback agreement. Color code as follows:

Red	Indicates access control and access rights to be retained by WSDOT
Blue (light)	Indicates Roadway Facilities and Right of Way to be conveyed in fee to the Local Agency
Yellow	Indicates easements to be conveyed to the Local Agency
Green	Indicates Roadway Facilities and Right of Way to be conveyed in fee to the Local Agency subject to easement(s)

- Provide details of the design elements and local agency coordination to the Region Agreement Writer.
- Review the draft TB Agreement and coordinate responses to all comments from the review cycles.
- Approve the final TB Agreement, along with the local agency, and include it in the Project Development Approval.
- Include all details of the Turnback Agreement, Turnback file, and the Communication and Coordination Plan in the Design to Construction Transition Project Turnover package.

Region Agreement Writer (or other region designee)

- Create the Maintenance and Operations Responsibilities exhibit. Examples are available from HQ DS&A.
- Enter turnback agreement exhibits into ECM and send for review by all parties.
- Incorporate changes into the final exhibits and send for approval by all parties.

Region Real Estate Services (RES)

- Review and provide comments on the TB ROW plan and draft TB Agreement.
- Prepare an estimate to complete the turnback process.
- Provide ICN to the Design PEO
- Prepare the legal description of the Turnback area.

HQ Property Management

- Prepare and record the Quitclaim Deed.

HQ Development Services and Access (HQ DS&A)

- Support Design PEO through the Turnback Process.
- Set up ECM for new TB Agreement process.

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- Assign the TB Agreement Number.
- Review and send draft TB Concurrence Document to local agency through ECM
- Review and send draft TB Agreement to local agency through ECM
- Support Construction PEO through changes and amendments to the TB Agreement during construction, the Notice of Maintenance and Operations, and the Transfer Acceptance.

Construction Project Engineering Office (Construction PEO)

- Arrange a Preconstruction Meeting with the local agency (Construction Manual Chapter 1)
- Establish regular meetings with the local agency
- Coordinate changes to any work within the Turnback area with the local agency.
- Prepare amendments to the Turnback Agreement, if necessary, for changes to the Turnback area during construction.
- Perform final joint inspection with local agency of new improvements in Turnback area.
- Once the project is complete and amendments finalized, sign the Construction Review and Transfer Acceptance in ECM.

510.02(3)(b) Turnback Kick-off Meeting

The project office will conduct a Turnback Kick-off meeting for all projects with new turnback agreements. The Turnback Kick-off takes place shortly after the need for a turnback agreement is identified, either during pre-design or early in design.

Participants of the Turnback kick-off meeting typically include:

- Design PEO
- Pre-design Team
- Region Real Estate Services
- Region Agreement Writer (or other region designee)
- Region Right of Way Plans office
- Region Utilities
- Region Maintenance
- HQ Development Services and Access
- Assistant State Design Engineer (optional)
- Region Local Programs (optional)
- Region Environmental (optional)
- Region Planning (optional)
- Region Project Development Engineer (optional)
- Construction PE (optional)

Additional participants may be identified depending on the work to be included in the turnback area.

The following subject areas are discussed during the Turnback Kickoff Meeting:

Project Background – Introduce the project to the participants. Discuss the project scope and schedule, including the project background, proposed Turnback area, and any outreach activities that have been completed.

Roles and Responsibilities - Review the roles and responsibilities of each group as described in DM 510.02(3)(a). Establish any specific commitments or needs from the participants. Discuss work orders and charge codes for the duration of the Turnback Agreement process. Determine any internal Scope of Work agreements for the turnback process.

Reviewers and Approvals - Identify which groups need to review the Turnback Right of Way plan, Turnback Concurrence document, and turnback Agreement and who are the final approvers.

510.02(3)(c) Turnback Concurrence document

The Turnback Concurrence document details the agreement between WSDOT and the local agency on design guidelines for the Turnback area. Typically, the local agency's design standards apply to geometric design elements within its jurisdiction.

Local agencies may have their own aesthetic standards. Unless visual mitigation for the project's impact is identified, typically through the NEPA/SEPA process, any aesthetic features that exceed WSDOT's standard design are usually funded by the local agency. An example of an aesthetic feature is an ornamental luminaire.

For projects that include a Turnback area, the Turnback Concurrence document is included in Design Approval or Conceptual Design Approval.

510.02(3)(d) Turnback Agreement System Documents

The Turnback Agreement System (TAS) document includes the Design Concurrence Document, Turnback Agreement with exhibits which are Turnback Right of Way Plans, Maintenance and Operations Responsibilities document, and exemplar deed. The turnback agreement details the specific design elements and layout within the turnback area. The design elements may include alignments and cross-sections, Active Transportation facilities, utilities, drainage features, illumination and signals, retaining walls or bridges, traffic barriers, etc. Collaborate with the local agency to finalize the design layout for the elements in the turnback area.

Plan sheets showing these design elements are included as exhibits of the Turnback Agreement, along with the Turnback ROW plans and the Turnback Concurrence document. The Turnback Agreement is included in the Project Development Approval.

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510.02(4) Preparing for Construction

Prepare and organize the turnback file to be shared with the Construction PEO. Include any pertinent communications and contacts. Construction PEO will request access to ECM Turnback Documentation from HQ DS&A. The Construction PEO will request a Project Turnover meeting to discuss the details of the turnback agreement and communications protocols.

Participants of the Project Turnover meeting typically include:

- Design PEO
- Construction PEO
- Region Real Estate Services
- HQ Development Services and Access
- Region Project Development Engineer (optional)

510.02(5) Non-Standard Form

A nonstandard form of the Turnback Agreement is needed if the standard template language will be changed. This will typically happen at the request of the local agency, but other circumstances may also necessitate a change to the standard template language. The Design PEO provides the details of the requested change to the Region Agreement Writer. HQ Development Services and Access will provide support and review of all non-standard agreements. HQ Development Services and Access will also facilitate a review through the Attorney General's office and, if necessary, FHWA.

510.02(6) Final Closeout Process

Upon completion of project construction, the Notice of Maintenance and Operations Responsibility will be sent through ECM. The department will then request Transfer Acceptance. Per the terms of the turnback agreement, the deed must be recorded within one year of transfer of jurisdiction and maintenance to the local agency.

Questions

For questions or information on how to implement this Project Delivery Memo, contact your ASDE.

MG:jl

cc: Regional Administrators
Assistant State Design Engineers
Omar Jepperson - SR 520 and AWV Program Administrator
Frank Green - IBR WA Deputy Program Administrator
Ricky Bhalla - Puget Sound Gateway Program Administrator
Lisa Hodgson - I-405/SR 167 Program Administrator
Tim Rydholm - Deputy Director, Capital Program Development & Management Division

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