WSDOT

IMPLEMENTATION OF VMT TARGETS AND SUPPORTING ACTIONS

FINAL REPORT | JUNE 2025

Julie Meredith, PE,
Secretary of Transportation

Karena Houser,
Director of Multimodal Planning and Data Division

Title VI Notice to Public

It is the Washington State Department of Transportation's (WSDOT) policy to assure that no person shall, on the grounds of race, color, national origin, as provided by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or otherwise discriminated against under any of its programs and activities. Any person who believes his/her Title VI protection has been violated may file a complaint with WSDOT's Office of Equity and Civil Rights (OECR). For additional information regarding Title VI complaint procedures and/or information regarding our non-discrimination obligations, please contact OECR's Title VI Coordinator at (360) 705-7090.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Information

This material can be made available in an alternate format by emailing the Office of Equity and Civil Rights at wsdotada@wsdot.wa.gov or by calling toll free, 855-362-4ADA (4232). Persons who are deaf or hard of hearing may make a request by calling the Washington State Relay at 711.

Notificación de Titulo VI al Público

La política del Departamento de Transporte del Estado de Washington (Washington State Department of Transportation, WSDOT) es garantizar que ninguna persona, por motivos de raza, color u origen nacional, según lo dispuesto en el Título VI de la Ley de Derechos Civiles de 1964, sea excluida de la participación, se le nieguen los beneficios o se le discrimine de otro modo en cualquiera de sus programas y actividades. Cualquier persona que considere que se ha violado su protección del Título VI puede presentar una queja ante la Oficina de Equidad y Derechos Civiles (Office of Equity and Civil Rights, OECR) del WSDOT. Para obtener más información sobre los procedimientos de queja del Título VI o información sobre nuestras obligaciones contra la discriminación, comuníquese con el coordinador del Título VI de la OECR al (360) 705-7090.

Información de la Ley sobre Estadounidenses con Discapacidades (ADA, por sus siglas en inglés)

Este material puede estar disponible en un formato alternativo al enviar un correo electrónico a la Oficina de Equidad y Derechos Civiles a wsdotada@wsdot.wa.gov o llamando a la línea sin cargo 855-362-4ADA(4232). Personas sordas o con discapacidad auditiva pueden solicitar la misma información llamando al Washington State Relay al 711.

Executive Summary

Reducing per capita Vehicle Mile Traveled (VMT) is a key strategy to decrease greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), as recognized by state law in RCW 47.01.440[1]. The 2023 Legislature allocated $750,000 for WSDOT to partner with the Department of Commerce and Regional transportation planning organizations (RTPOs) to implement and report on per capita VMT reduction targets and supporting actions.[2] WSDOT set aside $50,000 of these funds to support state-level scenario planning and modeling and divided the remaining funds equally among the five affected RTPOs.[3] RTPOs used the funds to improve their travel demand modeling programs and to pilot community engagement strategies. This report provides background on the proviso funding, summarizes initial results and findings from the different regions, and presents recommendations and next steps for continuing VMT reduction efforts.

Background – Legislative Budget Provisos Supporting the Reduction of Per Capita VMT

In 2021[4], the Legislature directed the Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to develop a process for establishing local vehicle miles traveled reduction targets for certain counties, recommend a suite of options for local jurisdictions to achieve the targets, recommend changes to laws and rules to support reduction in vehicle miles of travel, and identify funding requirements for state and local jurisdictions. Figure 1 shows the Washington Counties required to establish VMT Targets.

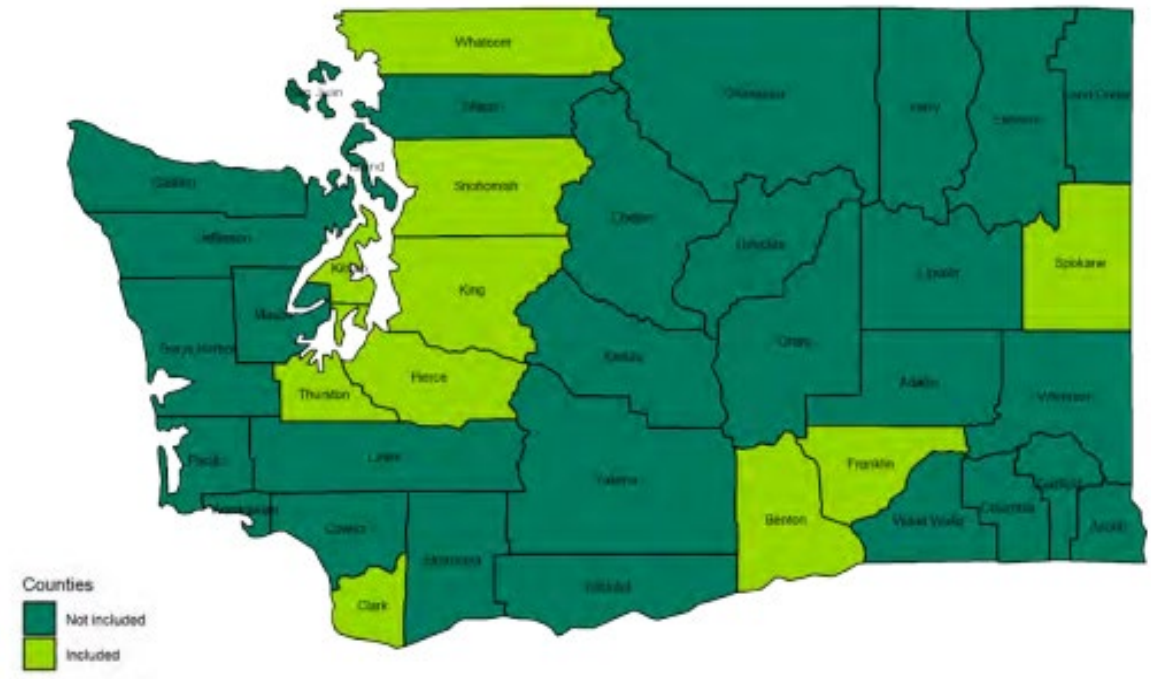
[1] Washington State Legislature. RCW 47.01.440 – Vehicle Miles Traveled Reduction Targets. https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=47.01.440

[2] Washington State Legislature. Engrossed Substitute House Bill. May 2023. ESHB 1125 Section 219(1)

[3] Benton-Franklin Council of Governments, Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Commission, Spokane Regional Transportation Council, Thurston Regional Transportation Council, Whatcom Council of Governments.

[4] Washington State Legislature. Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5165, Section 218(3). May 2021. 5165-S.SL.pdf

FIGURE 1 - COUNTIES INCLUDED FOR VMT REDUCTION TARGETS



WSDOT detailed the results of these efforts in reports published in 2021[5], 2022[6], and a final report in June 2023[7]. The 2023 final report provided a summary of work completed at the local and regional level to address VMT reduction in accordance with the proviso requirements, including a trend of VMT, reduction strategies, engagement summaries, and considerations for establishing a formal VMT program with financial considerations. In parallel to administering the proviso, WSDOT participated with the Washington State Department of Commerce on the development of interim guidance[8] for the new climate element in local comprehensive plans, helping ensure that VMT reduction, multimodal planning and transportation land-use integration are reflected in state planning guidance.

---

[5]Washington State Department of Transportation. VMT Targets Technical Report. December 2021 VMT Targets Technical Report - December 2021

[6] Washington State Department of Transportation. VMT Vehicle Miles Travel Targets – Interim Report June 2022 Vehicle Miles of Travel Targets - Interim Report

[7] Washington State Department of Transportation. VMT Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) Targets – Final Report. June 2023. Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) Targets - Final Report, June 2023

[8] Intermediate Climate Element Planning Guidance, Washington State Department of Commerce, December 2023. https://deptofcommerce.app.box.com/s/fpg3h0lbwln2ctqjg7jg802h54ie19jx

The 2023 VMT Targets Final Report asserted the importance of land use strategies for achieving per capita VMT reduction goals, noting it is not feasible for the state to build its way out of congestion through highway expansion. Land use and development patterns are a foundational determinant of travel behavior, influencing how, when, and why people move within their communities[9]. It is because of this strong relationship that land use must serve as a primary strategy in efforts to reduce VMT and improve transportation outcomes.

In the 2023-2025 Transportation Budget (ESHB 1125), Section 219(1) allocated $750,000 for WSDOT to partner with the Department of Commerce and Regional transportation planning organizations (RTPO's) to carry out the work and recommendations from the Final Report on Vehicle Miles Traveled. The proviso states:

> *"$750,000 of the multimodal transportation account—state appropriation is provided solely for the department to partner with the department of commerce and regional transportation planning organizations in implementing vehicle miles traveled targets and supporting actions. As part of target setting, important factors that must be considered include land use patterns, safety, and vulnerable populations. The department shall provide an interim report by June 30, 2024, and a final report by June 30, 2025."*

An interim report on progress was published in June 2024[10]. The 2024 Report on Implementation of VMT Targets and Supporting Actions dedicated a section to the consideration of land use patterns, safety, and vulnerable populations. The agency has made progress in developing internal approaches to account for land use decisions at the local level and has captured the current land use and zoning structure in draft transportation-efficient location mapping efforts. Land use demographics (such as household size, densities, employment types and number of jobs) are primary inputs into travel demand modeling efforts, which was the focus of much of the funding utilized by partner agencies. WSDOT continues to coordinate with the Department of Commerce on providing guidance to local jurisdictions on strategies to reduce per

[9] Litman, Todd. Land Use Impacts on Transport: How Land Use Factors Affect Travel Behavior. Victoria Transportation Policy Institute. December 2024. https://www.vtpi.org/landtravel.pdf

[10] Washington State Department of Transportation. Implementation of VMT Targets and Supporting Actions – Interim Report. June 2024 Implementation of Vehicle Miles Traveled Targets and Supporting Actions - Interim Report, June 2024

capita VMT, including incorporating Complete Streets, multimodal connectivity, and transportation-efficient communities in comprehensive plans.

Results and Findings

Progress toward Achieving Per Capita VMT Reduction Targets

As shown in Table 1[11], from 2018 to 2023, the total annual VMT for all vehicle types (including heavy-duty trucks) in Washington State has fluctuated. The steep per capita decrease from 2019 to 2020 was likely caused by reduced travel during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2020 per capita VMT has increased each year but has remained below 2019 levels, likely in part due to ongoing remote work practices. Between 2020 and 2023 (post-pandemic period), per capita VMT in Washington State has increased by 7.6%, while population has increased by 3.9%[12]. This data is provided to WSDOT by agencies throughout the state to support federal reporting requirements via the Highway Performance Monitoring System (HPMS)[13.] Continued action and implementation of reduction strategies, including land use changes, multi-modal investments, and increasing transportation-efficient communities will be necessary to reach future reduction targets of 30% by 2035 and 50% by 2050 compared to the statewide baseline as required by RCW 47.01.440[14.]

[11] NOTE: The statewide VMT data presented in Table 1 are derived from the Washington State Department of Transportation's Highway Performance Monitoring System (HPMS) and include vehicle miles traveled by all vehicle types, including heavy-duty trucks over 10,000 pounds. VMT Reduction targets established under RCW 47.01.440 are based only on light-duty vehicle travel. The VMT per capita figures shown in this report do not reflect the statutory target calculations, continued work will be conducted to support monitoring and evaluating progress towards compliance with RCW 47.01.440.

[12] Washington State Office of Financial Management. Total Population and Percent Change. Total population and percent change | Office of Financial Management

[13] Washington State Department of Transportation. Highway Performance Monitoring System Data. https://wsdot.wa.gov/about/transportation-data/travel-data/annual-mileage-and-travel-information

[14] Washington State Legislature. RCW 47.01.440 – Vehicle Miles Traveled Reduction Targets. https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=47.01.440

TABLE 1 - STATEWIDE VMT AND POPULATION TRENDS

Year	Total VMT (in Billions)	Population	VMT Per Capita
2018	62.37	7,427,570	8,397
2019	62.54	7,546,400	8,287
2020	53.51	7,656,200	6,989
2021	57.80	7,766,925	7,442
2022	58.48	7,864,400	7,436
2023	59.80	7,951,150	7,521

Results of Proviso Funding

In the 2023-2025 biennium, the Legislature provided funding[15] in the amount of $750,000 for the Department to partner with the Department of Commerce and Regional transportation planning organizations (RTPO's) to implement VMT targets and supporting actions.

Funding recipients largely focused on improving their travel demand model programs and piloting community engagement strategies.

WSDOT's approach was to pass through funds to five regional agencies, divided equally, with the remainder reserved to support state-level scenario planning and modeling. Five agencies in addition to the Department of Transportation were selected to receive funding[16]:

- Benton-Franklin Council of Governments (BFCOG)
- Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Commission (RTC)
- Spokane Regional Transportation Council (SRTC)
- Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC)
- Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG)

[15] Washington State Legislature. Engrossed Substitute House Bill 1125, 68th Legislature, §219(1), 2023. https://lawfilesext.leg.wa.gov/biennium/2023-24/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/House/1125-S.SL.pdf

[16] The Puget Sound Regional Council declined funds, allowing increased funding availability for other agencies.

Each of the regional agencies received $138,000 through Special Transportation Planning Study Agreements, and the Modeling Analysis Branch within WSDOT received $50,000. Table 2 below summarizes the agencies and the focus of their scope of work.

TABLE 2 SUMMARY OF FUNDED VMT IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES

Agency	Scope of Work	Funding
Benton-Franklin Council of Governments	Implement demonstration projects to increase awareness of VMT reduction strategies; purchase data to support VMT reduction benefits.	$138,000
Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Commission	Study methods analysis and implementation of VMT Targets in support of state requirements.	$138,000
Spokane Regional Transportation Council	Develop a framework to address recommendations from the WSDOT VMT Targets Final Report.	$138,000
Thurston Regional Planning Council	Advance agency capabilities in identifying and reporting on VMT as part of the Regional Transportation Plan Update.	$138,000
Whatcom Council of Governments	Enhance travel demand forecasting model to improve VMT measures and sensitivity.	$138,000
Washington State Department of Transportation	Enhance state models and use of VisionEval for VMT and GHG analysis; support guidance to local agencies.	$50,000
Washington State Department of Transportation	Funds allocated for incidental expenses, including education, workshops, data collection, and report preparation.	$10,000
Total	-	$750,000

Department staff contacted each agency between April and May 2025 to collect feedback and updates on their progress. The results are summarized below.

- Benton-Franklin Council of Governments
    - The Benton-Franklin Council of Governments used funding to launch an outreach effort to coordinate with local jurisdictions on bicycle pop-up demonstrations designed to educate and engage the public on non-motorized travel and VMT reduction. The agency promoted the funding and solicited local jurisdictions interested in the demonstrations.

  - In April 2025, the agency shifted its efforts towards purchasing data (e.g., StreetLight Data) to support VMT and greenhouse gas reduction analysis that would be shared with local jurisdictions in advance of their comprehensive planning efforts.

- Southwest Regional Transportation Commission
  - The Southwest Regional Transportation Commission pursued an evaluation of a range of regional strategies and policies to reduce VMT using the VisionEval platform. These efforts aimed to help RTC and its regional partners with a broad understanding of VMT and GHG reduction strategies and policy options to meet state goals and requirements on climate.
  - SWRTC selected a consultant and is currently in the process of developing the VisionEval modeling tool. The outputs from this effort are intended to assist with evaluating various VMT and GHG reduction policies and cover a wide range of measures on the environment, mobility, health, and equity. The tool is expected to be completed and ready for use by the end of June 2025.
- Spokane Regional Transportation Council
  - The Spokane Regional Transportation Council aimed to develop a framework to address the recommendations in the WSDOT Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) Targets – Final Report, to establish targets. SRTC used funding to secure the services of a general planning consultant to support agency staff with project management, community outreach, review of best practices, assessment of VMT data resources, equity analysis, and the VMT reduction framework.
  - SRTC did not establish VMT targets, but the agency has made progress in developing a methodology to monitor VMT per capita trends, supporting local jurisdictions with their comprehensive plans, conducting outreach, and refining data from the WSDOT Highway Performance Monitoring System (HPMS). Land use was noted as a significant factor in VMT reduction strategies, while acknowledging the agency does not have land use authority. The agency has emphasized the importance of close coordination with local jurisdictions to align land use and transportation goals.

- Thurston Regional Planning Council
    - Thurston Regional Planning Council used the funding to provide support for updating TRPC's regional travel demand model and regional transportation plan to include estimates and a forecast of vehicle miles traveled (VMT) per capita. The VMT Reduction Work Program will enhance ongoing work to update the travel demand model and regional transportation plan. It will also identify different ways to extract VMT from the model and identify the pros and cons of each method.
    - TRPC staff submitted a draft deliverable in March 2025 for review, focusing on three key elements: evaluating options for monitoring VMT in the region; updating its regional travel demand model; and incorporating the analysis into the update of the Regional Transportation Plan. The agency identified six potential sources of VMT data to support this effort, including:
        - WSDOT Highway Performance Monitoring System (HPMS)
        - Household Travel Survey
        - Travel Demand Model – Trip Matrices
        - Travel Demand Model – Trip Network Assignments
        - Google Environmental Insights Explorer
        - Connected Vehicle Subscription Data (Streetlight Data)
    - In summary, no single data source met all the needs. Each method offered tradeoffs between cost, coverage, frequency and accuracy. HPMS data accounts for the entire state and is readily available, but lacks refinement, whereas travel surveys provide a significant amount of data related to household trip characteristics but are costly and infrequent. The use of travel modeling allows for custom geographies and the ability to project future projections but requires assumptions and is a multi-year process. A draft of the TRPC Regional Transportation Plan was made available in April.
- Whatcom Council of Governments
    - The Whatcom Council of Governments used funding to enhance its travel demand forecasting model to improve baseline VMT measures and evaluate the sensitivity

of the model to near and long-term changes that would affect per capita VMT. The agency worked with its regional transit partner, the Whatcom Transportation Authority, local governments, and others to improve its data capabilities.

  - The agency explored using artificial intelligence (AI) to enable permanent traffic counters on the Interstate 5 corridor, in consulting with WSDOT, to track and classify vehicles. WCOG also invested in a regional traffic count collection effort that will be used to support refinements to the agency travel demand model and will be available for use in other agency work plan efforts. Approximately 100 locations are being counted and will be used to refine the network data used in the travel demand model.

- Washington State Department of Transportation
  - WSDOT's Modeling Analysis Branch within the Department's Multimodal Planning and Data Division intended to utilize funding to support the agency's own modeling efforts on VisionEval, a strategic planning tool. VisionEval is a strategic planning platform that evaluates how community development, economic, transportation investments and policy decisions influence impacts on planning, land use, and various community livability factors. The model forecasts how policies and investments interact, such as the effect that parking policies may have on transit use, or how different development types could affect trip lengths, which have a direct relationship with VMT, and cross-departmental efforts related to greenhouse gas emissions. WSDOT invested the funds in a national pooled fund study that provided access to modeling experts with knowledge of VisionEval to provide coaching and troubleshooting to WSDOT as it developed a statewide model. Although WSDOT received the technical assistance needed, FHWA recently canceled the pooled fund study and is in the process of returning the funds to WSDOT.

- Funding Summary
  - WSDOT has reimbursed a total of 56% of the available funding to regional agencies. That number may change due to the date of invoices and consultant billing schedules. The Federal Highway Administration also returned the funding submitted by the Washington State Department of Transportation for participation in the

VisionEval pooled fund[17]. The agency anticipates that approximately 40% of the total available funding will not be spent[18].

- Several factors may have impacted use of the funding, including timing with local and regional planning and travel model efforts and updates, timing and availability of grants to support local comprehensive plans and climate change elements, and the limited funding itself. For WSDOT, the recent service contract freezes[19] also limited the opportunity to allocate leftover available funds for the purchase of professional services.

Next Steps and Recommendations

The 2023 VMT Final Report provided a summary of recommendations that offered policy and regulatory guidance for the agency (WSDOT), Regional transportation planning organizations, and the Legislature. The projects and activities described in this report demonstrate steps in establishing the tools, data systems, partnerships and methodologies to implement per capita VMT reduction strategies. The following recommendations are proposed to increase support for more effective and scalable VMT reduction outcomes statewide.

Building on the 2023 VMT Targets Final Report, the Agency should continue to identify opportunities to provide technical support and guidance for regional and local agencies and incorporate them into transportation and land use plans. This may include partnerships with agencies to assist with the development of best-practice development standards, coordinated comments on local code updates that influence travel behavior, and continued guidance on implementation of transportation-efficient communities. Recent analysis by the University of California's Terner Center for Housing Innovation found that between 2011 and 2019, 35% of all housing units constructed in Washington were built in very low VMT areas – defined as communities where average daily per capita VMT is 12 miles or less. This share increased from 23% in the 2000s. These findings suggest a positive trend towards housing growth in areas that

[17] WSDOT received technical assistance and completed its efforts associated with the VMT proviso funding at no cost due to the returning of the funding from the Federal Highway Administration.

[18] This number will be updated following the June 30, 2025, study agreement deadlines to account for reimbursement requests occurring after the publishing of this report.

[19] Washington State Office of Governor Jay Inslee. Directive of the Governor 24-19. December 2024. https://governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/directive/24-19%20-Freezes.pdf

support lower VMT and reinforce the opportunity for WSDOT and local governments to align housing, zoning, and transportation investments to continue this pattern.

WSDOT will also continue to work on developing consistent metrics to measure incremental progress towards reducing VMT through land use and zoning decisions. For example, agencies could monitor the share of new housing construction and population growth occurring in walkable, transit-accessible areas. WSDOT's ongoing work on context classification and mapping transportation-efficient communities will provide a strong foundation. This work may also be informed by the Terner Center's methodology, which links the built environment characteristics to travel[20].

WSDOT will also explore identifying opportunities to allocate funding and resources directly to local agencies in support of projects that demonstrate their ability to improve or reduce per capita VMT – which can be partnered with projects in receipt of funds from the Washington State Department of Commerce including Connecting Housing to Infrastructure Program[21] or Transit-Oriented Development funding[22].

The VMT proviso-funded work completed during the 2023-2025 biennium reflects growing momentum and ongoing challenges among regional agencies to develop the tools, data, and strategies to reduce per capita vehicle miles traveled. As agencies continue refining their models and planning practices, there is recognition that land use decisions, particularly those that allow for the development of safer, well-connected neighborhoods and communities, are essential to achieving long-term VMT and greenhouse gas reduction goals. Recent legislation in Washington State aimed at increasing housing affordability and promoting transit-oriented development supports a broader transition to transportation-efficient communities. WSDOT has worked to understand how local agencies are approaching VMT reduction, which includes a review of a

[20] Carolina Reid and Shannon Van Zandt. "Building Housing in Walkable Neighborhoods: Are US Cities and States Making Progress?" Terner Center for Housing Innovation, University of California, Berkely. https://ternercenter.berkeley.edu/research-and-policy/building-housing-in-walkable-neighborhoods-are-u-s-cities-and-states-making-progress

[21] Washington State Department of Commerce. Connecting Housing to Infrastructure Program (CHIP). https://www.commerce.wa.gov/growth-management/housing-planning/chip/

[22] Washington State Department of Commerce. Transit-Oriented Development. Transit-Oriented Development – Washington State Department of Commerce

survey[23] prepared by the Puget Sound Regional Council and the Washington State Department of Commerce. The survey received input from nearly 100 partner agencies which indicated that continued improvements to public and active transportation, transit-oriented development, walkability as key to addressing VMT reductions. These findings continue to guide WSDOT and the Department of Commerce in aligning technical assistance and funding with local VMT needs.

Moving forward, continued collaboration and leadership -- in partnership with the Department of Commerce and regional and local governments -- will be critical to supporting transportation-efficient communities, and enabling the implementation of practical, measurable VMT strategies across the state.

[23] Puget Sound Regional Council and Washington State Department of Commerce. (2022). Housing Survey. Seattle: Washington State Department of Commerce. Retrieved from https://deptofcommerce.app.box.com/s/gt9fmhlstj1nark9faknslb3nd2glofl