



MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council Board of Directors  
**FROM:** Matt Ransom, Executive Director *MR*  
**DATE:** March 25, 2014  
**SUBJECT:** **Regional Transportation Plan (RTP): Policy Review**

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***AT A GLANCE***

*At the March RTC Board meeting, members began to review transportation policies which provide the framework for Clark County's long-range Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). This agenda item will allow the Board to resume RTP policy discussions.*

**RTP FRAMEWORK; VISION, PURPOSE AND GOALS: DISCUSSION POINTS**

At the March RTC Board meeting, the Board discussed the Regional Transportation Plan's Vision, Purpose and Policy Goals as the critical elements framing the Plan update. The consistent transportation policy themes found in federal, state, regional and local plans were reviewed. These policy themes are: Safety and Security, Accessibility and Mobility, Management and Operations, Efficiencies, Environment, Community Vision and Values, Finance and Preservation. At the last meeting, the Board was told of Regional Transportation Advisory Committee (RTAC) discussion suggesting that Safety and Mobility are core transportation issues but the two policy issues needing most focus in the 2014 RTP update are Economy and Finance. Economy is a significant policy issue because of the role transportation infrastructure can have on economic development. Finance is a difficult policy issue because of the increasing challenge in funding preservation and maintenance of the existing transportation system as well as transportation capital and operating needs to support a growing population.

Due to time constraints, the RTP Vision and Goals review was not completed at the March Board meeting. In response, RTC staff prepared a follow-up Memo and e-mailed to Board members on March 11. The e-mailed Memo (copy attached) re-capped the Board's March discussions and poses follow-up questions Board members may want to consider before resuming RTP policy discussions at the April 1 Board meeting.

**Attachment:** RTP Update Policy Questions Memo

20140401RTCB\_RTUpdate\_Memo\_Policy.docx



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At the March 4 RTC Board meeting, there was limited time to discuss the Regional Transportation Plan policy background. The Board Chair requested that I distribute a memorandum describing the remaining policy questions for Board members to think about prior to the April meeting, when preliminary RTP policy discussion is set to conclude.

### Board Meeting Discussion Recap:

The Board received a broad overview of, the transportation policy themes: Economy, Safety and Security, Accessibility and Mobility, Management and Operations, Efficiencies, Environment, Community Vision and Values, Finance and Preservation. These are consistent transportation policy themes found in federal, state, regional and local plans.

Regional Transportation Advisory Committee (RTAC) members suggested that safety and mobility are core transportation issues but proposed that the two policy issues needing most focus in the 2014 RTP update are Economy and Finance.

### 1) ECONOMY

**Context:** The eight federal transportation planning factors lead off with the significant goal of having the transportation system contribute to the economic development and vitality of the region as well as competitiveness and productivity of the nation. In this region, we are keenly interested in retaining the range of businesses, industry and jobs we currently have as well as attracting new jobs to the region. The broader region's advantage and dependence on trade and export related industry further serves to emphasize the significance of transport infrastructure systems. RTAC members noted that being able to attract employers and jobs relates not only relates to efficient transportation systems, but also the quality of place in a diverse and healthy community

**Current RTP Policy:** The RTP should “support economic development and community vitality.

### Refinement Questions / Thoughts:

- 1) *How Can Transportation Policies Guide Investments To Best Support Economic Vitality?*
  - o Should economic development be a priority for regional transportation system investments?

RTC Staff generated comments:

Implementation strategies could include:

- Refinement to project prioritization and selection criteria for regional federal funds to optimize economic development in areas defined in local comprehensive plans such as:
  - ♦ Existing GMA growth centers
  - ♦ Access to Port districts
  - ♦ Targeted development sites designated as priority job growth centers by local government
- Evaluating regional revenue sources (local options) that could be focused on targeted investment areas for economic development.
- Strengthening partnerships with local economic development associations and chambers to build a cohesive regional strategy for regional roadway infrastructure investments to priority shovel-ready development sites.
- Developing regionally focused grant strategies (e.g. the TIGER program) where jurisdictions could collaborate on specific regional system projects for funding.

## 2) FINANCE

**Context:** Agency representatives at RTAC were highly concerned about how to meet the growing challenges of transportation system maintenance and preservation as well as funding transportation capital needs into the future. RTAC felt that efficiencies and transportation system management are key related issues.

**Current RTP Policy:** The RTP should “Provide for a financially-viable and sustainable transportation system.”

**Refinement Questions / Thoughts:**

1) *How do we afford to maintain and preserve the existing system?*

2) *How do we meet transportation revenue needs into the future?*

- How should highway programs be funded into the future because gas tax revenues funding the Highway Trust Fund are not keeping pace with need?

**RTC Staff generated comments:**

Methods to address regional transportation system revenue and investment shortfalls could include:

- **Regional:** Development of a regional funding strategy for local option revenues such as a regional gas tax and/or regional license tab fees. These tools are currently being evaluated in other regions of the state, e.g. King County’s Transportation Benefit District proposal to deal with localized needs and to ensure “retainage” of the locally-generated fees/taxes. Many other regions across the nation have developed regionally focused investment / levy strategies for infrastructure.

- State: Any new Statewide transportation revenue bill should provide a fair share distribution to the RTC region as well as local revenue distribution and enhanced local options. In order to advance the region's needs, a unified coalition of public and private sector representatives should coalesce around a discrete set of regional project priorities and advocate for the collective interest of the region with the State Legislature and Governor.
- Federal: MAP-21 re-authorization discussions are already underway with President Obama releasing a February 26, 2014 proposal to Congress which includes fixing the Highway Trust Fund shortfalls and major increases in investment to stem the decline of aged infrastructure. Advancing a regional position relative to federal reauthorization, and working with our state and local congressional delegation may serve to advance the region's interests at the federal level.