



AGENDA ITEM #9

REGIONAL VISION • COOPERATION • INFORMATION

MEMBERS:

- City of Lacey
- City of Olympia
- City of Rainier
- City of Tenino
- City of Tumwater
- City of Yelm
- Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation
- Nisqually Indian Tribe
- Town of Bucoda
- Thurston County
- North Thurston Public Schools
- Olympia School District
- Tumwater School District
- Intercity Transit
- LOTT Clean Water Alliance
- Port of Olympia
- PUD No. 1 of Thurston County

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS:

- Lacey Fire District #3
- Puget Sound Regional Council
- The Evergreen State College
- Thurston Conservation District
- Thurston Economic Development Council
- Timberland Regional Library



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Executive Director

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Thurston Regional Planning Council

FROM: Marc Daily, Executive Director

DATE: May 27, 2022

SUBJECT: Federal Infrastructure and Capacity for Grant Application Processes

PURPOSE

To discuss a Transportation Policy Board (TPB) recommendation regarding a proposal from TPB Chair Andy Ryder to provide staff or contractor resources to support member organizations in coordinating and developing regional applications for upcoming federal grant opportunities.

Summary:

In late 2021 Congress passed, and the President signed, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), the largest federal investment in infrastructure in our nation’s history. The BIL provides \$550 billion between now and September 2026, an unprecedented opportunity to fund infrastructure at levels we have not experienced.

- With this amount of funding to distribute over a short period of time, the federal government will likely increase funding amounts and minimums for existing programs; modify project type and applicant eligibility; add new requirements and focus areas; and develop new funding programs.
- At the April Transportation Policy Board (TPB) meeting, Chair Ryder suggested that the region could benefit by adding short-term regional capacity to:
 - Review, track, and help educate the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) and others on upcoming grant funding opportunities, guidance, and eligible project types/applicants.
 - Review jurisdiction Transportation Improvement Programs (TIP) and the Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP) to identify projects that could be combined into a single regional application that tells a regional story - and meets new funding minimums.
 - Lead development of regional funding applications that combine the priorities of individual jurisdictions.
- Staff discussed this concept with the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). TAC members have expressed concern that this regional staff resource is not needed. TAC members expressed that jurisdictions will apply for federal grants for their priority projects and questioned the benefit and work involved in also producing regional applications that bundle projects. Between the April and May TPB meetings, staff developed two options for the TPB to consider.
- Options, and Pros and Cons
If the TPB and Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC) wish to pursue this regional approach, staff identifies two main options: 1) Hire a part time project position Senior Planner at TRPC or 2) solicit for consultant support.

Option 1:

Staff suggest using a \$100,000 contingency allotment in our recently approved Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP). This staff hiring would likely not be an eligible “project” under TRPC’s next “Call for Projects” slated for fall 2022, but additional funding could be allotted for this purpose as an amendment to TRPC’s current UPWP or by providing additional funding in next year’s UPWP. The \$100K available would provide for about 900 to 1,000 hours of a mid-level senior planner.

Pros: Dedicated resource on this work, more hours for the funds available, ability to add work on other TRPC priorities to this part time contract.

Cons: Finding a qualified candidate willing to take a part-time project position could be challenging. A staff person is less able to spread the hours out over a longer period of time like a consultant could. To bring on staff, a two-year commitment to the project position would be preferable, but only \$100K is currently available. A single staff person does not bring a diversity of experience that a contractor with staff of multiple disciplines could provide.

Option 2:

TRPC could use the \$100,000 to hire a consultant to perform the coordination and grant application support scope of work. Based on a review of recent available contractor proposals, we estimate a billing rate range of \$125- \$150/hour. At that rate, the \$100K would provide about 600-700 hours of consultant time and 100 hours of a TRPC Senior Planner to manage the consultant agreement.

Pros: Contractors could bring a diversity of staff (e.g., planners, engineers, technical writers), which could be helpful in application development. Contractors could have a depth of federal grant experience that surpasses that of a single staff person hired by TRPC. Contractors are better able to account for the peaks and down times in work than a staff person. If no more funds are allocated after the \$100K, we would avoid laying off a temporary employee.

Cons: Fewer hours available to do the scope of work. Staff resources are required to develop the Request for Proposal (RFP), negotiate agreement, monitor, and direct work – therefore, this poses an additional staff burden on TRPC.

- In the interim between the April and May meeting, TRPC discussed this proposal with the TAC and others. Some concerns noted:
 - The jurisdictions have competent grant writers who successfully bring grant awards to their communities.
 - Jurisdictional staff know their project details and engineering requirements much better than TRPC staff or a consultant.
 - Jurisdictions must be able to submit their priorities.
 - This approach may favor urban over rural projects.
 - The time required by jurisdiction staff to support the work at TRPC to produce regional applications would require a duplication of jurisdictional staff work, without commensurate benefit.
- At the May TPB meeting, the Board discussed the options and concerns. Chair Ryder and others emphasized that the federal government is seeking "transformational" projects and that a regional project may compete better than a smaller individual project - especially with minimums raised to \$1M for planning projects and \$5M for construction projects. A process might be:
 - Each jurisdiction would be responsible for the details of their portion of a larger project, but TRPC/Consultant could combine those detailed pieces into a coherent joint project that could compete better. For example, the story could include Sustainable Thurston and how these jurisdictionally conceived projects all fit into a cohesive whole while recognizing the needs, preferences, and conditions in a specific jurisdiction.
 - While a Rainier or Tenino project might not compete well individually, a package of rural projects (comparable to the one proposed in our 2021 Legislative priorities package) that tell a story about state highways as main streets, safety on rural roads, and focus on the planning work already completed may stand out.
- At May meeting, the Transportation Policy Board took action to recommend Option 1 to the Regional Council for further discussion and possible action.

REQUESTED ACTION

Council may take action on the TPBs recommendation to hire a part-time senior planner to support regional grant applications or direct staff to take no further action on the TPB proposal.

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EQUITY CONSIDERATIONS

How has equity been considered in this agenda item?

This agenda item is intended to help ensure that TRPC and our members are well positioned to apply for Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) funds. The resources being considered would help the region, especially our smaller south county jurisdictions, apply for BIL funds. This would increase the likelihood of geographical equity in applying for these federal funds. Additionally, combining projects across jurisdictions, including multi-modal approaches, would benefit underserved populations in the Thurston region.