

Agency: 410 Transportation Commission
Decision Package Code/Title: LA Transportation Online Public Input Program
Budget Period: 2015-17
Budget Level: Maintenance Level

Program L – Transportation Commission

Recommendation Summary

This package will provide the funding necessary to carry out current law requirements and maintain the functionality and use of prior state investments in the Washington State Transportation Commission’s (WSTC) online public input program comprised of an online statewide discussion forum (made up of eight regions) and two on-line survey panels: 1) the Ferry Riders Opinion Group (FROG) and 2) the Voice of Washington State (VOWS). This funding will allow the WSTC to expand the membership of the survey panels, create a more active environment for the online discussion forums, and allow the WSTC to conduct surveys required under law.

Fiscal Detail

Detail by Fund	FY 2016	FY 2017	2015-17	2017-19	2019-21
108-1 MVA-State	258,000	202,000	460,000	460,000	460,000
Total by Fund	258,000	202,000	460,000	460,000	460,000

Package Description

This package will provide the funding necessary to carry out current law requirements, and maintain as well as enhance the functionality and use of prior state investments that have built an asset in the Washington State Transportation Commission’s (WSTC) online public input program. The program is comprised of an online statewide discussion forum (made up of eight regions) and two on-line survey panels: 1) the Ferry Riders Opinion Group (FROG) and 2) the Voice of Washington State (VOWS).

This funding will allow the WSTC to: expand the membership of the FROG and VOWS survey panels - critical to keeping them representative and the data they produce projectable and statistically valid; create a more known, active, and responsive environment for the statewide online discussion forums where Washingtonians can post ideas and ask questions about transportation; and allow the WSTC to conduct surveys required under current law, including surveys that will focus on the performance of Washington State Ferries (WSF), and willingness of ferry riders to pay higher fares in order to sustain the ferry system’s operations. The kind of robust data that comes from the FROG and VOWS survey panels is critical to the WSTC’s ability to effectively set ferry fares and advise the Governor and Legislature on transportation policy and funding matters.

Narrative Justification and Impact

What specific performance outcomes does the agency expect?

With this additional funding, the WSTC will be able to do the following:

- **Conduct annual WSF Performance Surveys of FROG panel members.** RCW's 47.64.355 and 47.64.360 require performance measures and targets be established for WSF. One of the measures required is "service effectiveness" which includes, but is not limited to, passenger satisfaction of interactions with ferry employees, cleanliness and comfort of vessels and terminals, and satisfactory response to requests for assistance. The law requires that customer satisfaction must be measured by surveys conducted by the WSTC's FROG survey panel. These annual surveys will produce comparable, longitudinal, robust, and timely data. The results of these WSF performance surveys must be incorporated into OFM's annual performance report which is required under law to be submitted to the Legislature and must report out on the various WSF performance measures including the FROG performance data gathered.
- **Conduct a Fare Elasticity Survey of FROG panel members aimed at measuring ferry rider's willingness to pay, providing critical data that will help inform ferry fare setting by the WSTC.** While all fare increases result in ridership declines, proper rate setting will still result in increased revenues despite this fact. The resulting data from this survey will be able to identify with a high level of accuracy, the break-points for when fares go too high and cause revenue loss due to excessive ridership declines. The last time this kind of specialized survey was conducted was in 2010 at the start of the recession. It is important that we gather new data on willingness to pay to ensure the WSTC's rate setting process is accurate, effective, and produces the revenue results required in the Transportation Budget.
- **Conduct annual surveys of the statewide VOWS survey panel and increase its membership.** The VOWS is used to test a variety of transportation funding approaches and policies, gather public opinion data on investment needs and priorities, and measure performance of the state and local transportation system. Surveys are conducted annually to provide the Legislature and Governor with timely data to help inform decision making, as well as to produce comparable, longitudinal, and robust data over time so we can accurately measure effectiveness of public education efforts and changes in public opinion and preferences. In order to ensure the VOWS panel is representative and the data it produces is projectable and scientifically valid, we must continually recruit new members from across the state to join the panel and take the surveys. The goal of the 2015-17 recruitment effort will be to add approximately 15,000 new members statewide, taking the panel from its current 60,000 members to 75,000 members statewide.
- **Enhance the value of the WSTC's current online discussion forums by expanding public awareness of the forums and creating a more active, responsive environment**

to gather statewide input on transportation issues. The WSTC has created an online environment in which Washingtonians can post ideas and ask questions about transportation. There are eight regional discussion forums across the state which allow for more targeted, localized discussions of transportation issues. While statewide issues are also discussed in the forums, one size does not fit all in our geographically diverse state. The eight forums have been established to allow for more customized and meaningful discussion. Citizens can go online and post ideas, comments and questions. Forum participants can vote on posts, allowing the top vote getters to move to the top of the list and thus to the top of the state's attention. Annual summary reports will be produced from active forums, providing decision makers new ideas and perspectives. A targeted public relations campaign will occur throughout the biennium in each of the eight regions to get the word out on the forums and encourage participation. VOWS and FROG panel members will also be informed of the forums and will be encouraged to participate and spread the word to friends and family.

The following undesired results will be reduced if funding for this package is provided:

- The WSF performance survey of FROG members will allow the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to reduce the undesired result of unresponsive or ineffective operational changes or mis-targeted investments due to lack of data and rider insight.
- Conducting the fare elasticity survey will allow the WSTC to avoid the undesired result of not raising fares sufficiently or in a manner that would generate the required revenue. It will also allow the WSTC to balance fare increases against anticipated ridership declines so that the overall result is increased revenue.
- Conducting annual statewide surveys of VOWS members and recruiting new members to join the panel, will reduce the undesired outcomes of having data that is not representative of the state of Washington, and having public resistance to policy or funding changes that are not supported by data, public outreach, and education.
- Enhancing the statewide online discussion forums will help reduce the undesired result of stagnation in creative decision making and lack of public impact on long-term decisions and approaches to problem solving.

The following efficiencies are expected to increase as a result of funding this package:

- The WSF performance survey of FROG members will allow the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to more strategically target investments, and make effective operational and management changes. By utilizing the FROG data to identify operational and performance problem areas, WSDOT will be able to apply targeted changes down to the route and sailing time, creating greater efficiency and effectiveness of WSF operations and increasing rider satisfaction. Conducting the performance surveys each year will allow WSDOT to determine the success of the changes made from year to year, track outcomes and performance over time, and uncover new problem area as they occur.
- Conducting the fare elasticity survey will provide greater assurance and confidence in the accuracy of ferry fare setting by the WSTC, strengthening our ability to raise fares

that produce the required revenue levels, without reducing ridership to the point where the state begins to lose revenue, threatening the viability of WSF's operations.

- Recruiting more people to join the VOWS survey panel and conducting annual statewide surveys of VOWS members will provide decision makers with representative and valid data on key areas of transportation, thus informing decision making on transportation funding and policy matters. The VOWS survey panel provides greater efficiency both for citizens and for state government. It gives Washingtonians a "seat at the table" of decision making and leaders have easy and quick access to scientifically valid data from across the state, down to the county level. The VOWS provides unprecedented insight into the priorities and preferences of the "silent majority" – the average person who does not attend public meetings nor get overly involved. But now they can have a say from the comfort of their home or using their smart phone on the go, giving them a voice. This helps to create more responsive policy making that is reflective of the state's majority, rather than the "loud minority".
- Enhancing the statewide online discussion forums will provide decision makers with new ideas, voted and vetted with participants, giving insight to possible new and different ways of improving our transportation system, recognizing the unique needs of the various regions of our state. It allows decision makers to get creative input on a regular basis without spending significant dollars conducting more traditional, in-person open-houses and public input meetings where we often see the same very small group of people, thus inhibiting change and reducing the responsiveness of government.
- With reliable data, efficient and responsive decision making and management is enhanced and its accuracy sharpened. The survey data from the FROG and VOWS panels, along with the input gathered from the discussion forums, allows government agencies and our state's leaders to garner expanded perspective to inform policy and investment decisions, improve public acceptance, and increase public education around state on the challenges faced in transportation.

Performance Measure Detail

No activity measures are affected by this decision package.

Is this decision package essential to implement a strategy identified in the agency's strategic plan? If so, please describe.

Yes, this decision package is essential to implementing several strategies in the WSTC's strategic plan.

- The data gathered from the FROG, VOWS and discussion forums is critical to shaping the WSTC's guidance to the Governor and Legislature, and in formulating the state's 20-year Transportation Plan. The strategies this package is essential to are as follows:
 - Submit an annual report to the Legislature, the Governor's Office and the Office of Financial Management. This report will reflect the results of the Commission's ongoing public outreach, survey data, discussion forum ideas, policy studies, and investigations and will identify critical transportation needs and challenges facing policy makers in the coming year.

- Provide regular communications to the Legislature, the Governor's Office and the Office of Financial Management regarding transportation issues and needs.
 - Update the Washington Transportation Plan every four years to provide a basis for long-term investment and policy planning, and to support the budget process.
- Public engagement and education is a hallmark function of the WSTC. It is therefore critical that the WSTC actively engage the public and stakeholders to provide education on transportation issues and challenges, and to allow for input into the development of the Commission's transportation plans, policies and financing recommendations that reflect statewide transportation needs and priorities. The FROG and VOWS survey panels serve a critical role in the gathering of public input, as does the online discussion forums, and has the additional benefit of doing so very efficiently and cost effectively. The strategies this package is essential to are as follows:
 - Conduct surveys of the Voice of Washington State (VOWS) survey panel and the Ferry Riders Opinion Group (FROG) survey panel to gather data on transportation and ferry policy and investment priorities and preferences of Washingtonians and ferry riders. Also gather ideas and input from online discussion forums. The data from both survey panels and ideas from the discussion forums will be used to inform the Commission's guidance and advisement to the Governor and Legislature.
 - Meet with key stakeholders on a regular basis to strengthen relationships and ensure open communication on various transportation issues statewide.
 - Collaborate with other state, regional and local transportation related agencies to strengthen the effectiveness of system wide efforts aimed at improving overall connectivity.
 - Give informative presentations on a regular basis and participate in other public outreach efforts to discuss transportation issues and solicit feedback from the public.
 - Setting highway tolls and ferry fares is a very important function of the WSTC and carries a significant impact to the delivery of major construction projects and the ongoing operations of the ferry system. To set tolls and ferry fares accurately, effectively and consistently, reliable data and analysis are critical to successfully carrying out the rate setting function. The surveys conducted of VOWS and FROG members on ferry fares and highway tolls provides the data critical to carrying out this responsibility. The strategies this package is essential to are as follows:
 - Conduct surveys of the VOWS and FROG survey panels to gather public input on tolls and toll policy, and ferry fares and fare policy.
 - Set tolls and ferry fares at levels that ensure the state is able to meet its financial obligations and commitments, maximizes system performance and utilization of existing capacity, and is able to deliver on any other mandates as specified in law.
 - Set ferry fares so as to be forecasted to recover that portion of planned operating expenses specified by each year's enacted transportation budget.

- The WSTC’s online public input program is a core function of the agency and is provided for in the strategic plan. Utilizing the online discussion forums and conducting surveys of ferry riders and residents statewide, supports many functions of the agency and is also a stand-alone program providing great value to the Governor and Legislature to inform decision making. The strategies this package is essential to are as follows:
 - Coordinate with the Legislature, the Governor’s Office, and the Washington State Department of Transportation in preparing, executing, and applying survey findings.
 - Ensure surveys provide statistically valid results by gathering information from a representative sample of citizens and ferry customers.
 - Use surveys to gather data on ferry rider and statewide driver preferences and attitudes, gain feedback on policy and funding options, and gather input on operational, pricing and other strategies under consideration.
 - Utilize online discussion forums to gather ideas and input on tolling and ferry fare policies and rates, transportation needs, operations, investments, priorities, etc.
 - Consider survey findings and discussion forum input in developing plans, strategies, policy and fiscal guidance, and decision making.

Does this decision package provide essential support to one or more of the Governor’s Results Washington priorities? If so, please describe.

Yes, this decision package provides essential support most directly to two of the Governor’s Results Washington priorities:

- **Governor’s Economic development priority:**
Increase the speed of Washington commerce. Our businesses and their workers need to move products efficiently and reliably across our highways and railways, through our ports and in the air. Governor Inslee is committed to addressing infrastructure improvements to provide long-term economic growth and a healthy quality of life.
 - This decision package will support the achievement of this priority by gathering and providing statistically valid data reflecting the priorities and preferences of Washingtonians statewide. This data will help inform how decision makers choose to invest in our transportation system across the state, how the revenue can be generated, and what the key investment priorities should be in order to achieve increases in speed and efficiency for commerce and the general traveling public.

- **Governor’s Energy and Climate Priority:**
Clean transportation – The greatest percentage of carbon emissions come from cars, trucks and other transportation-related sources. The Washington State Department of Transportation will lead an effort with other agencies and governments to promote strategies, policies and investments that support electrification of our transportation system, lower-emission multi-modal options, and clean fuels.

- This decision package will support the achievement of this priority by providing ideas and thoughts from the public discussion forums, as well as statistically valid and representative public opinion data that will inform the development of strategies, policies and investment approaches. It will be critical to ensure the public is both informed and involved as the state moves towards a significant paradigm shift in how we view transportation, contemplate modal options, and exercise individual choices around vehicle types and fuel source.

Identify important connections or impacts related to this proposal.

This decision package gives the general public multiple opportunities to get involved in government decision making and provides decision makers with unprecedented data that can be used to inform investment and policy decisions. The surveys provide statistically valid data and the online discussion forums provide ideas and input into important transportation challenges faced across the state. The outcome of this program is positive from the standpoint of the public, decision makers and state transportation agencies.

What alternatives were explored, and why was this alternative chosen?

The WSTC has historically gathered public input via in-person public meetings. While WSTC continues to do this, it is no longer sufficient to rely only on in-person meetings to provide public education and gather public input – largely because very few members of the general public attend public meetings, unless there is a problem. Public meetings are no longer effective as the only approach to gathering input, nor involving the public in major decisions impacting their lives. The most cost-effective and efficient way to engage the highest number of people is to utilize technology and online programs. This online program approach has proven to be effective and is utilized.

What are the consequences of not funding this package?

If this decision package is not funded, the WSTC’s online public input program will cease to exist, with the one exception of the FROG survey panel which has very basic funding provided for in the WSTC’s base budget. But even with this base funding, the WSTC would not be able to conduct the WSF annual performance survey nor be able to conduct the fare elasticity survey.

What is the relationship, if any, to the state capital budget?

There is no relationship to the state capital budget.

Determine which statutes, rules, or contracts might be impacted.

N/A.

Expenditure calculations and assumptions.

The \$460,000 requested is comprised of the following elements and assumptions.

Annual WSF Performance Survey of FROG Panel Members: \$60,000

Covers the costs for an outside market research vendor to work with the WSTC to design, program, analyze, and present the results of two annual WSF performance

surveys over the biennium. Costs are based on the WSTC's 2014 costs to conduct a similar WSF performance survey.

FROG Fare Elasticity Study: \$55,000

Covers costs related to an outside elasticity consultant to work with the WSTC to design, program, analyze, report, and develop a model of the current fare elasticity structure in the marketplace. This study was last done by the Commission in 2010 and costs are based on the efforts done at that time.

Recruitment of additional VOWS members: \$15,000

Covers the costs for acquiring and emailing Washington registered voters, and inviting them to join the VOWS panel. Costs are based on past purchases of registered voter emails.

VOWS Annual Statewide Surveys: \$110,000

Covers the cost of an outside market research vendor to work with the WSTC to design, program, analyze, and present the findings of two annual statewide surveys over the biennium. These costs are based on past year's efforts and represent no increases over the 2013-15 biennium due to program efficiencies.

VOWS quick Polls and WSTC VOWS Project Management: \$65,000

Covers the costs for the WSTC project manager to work on the VOWS surveys listed above and to manage four to six quick polls over the biennium. This request is based on the costs for the 2013-15 biennium and considers an increase in workload to manage the expansion of the VOWS program.

Panel Hosting & Questionnaire Fielding Services: \$60,000

Covers costs related to the private vendor hosting the thousands of VOWS panel members on their servers and utilizing their software systems and programs to deploy questionnaires to the panel members via email. These costs are based on estimates by the vendor for the next biennium and reflect the increase in the VOWS panel size and increase in emailing activities to recruit more VOWS members.

Discussion Forum Public Relations: \$50,000

Covers the costs of a public relations firm to conduct a PR campaign throughout the biennium in each of the eight discussion forums around the state tailored to specific regional issues or projects. Media sources within each region would be targeted to both help get the word out about the forums and to share forum results. These costs are based on a public relations program that WSTC undertook in 2012 for a similar purpose.

Hosting of the Discussion Forums: \$45,000

Covers costs for accessing, licensing and hosting by the vendor who owns the forum software and management system. The costs are based on an estimate from the vendor for the eight regional websites it will host for WSTC.

Which costs and functions are one-time versus ongoing? What are the budget impacts in future biennia?

All costs are assumed to be ongoing.

Objects of Expenditure

Object of Expenditure Detail					
Object of Expenditure	FY 2016	FY 2017	2015-17	2017-19	2019-21
C - Personal Service Contracts	258,000	202,000	460,000	460,000	460,000
Total by Object	258,000	202,000	460,000	460,000	460,000