

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM: POLICIES

Adopted by the Transportation Policy Board on October 18, 2023

INTRODUCTION

In order to demonstrate compliance with federal and state transportation planning requirements, and to ensure that state, local and tribal governments have access to federal transportation funding for roadways, bridges, transit, and facilities for non-motorized modes – the RTIP must include all projects that are funded wholly or partially with federal funds, or are determined to be regionally significant. Though the RTIP is developed in its entirety annually, routine maintenance is required to accurately reflect anticipated federal expenditures, and to provide transparency to the public interested in short-term transportation improvements in the area.

SCOG has identified the following policies to provide guidance for the preparation and maintenance of the RTIP, and to assist in the effective administration of regionally managed federal grant funds. Currently, SCOG manages federal grant funding appropriated by the United States Congress through the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to governments within Skagit County. Specifically, SCOG is authorized to select projects for FHWA Surface Transportation Block Grant Program, Carbon Reduction Program and Transportation Alternatives for the Skagit region. From time to time, SCOG may receive an allocation of revenues from other funding sources (e.g. Highway Infrastructure Program, etc.) for which project-selection authority is also provided.

Policy 1 COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGIONAL PLAN

For a project to be eligible for the RTIP, it first must be included in, or consistent with, the adopted [Skagit 2045 Regional Transportation Plan](#). Regionally significant projects must be individually listed or clearly part of a larger project included in the fiscally constrained component of the plan. Projects that are not regionally significant, but improve safety, increase multi-modal opportunities, or enhance the existing transportation system may be programmed in the RTIP without individual identification in the regional plan, so long as they are consistent with the established goals and objectives of the plan and are funded with revenue identified by the plan.

Policy 2 COMPLIANCE WITH LOCAL AND TRIBAL PLANS

In order to be considered for inclusion in the RTIP, projects must first be included in the project sponsor's Transportation Improvement Program, Capital Improvement Plan, Transit Development Plan or adopted budget. This provides proof of governing body support from the project sponsor, and allows the public a reasonable opportunity to provide input on the proposed project prior to RTIP inclusion.

Policy 3 FINANCIAL FEASIBILITY

SCOG will program funds to projects eligible for Surface Transportation Block Grant Program, Carbon Reduction Program and Transportation Alternatives funds to match expected four-year allocations, based on estimates provided by WSDOT. The Transportation Policy Board may determine it beneficial to program more than the four-year expected allocation.

SCOG will only program projects in the first two years of the RTIP if funding is available or committed to complete the project phase. Project phases in years three and four of the RTIP may not yet have full funding available or committed to complete the phase, but full funding must be reasonably anticipated by SCOG to be made available to complete the project phase.

Policy 4 ILLUSTRATIVE PRIORITIES

Upon adoption of the RTIP, SCOG shall endorse or reaffirm its commitment to seeking resources for regional priority projects not funded within the four-year financial feasibility table included in the RTIP. The endorsed list of Illustrative Priorities shall be used to identify projects to be funded in the event that additional funding becomes available to SCOG, either through higher-than-expected appropriations or new federal grant programs, or from funding that is returned to the Skagit region from any project not able to use its award.

Any project phase that remains on the list of Illustrative Priorities for four calendar years will be reviewed by the Transportation Policy Board, and may be deprogrammed from the RTIP.

Policy 5 UNANTICIPATED FUNDS

When SCOG receives unanticipated funds (e.g. deobligations, additional grant allocations), the Transportation Policy Board can program a project from the list of Illustrative Priorities. If SCOG has already met the obligation authority target for the federal fiscal year that the unanticipated funds are received, they may be carried forward to be distributed at a future call for projects.

Policy 6 ELIGIBILITY FOR REGIONALLY MANAGED FEDERAL GRANT FUNDS

At minimum, any proposed project to improve the safety, capacity, operations, or physical condition of roadways identified on SCOG's adopted regionally significant network are eligible for regionally managed federal grant funds. In addition, projects that improve safety or multi-modal opportunities on routes not identified on the regionally significant network (e.g. sidewalks on local roads, greenways) also are eligible as long as they meet all applicable federal regulations. Certain regionally managed federal grant funds may require additional conditions to be met in order for proposed projects to be considered eligible. Any additional conditions will be identified when SCOG approves updated project selection criteria.

Regionally managed federal grant funds will be awarded to projects that are in locations contained within the geographic area of the associated grant program (e.g. STBG Urban Medium, STBG Urban Small, STBG Rural).

Policy 7 PROJECT SPONSOR COMMITMENT TO PROJECTS

Project sponsors are responsible for ensuring that their project information contained in the RTIP is correct, that it accurately represents the scope of work being performed, and the amount of funding by phase is correct. The sponsor is responsible for providing to SCOG an honest accounting of project details including costs, implementation schedules, and local matching fund sources at the time of the application for federal funds and anytime such details change, or at the request of SCOG.

Policy 8 DORMANT OR INACTIVE PROJECTS

In the event that SCOG does not meet its regional obligation authority target and is at risk of having funds sanctioned, the Transportation Policy Board may take actions including taking back funding that had been awarded to the project sponsors who failed to obligate their projects.

Project phases which have been obligated, and appear on WSDOT's inactive project list, may be subject to deobligation and grant funds returned to the region. This determination is made by WSDOT and FHWA.

Policy 9 COST INCREASES/COST OVERRUNS

The responsibility for any cost overrun on a project already under contract shall be determined by the prevailing contractual agreement between WSDOT and the project sponsor. Such contractual agreements shall not bind SCOG to allocate regionally managed federal grant funds for cost overruns. In cases where a project that is awarded regionally managed federal grant funds does not have sufficient funding to fulfill the scope of the project as originally programmed, the project sponsor may be granted the flexibility to shift funding across phases and/or years (pending the availability of funding) to cover increased cost estimates for the affected phase. Should additional funding be required to implement the phase, the project sponsor will be responsible for securing the additional funding from an alternative source of revenue or compete for additional funds at the next available call for projects.

Policy 10 CHANGES IN THE SCOPE OF WORK

All changes to the scope of work for projects programmed in the RTIP, with regionally managed federal grant funds, must be approved by the Transportation Policy Board through the amendment process. Projects are evaluated and selected based on the merits of the projects proposed at the time the RTIP is developed. Any changes that significantly depart from the original scope may be removed from the RTIP. If the project is removed from the RTIP, it can compete for regionally managed grant funds in future calls for projects.

Policy 11 PROJECT TRACKING

In order to facilitate the implementation of the RTIP policies, SCOG will work with WSDOT and project sponsors to present to member agencies, at least quarterly, a full accounting of the funds obligated for each project and any changes in the status of those projects.

Project sponsors should inform SCOG of any underutilization of regionally managed funds as soon as possible.

Policy 12 RTIP AMENDMENT CYCLES

The Transportation Policy Board adopts the RTIP in October of each year. Amendments to the RTIP are considered on a monthly basis between January and October. The annual schedule of amendment cycles will be established by SCOG prior to the beginning of each federal fiscal year (October 1).

Policy 13 SCOG ADMINISTRATION FUNDING

The Transportation Policy Board directs 15% of annual Surface Transportation Block Grant Program regional funding to SCOG, with this funding used to support the surface transportation planning program of the agency. This SCOG administration funding is programmed in the RTIP October of each year, along with matching funds, using the most recent STBG final allocation to the Skagit region as a programming

estimate¹. An administrative modification to the RTIP will be made by SCOG in 2024, if necessary, to adjust the estimate to 15% of STBG regional funding for federal fiscal year 2024, following SCOG receipt of the final STBG allocation for the federal fiscal year, which is typically received from WSDOT early each calendar year.

¹ The initial estimate for SCOG administration funding in the 2024–2029 RTIP is based on the 2022 STBG federal fiscal year allocation, instead of the 2023 allocation. SCOG has determined the 2022 allocation is a more accurate estimate of funding expected in 2024 due to the 2023 allocation being significantly reduced because of a nationwide STBG federal funding reduction experienced earlier this year.