

The role of MPOs and RTPOs in informing transportation investments

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What is an MPO and RTPO?

Under state and federal law, Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) across the state work with cities and counties, state agencies, tribal governments, transit agencies, port authorities and other stakeholders to identify transportation investment priorities, develop transportation plans, and secure funding for transportation infrastructure and services. MPOs are agencies created by federal law to guide investment of federal transportation funds to areas with a population of over 50,000. An RTPO is a voluntary association of local governments, enabled under the state Growth Management Act, created to coordinate state and local planning for regional transportation systems.

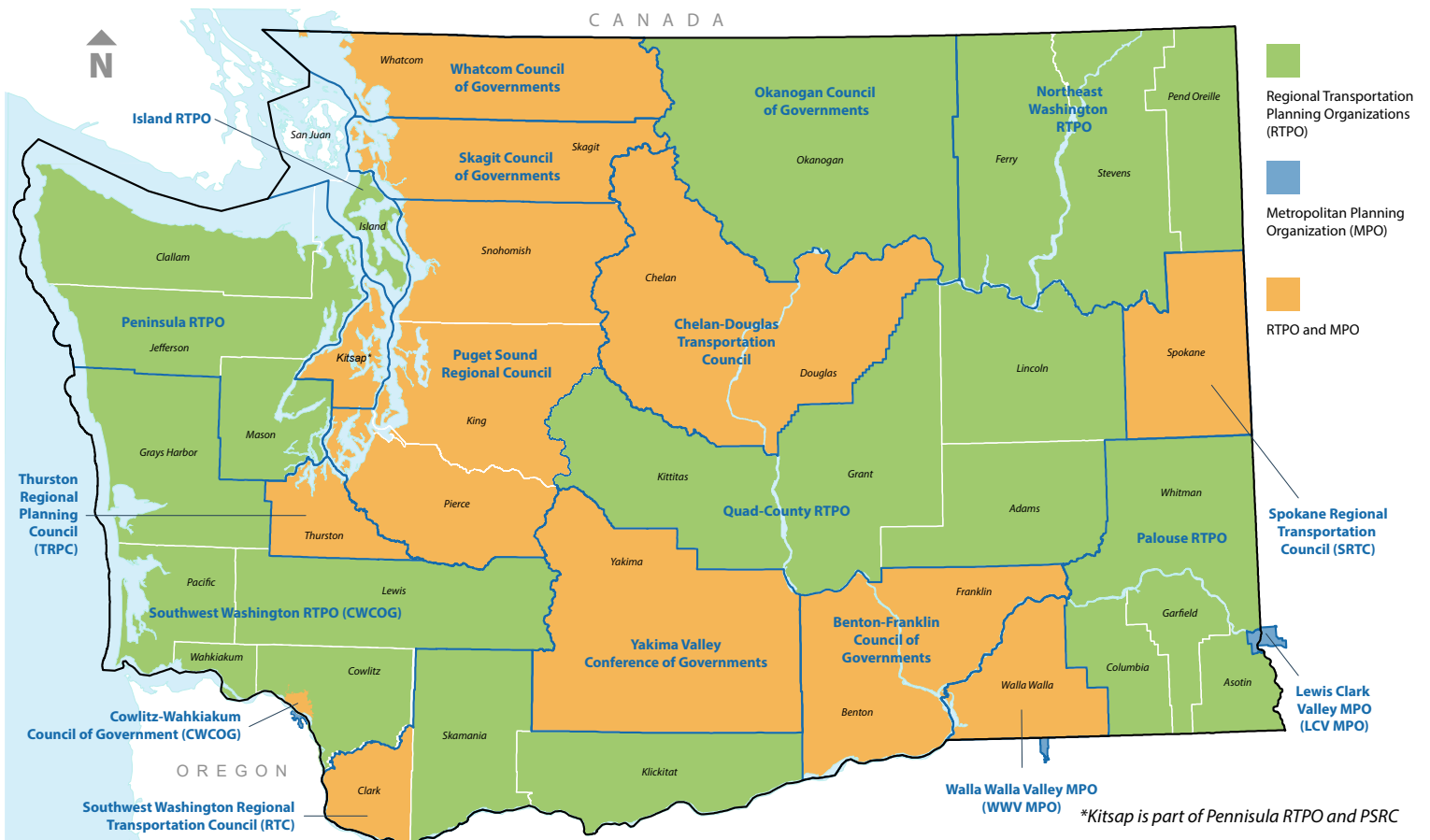


What do MPOs & RTPOs do?

RTPOs and MPOs have a unique, regional perspective that is vital to understanding the state of transportation in Washington and the needs and priorities of the local communities and regions they serve. MPOs and RTPOs collaborate with WSDOT, transit agencies and other transportation stakeholders to develop long-range transportation plans and establish regional transportation investment priorities. MPOs and RTPOs strive to build consensus on transportation investment priorities through:

- Developing fiscally-constrained regional transportation plans.
- Informing statewide transportation investment priorities.
- Performing transportation studies and data analysis.
- Prioritizing regional projects and programs for funding.
- Council's of Government (COGs) are sometimes created to convene regional stakeholders to develop plans relating to land use, environment, and economic development across jurisdictions. In some regions, these COGs can act as an RTPO.

Washington state is made up of the following RTPOs and MPOs:



How do MPOs and RTPOs prioritize transportation investments?

MPOs and RTPOs often differ in their approach to identifying investment priorities for their region. Many of the MPOs and RTPOs work with their communities, committees, boards, and other organizations to create a priority project list or legislative policy statements. Others simply use the established Regional Transportation Plan list. Sometimes, MPOs and RTPOs respond to direct requests from state agencies or legislators to identify regional transportation priorities for specific purposes. These local priorities offer insight into potential state priorities that WSDOT and the Legislature can include in their State Transportation Plan.

In addition to planning and investment prioritization, some MPOs and RTPOs also work to secure funding to implement the transportation strategies in regional plans. The flow chart below illustrates this process.



What funding can MPOs and RTPOs help access?

Certain federal funds for transportation projects and programs are channeled through MPOs, who award them to local jurisdictions, transit agencies and other entities. Other federal funds are awarded to local jurisdictions by WSDOT, but those awards must also be approved by MPOs through the regional Transportation Improvement Program. Some funding sources may come through one-time funding packages, programmatic funding opportunities, and grant funding.

STATE BUDGET PROCESS

During the biennial budget cycle, most MPOs and RTPOs strive to work with WSDOT, the Governor's Office, and the Legislature to develop a 24-month state transportation budget. The budget process determines the funding allocation for a large portion of projects that occur within the MPOs and RTPOs. This process starts in May the year prior and ends in May before the upcoming fiscal year, which begins July 1. However, this process is a continuous cycle and moves through several phases at the same time.

LEGISLATIVE CYCLE

The Legislative Cycle is between January and April (odd years) or February and March (even years). New revenue identified by the legislature follows a different process for approval, and generally occurs in the form of large investment packages about every 10 years.

Throughout the year, MPOs and RTPOs convene consensus-building processes amongst stakeholders within their planning area boundaries to align regional transportation investment priorities. This commitment to collaboration and communication helps provide a regional lens for the budget development process. During the budget process, MPOs and RTPOs have several opportunities to inform the state on regional transportation needs.



For more information, visit the WSDOT Directory:

wsdot.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2021-10/WSDOT-Directory-MPO-RTPO.pdf

Questions? Contact: **Joseph Coppo** WSDOT Senior Multimodal Planner
coppoj@wsdot.wa.gov | 360-742-9446 | wainvestmentstrategy.org