



STATE OF WASHINGTON
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April 4, 2025

TO: Honorable Jake Fey
Honorable Andrew Barkis
House Transportation Committee

Honorable Marko Liias
Honorable Curtis King
Senate Transportation Committee

FROM: K.D. Chapman-See
Director

SUBJECT: OFM CONCERNS WITH HOUSE AND SENATE 2025-27 TRANSPORTATION BUDGETS

Thank you for your continued partnership as we work together to finalize the 2025 supplemental and 2025-27 biennial transportation budgets. The biennial budget presents extraordinary challenges, and we recognize the thoughtful work and diligence each of your proposals represent. We value your collaboration and the engagement occurring between the legislative and executive branches. As work toward reaching a final budget agreement begins, I want to highlight a few critical considerations.

It is important to prioritize limited resources to maintaining and preserving our existing infrastructure, restoring ferry service, keeping our roadways safe with adequate patrolling, and meeting our legal responsibilities. New spending should be restrained to only what is most necessary to maintain current services and the most critically needed new investments. We cannot expand or add new programs and projects at the expense of inadequately funding core agency functions and infrastructure in ways that may undermine our ability to effectively serve the public or create legal or financial risk to the state.

That said, we must also recognize the full cost of work created by new legislation. Not fully funding new legislation hinders agencies' ability to successfully deliver on their missions, particularly while they are faced with taking on efficiencies and savings in their base budgets. If we cannot afford to pay for the full cost of new legislation, we should reconsider whether that legislation is necessary.

As we move forward, I want to clarify the scope and intent of the remainder of this memorandum. It does not detail every difference between the proposed budgets; rather, it highlights significant areas warranting your careful consideration. We will also submit a variety of specific policy and technical issues to you and your staff. Thank you again for your continued partnership and thoughtful consideration of these concerns.

Department of Transportation, Additional Vessel Crew

The state's ferries play a major role in our transportation system. Governor Inslee's budget and the Senate budget include sufficient funding for crew above Certification of Inspection (COI). The House budget did not include this vital funding, without which state ferries and Washingtonians will likely experience delayed and cancelled routes.

Department of Transportation, Kitsap Transit Passenger Ferry and King County Water Taxi

Passenger ferry services are a necessary part of daily life for many Washingtonians. Without state funding, there will be a reduction in service, impacting people traveling to work, school, and health appointments. While WSF intends to restore service to pre-pandemic levels in the summer of 2025, service reliability remains precarious with only 21 aging vessels in the fleet. Passenger-only ferry service should be maintained through the biennium to support commuters who are dependent on ferries.

Department of Transportation, Credit Card Recovery Fees

Both the House and Senate proposed budgets direct WSF to recoup 3% in credit card and other financial transaction costs from ferry fare collection. The House budget directs the agency to have this implemented beginning October 1, 2025. WSF will not be able to implement this change in such a short time frame. We recommend a March 1, 2026, implementation date.

Department of Transportation, Capital Program, Bonds

WSDOT may not have sufficient expenditures to meet bond eligibility requirements. Historically, WSDOT Local Programs has not sold bonds to support construction projects, as the program has not had expenditures that align with the criteria necessary for bond issuance. Without meeting these eligibility requirements, the department may face challenges in leveraging bonds for future projects.

Department of Transportation, Graffiti Activity Monitoring

The House budget requires the department to appoint a current full-time equivalent employee at two traffic management centers to monitor traffic cameras for graffiti activities on state highway infrastructure without providing funding for new FTEs. This workload cannot be absorbed by the current, already limited staffing in the traffic management centers.

Department of Transportation, Truck Parking Availability System (L1000375)

Governor Inslee's proposed budget and the Senate budget included \$6.9 million for the development and implementation of a technology-based truck parking availability system along the I-5 corridor, in partnership with Oregon and California. Since the three states were awarded a \$12.3 million federal Nationally Significant Multimodal Freight & Highway Projects (INFRA) grant in January 2024, full state funding is necessary to meet federal grant requirements and ensure full project compliance.

Washington State Patrol, Anticipated Trooper Vacancies and Non-Field Force Vacancies

The Senate and House budgets both include reductions to WSP for vacancy savings, while also providing contingency funds to address emergent issues. The contingency funds provided do not give WSP enough flexibility to effectively address these challenges. Relying on vacancy savings to balance budgets creates significant hurdles in filling mission-critical positions, responding to unpredictable emergency service events, and meeting long-term strategic goals.

Washington State Patrol, Wide Area Network/Local Area Network (WAN/LAN) Lifecycle

The House budget fails to provide the critical funding needed for the Wide Area Network/Local Area Network (WAN/LAN) system, which is the backbone of communications providing physical and virtual links and services to over 70 WSP locations across the state. Since its inception in 2016, the system has not kept pace with advancing technologies, resulting in over 200 unsupported devices and an increasing number of system failures. Without full funding, WSP's ability to provide essential services like electronic ticketing, firearms background checks, criminal records processing, collision investigations, sexual assault kit processing, and computer-aided dispatch will be compromised, leading to system failures, reduced response capabilities, and a strain on resources that are already stretched thin.

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Department of Licensing, REAL ID Driver Licensing Office Adjustment

The Senate budget reduces 55 of the 80 positions currently in place to meet demand for REAL ID licenses. This has the potential for major impacts to customer service at driver licensing offices and will result in longer wait times, fewer available appointments, slower processing times, and increased customer complaints.

We appreciate your continued support for the ferry system through additional workforce, capital investments in sustainable electric-hybrid ferries, and funding for additional trooper classes. We also appreciate that both chambers proposed additional funding to meet our legal responsibility to comply with the permanent fish passage injunction.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to continuing discussions with you and your staff as you work on the final budget.

cc: Kelly Simpson, Staff Coordinator, Senate Transportation Committee
Mark Matteson, Staff Coordinator, House Transportation Committee
Robyn Williams, Budget Director, Office of Financial Management
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