

2023 Regional Transportation Plan



Chapter 1

Toward a Connected Region

2023 Regional Transportation Plan

July 10, 2023 PUBLIC REVIEW DRAFT

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PURPOSE

Metro is the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) designated by Congress and the State of Oregon, for the Oregon side of the Portland-Vancouver urbanized area, serving 1.7 million people living in the region's 24 cities and three counties. As the MPO, Metro formally updates the Regional Transportation Plan every five years in cooperation and coordination with the region's cities, counties, the Port of Portland, the Oregon Department of Transportation, transit providers and other partners.

The Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) is a blueprint to guide investments in motor vehicle, transit, bicycle, and walking travel options and the movement of goods and freight throughout the greater Portland region. The plan identifies the region's most urgent transportation needs and priorities with the revenues the region expects to have available over the next 22 years to make those investments a reality. It also establishes goals and policies to help meet those needs and guide priority investments. More resources will be needed to achieve the plan's vision and address the challenges of a growing, thriving region.

The policies, projects, and programs in the 2023 RTP helps move the region closer to safe, reliable, healthy and affordable transportation system that is environmentally responsible, efficiently moves products to market, and ensures all people can connect to the education and work opportunities they need to experience and contribute our region's economic prosperity and quality of life. Implementing the plan, will take sustained, focused work from every partner in the region.

Chapter organization

This chapter is organized into the following sections:

- 1.1 Introduction:** This section broadly describes the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and trends and challenges facing the region that were the focus of this update.
- 1.2 Geographic setting:** This section describes the geographic context of the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan region.
- 1.3 Metropolitan transportation planning process:** This section describes Metro's role in transportation planning and planning areas of responsibility to address state and federal requirements.
- 1.4 Process and engagement overview:** This section describes the timeline and process for developing the 2023 Regional Transportation Plan.
- 1.5 What's next moving forward:** This section provides a brief introduction to the rest of the plan.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The 2023 Regional Transportation Plan demonstrates the need for continued investment to build, operate and maintain the regional transportation system we need for all travelers and to meet the region's equity, safety, climate, mobility and economic goals.

The 2023 Regional Transportation Plan defines a shared vision and investment strategy that guides investments to keep people connected and commerce moving throughout the greater Portland region. The plan is updated every five years to stay ahead of future growth and address trends and challenges facing the region.

The greater Portland region continues to grow and change, requiring new and expanded transportation options while maintaining the system of today. One-half million new residents are expected to live in the Portland region by 2045 – about half from growing families. Communities are becoming more racially and culturally diverse, and the aging population is growing. People are shopping and working in new ways that will require different transportation solutions.

We are at a pivotal moment. The greater Portland region is facing urgent global and regional challenges. Climate change is happening faster than predicted and the transportation system is not fully prepared for the expected Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake. Technological changes in transportation, communication and other areas are radically altering our daily lives.

The impacts of climate change, generations of systemic racism, economic inequities and the pandemic have made clear the need for action. Systemic inequities mean that communities have not equally benefited from public policy and investments, and our changing climate and the pandemic has exacerbated many disparities that Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) communities, Federally recognized tribes, people with low income, women and other marginalized populations already experience. Safety, housing affordability, homelessness, and public health and economic disparities have been intensified by the global pandemic and continue to be of concern.

As the greater Portland region continues to emerge from the disruptions of the pandemic and respond to other urgent trends and challenges, this RTP provides an opportunity for all levels of government to work together to deliver a better transportation future.

The plan takes into account the changing circumstances and challenges facing our growing region and addresses them directly, adopting new approaches for addressing mobility and prioritizing investments to advance transportation equity, climate, safety,

mobility and economic goals. The goals, policies, projects, and strategies in this plan also address federal, state and regional planning requirements based on our shared values and the outcomes we are trying to achieve as a region, including implementation of the 2040 Growth Concept.

1.2. GEOGRAPHIC SETTING

The Portland-Vancouver metropolitan region is part of the broader Pacific Northwest region, also called Cascadia. Shown in **Figure 1.1**, the Pacific Northwest encompasses most of British Columbia, Washington, Oregon and adjoining parts of Alaska, Montana and California.

Figure 1.1 Portland-Vancouver metropolitan region geographic context



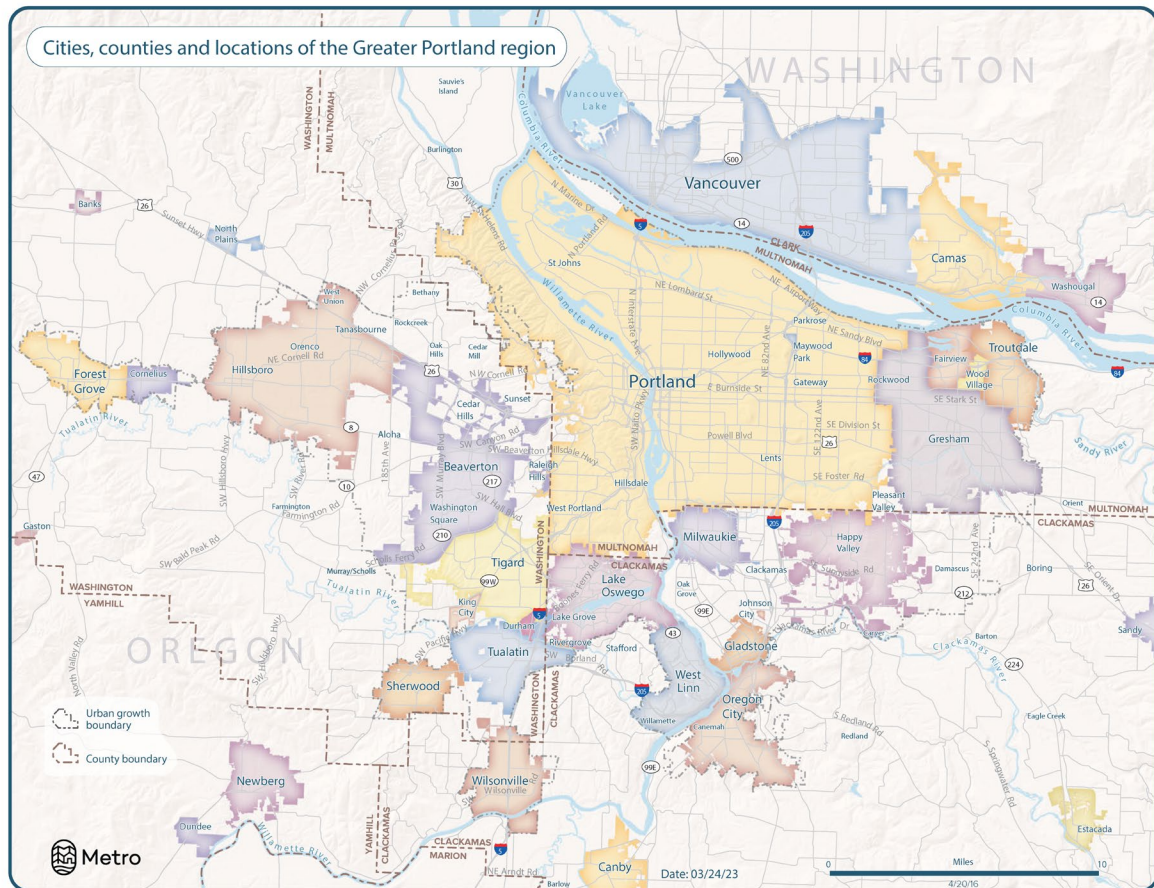
Linked together by a rich and complex natural environment, abundant recreational opportunities and major metropolitan areas, the Pacific Northwest serves as a global gateway for commerce and tourism, connecting to other Pacific Rim countries and the rest of the United States.

The greater Portland region is situated at the northern end of the Willamette Valley, a fertile river valley surrounded by dramatic natural features, with the Coast Range to the west, the Cascade Range to the east, and the Columbia River to the north (including the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic area). Several snow-capped mountains are visible from different vantage points in the region, including Mt. Hood, Mt. St. Helens, Mt. Rainier, and Mt. Adams. Within the region, rivers, streams, wetlands, buttes, forest lands, meadows and rolling to steep hillsides dominate the natural landscape. Outside the urban growth boundary, agricultural lands and other natural landscape features influence the sense of place for the greater region.

Although not the largest gateway on the U.S. West Coast, the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan region is one of four international gateways on the West Coast, including the Puget Sound, the San Francisco Bay area and Southern California. In this role, the region serves as a gateway to domestic and international markets for businesses located throughout the state of Oregon, Southwest Washington, the Mountain states and the Midwest. Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington counties also play a significant role in the state's agricultural production. The economy of our region and state depend on our ability to support the transportation needs of these industries and provide reliable access to gateway facilities.

The Oregon side of the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan region encompasses 24 cities and the urban areas of three counties as shown in **Figure 1.2**. Metro's urban growth boundary and jurisdictional boundaries are shown in **Figure 1.5**.

Figure 1.2 Cities and counties of the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan region



1.3 METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION PLANNING PROCESS

Since 1979, Metro has been the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) designated by Congress and the State of Oregon, for the Oregon portion of the Portland-Vancouver urbanized area, covering 24 cities and three counties with a population of 1.7 million. It is Metro's responsibility to meet the requirements of federal laws and regulations, the Oregon Transportation Planning Rule (which implements Statewide Planning Goal 12), the Oregon Metropolitan Greenhouse Gas Reduction Targets Rule, and the Metro Charter for the MPO area. Together, these requirements call for development of a multimodal transportation system plan that is integrated with and determined by the region's land use plans, and meets federal and state planning requirements.

Metro uses a federally mandated decision-making framework, called the metropolitan transportation planning process, to guide its regional transportation planning and programming activities. This planning process requires all urbanized areas with populations over 50,000 to have a MPO to coordinate transportation and air quality planning and programming of federal transportation dollars within their boundaries. These activities must address the seven national goal areas and consider projects and strategies that address the ten federal planning factors shown in **Figure 1.3**.

The national goal areas and planning factors are addressed throughout the RTP and appendices, including the plan's goals and objectives (Chapter 2), policies to guide development and implementation of the plan (Chapter 3), existing system performance (Chapter 4), financing the region's investment priorities (Chapter 5), the region's investment priorities (Chapter 6), expected performance (Chapter 7) and planned implementation and monitoring activities (Chapter 8).

Figure 1.3 National goal areas and federal planning factors¹



MPOs have responsibility for maintaining the region’s congestion management process and implementing federal performance-based planning requirements that tied to the national goal areas. MPOs are required to establish targets related to safety, bridge and pavement condition, air quality, freight movement, and performance of the National Highway System, and to use performance measures to track their progress toward meeting those targets. **Appendix L** of the RTP documents the region’s approach to addressing the federal transportation performance-based planning and congestion management requirements.

As the designated MPO for the Oregon portion of the Portland-Vancouver region, Metro is responsible for coordinating development of the RTP in cooperation with the region’s transportation providers —the 24 cities and three counties in the metropolitan planning area boundary, the Oregon Department of Transportation, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, Port of Portland, Port of Vancouver, TriMet, South Metro Area Regional Transit (SMART), Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council (RTC), Washington Department of Transportation and other Clark County governments. The process also includes opportunities for open, timely and meaningful involvement of the public, and requires comprehensive consideration of the link between transportation and other regional goals for land use, the economy and the environment, including public health, safety, mobility, accessibility and equity. Public engagement and consultation that shaped development of the 2023 RTP are summarized in this chapter with more details provided in **Appendix D** of the RTP.

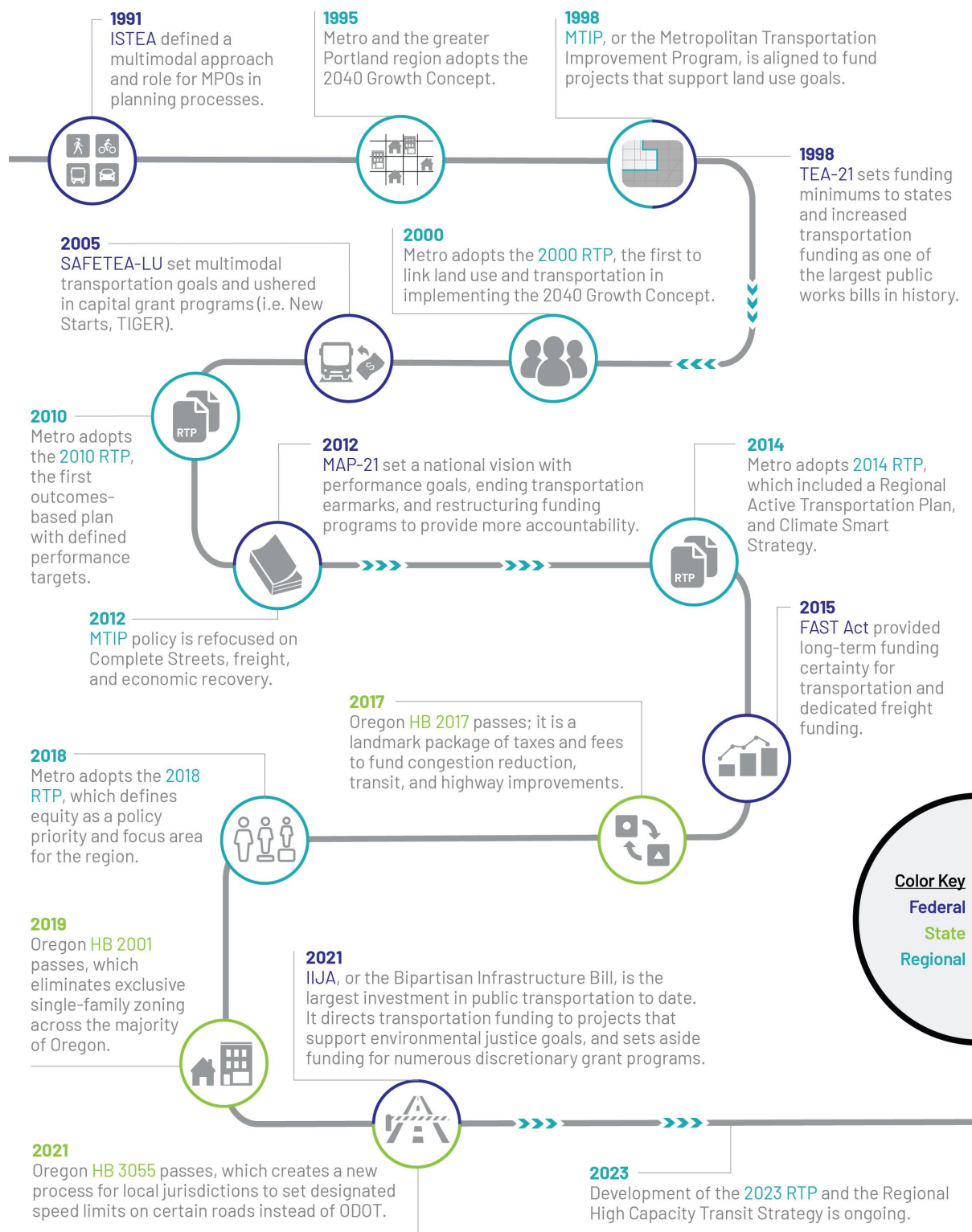
¹ <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-23/chapter-I/subchapter-E/part-450/subpart-C>

The Metro Council adopted the first RTP in 1983. As a cornerstone of the metropolitan transportation planning process, the RTP provides a long-range blueprint for transportation in the Portland metropolitan region with a 20-year minimum time horizon. The RTP is updated every five years to reflect changing conditions in the region and respond to new federal and state regulatory developments.

Under state law, the RTP serves as the region's regional transportation system plan (TSP), consistent with Statewide Planning Goals and the [Oregon Transportation Planning Rule](#) (TPR). State law establishes requirements for consistency of plans at the state, regional and local levels. The RTP must be consistent with the Oregon Transportation Plan, state modal and facility plans that implement the Oregon Transportation Plan, the Oregon Transportation Planning Rule and the [Metropolitan Greenhouse Gas Reduction Targets Rule](#). Local plans must be consistent with the RTP. Projects and programs must be in the RTP's Financially Constrained System to be eligible for federal and state funding.

Figure 1.4 illustrates how federal and regional transportation policies have evolved since the 1990s.

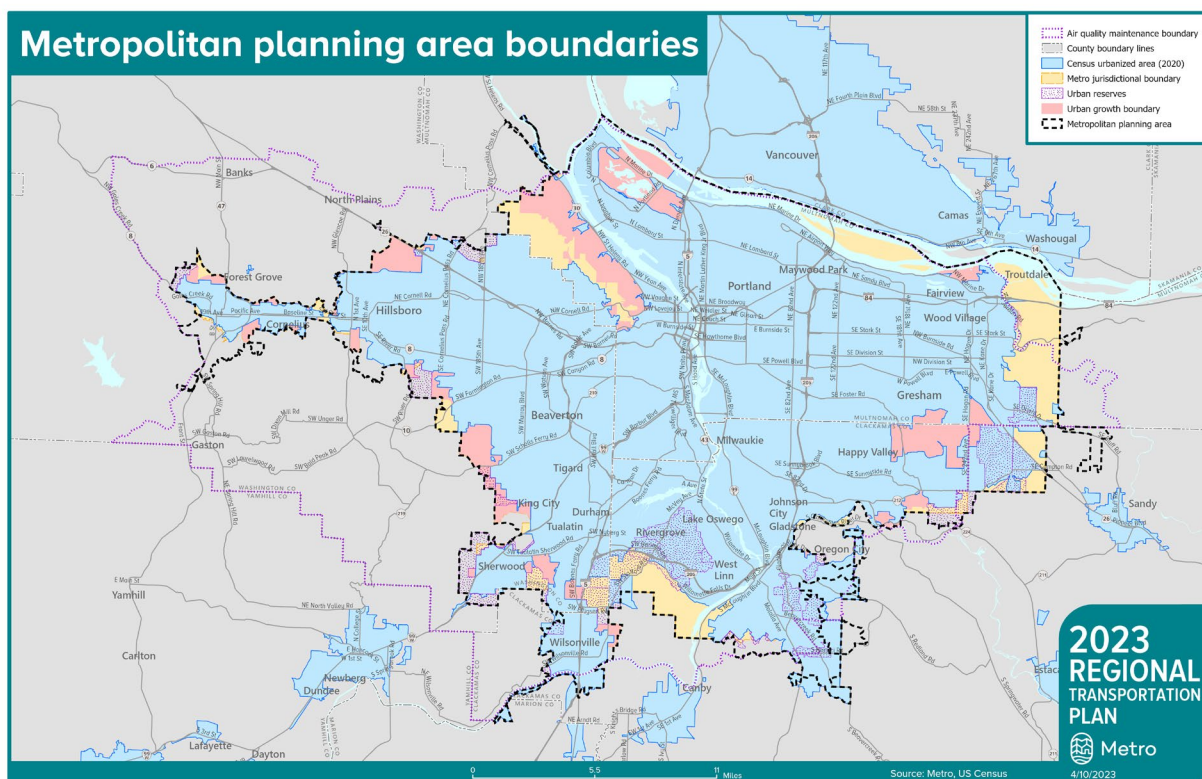
Figure 1.4 How federal and regional transportation policies have evolved since the 1990s



1.3.1 The region has several planning boundaries with different purposes

Federal and state law requires several metropolitan transportation planning boundaries be defined and planned for in the region for different purposes. These boundaries are shown in **Figure 1.5**.

Figure 1.5 Metropolitan planning area boundaries



First, Metro’s jurisdictional boundary encompasses the urban portions of Multnomah, Washington, and Clackamas counties.

Second, under Oregon law, each city or metropolitan area in the state has an urban growth boundary that separates urban land from rural land. Metro is responsible for managing the greater Portland region’s urban growth boundary.

Third, the Urbanized Area (UZA) boundary is defined to delineate areas that are urban in nature distinct from those that are largely rural in nature. The Portland-Vancouver metropolitan region is somewhat unique in that it is a single urbanized area that is located in two states and served by two MPOs. The federal UZA boundary for the Oregon-portion of the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan region is distinct from the Metro urban growth boundary (UGB). The UZA boundary is described in the legend of Figure 1.5 as “Census Urbanized Area (2020).”

Fourth, MPO's are required to establish a Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA) Boundary, which marks the geographic area to be covered by MPO transportation planning activities. At a minimum, the MPA boundary must include the urbanized area, areas expected to be urbanized within the next twenty years and areas within the Air Quality Maintenance Area Boundary (AQMA) – a fifth boundary.

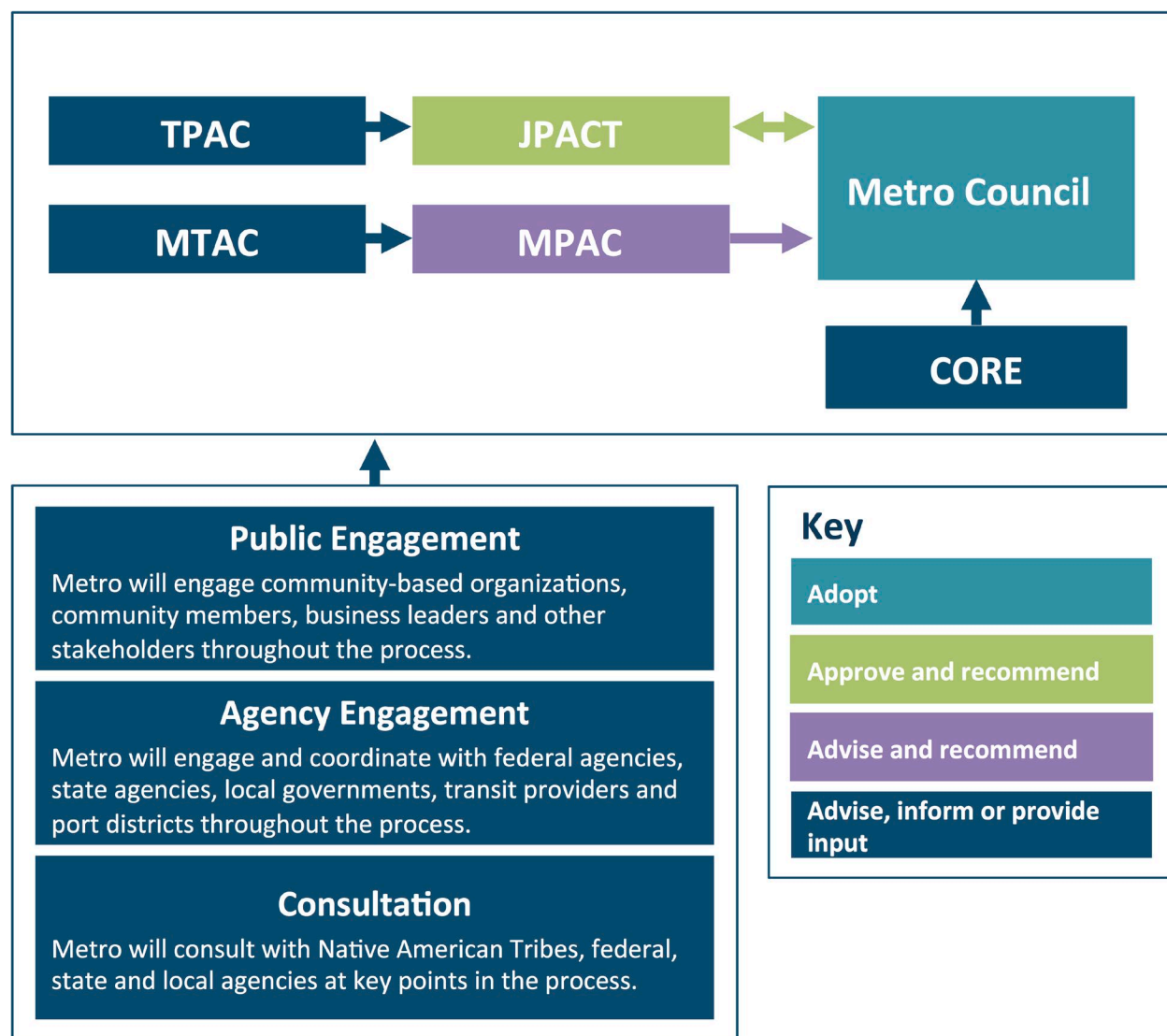
Fifth, the federally-designated Air Quality Maintenance Area Boundary (AQMA) boundary is the area subject to State Implementation Plan (SIP) regulations. The Portland region's AQMA boundary was developed as part of the ozone and carbon monoxide SIPs, which are pollutants the region had previously violated national air quality standards. In October 2017, the region achieved attainment status under the Clean Air Act Amendments. Reaching this milestone means that transportation conformity no longer is required to be performed in this region. The region continues to comply with other obligations and requirements outlined in the SIPs.

1.3.2 Metro facilitates the metropolitan transportation planning process through Metro's advisory committees

Metro facilitates the metropolitan transportation planning process, which include the Metro Council and five advisory committees –the [Joint Policy Advisory Committee on Transportation](#) (JPACT), the [Metro Policy Advisory Committee](#) (MPAC), Metro's [Committee on Racial Equity](#) (CORE), the [Transportation Policy Alternatives Committee](#) (TPAC), the [Metro Technical Advisory Committee](#) (MTAC). These committees have varying levels of responsibility to review, provide input and make recommendations on the development of the RTP. In addition to regular meetings of the Metro Council and advisory committees, Metro convened periodic joint workshops of TPAC and MTAC, and joint workshops of JPACT and the Metro Council to shape development of the 2023 Regional Transportation Plan.

Figure 1.6 displays the regional transportation planning decision-making process.

Figure 1.6 Regional transportation decision-making process



Source: Metro

JPACT is a 17-member committee that provides a forum for elected officials and representatives of agencies involved in transportation to evaluate transportation needs in the region and to make recommendations to the Metro Council. The established decision-making process strives for a well-balanced regional transportation system and involves local elected officials directly in decisions that help the Metro Council develop regional transportation policies, including updating the RTP. **TPAC** provides input to JPACT at the technical level.

All transportation-related actions (including federal MPO actions) are recommended by JPACT to the Metro Council. The Metro Council can approve the recommendations or refer

them back to JPACT with a specific concern for reconsideration. Final approval of each item, therefore, requires the concurrence of both bodies.

MPAC advises and makes recommendations to the Metro Council on growth management, land use and other topics of regional interest, including the RTP, at the policy level. Under the statewide land use planning program, the RTP serves as a regional transportation system plan (TSP). As a result, the **MPAC** also has a role in approving the regional transportation plan as a land use action, consistent with statewide planning goals and the Metro Charter. **MTAC** provides input to MPAC at the technical level.

The **Metro Committee on Racial Equity (CORE)** provides community oversight and advises the Metro Council on implementation of the Metro's [Strategic Plan for Advancing Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion](#)². Adopted by the Metro Council in June 2016 with the support of MPAC, the strategic plan leads with race, committing to concentrate on eliminating the disparities that people of color experience, especially in those areas related to Metro's policies, programs, services and destinations.

In addition, the [Metro Public Engagement Review Committee](#) (PERC)³ advises the Metro Council on engagement priorities and ways to engage community members in regional planning activities consistent with adopted public engagement policies, guidelines and best practices.

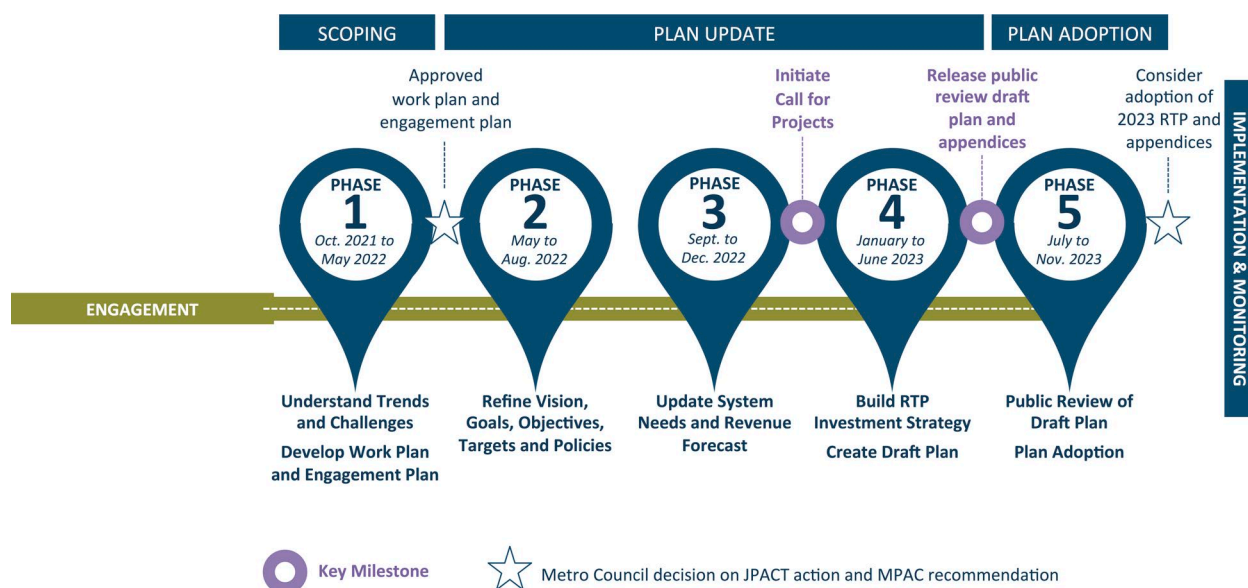
² Strategic Plan for Advancing Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion <https://www.oregonmetro.gov/regional-leadership/diversity-equity-and-inclusion/equity-strategy>

³ Metro Public Engagement Review Committee (PERC) <https://www.oregonmetro.gov/regional-leadership/metro-advisory-committees/public-engagement-review-committee>

1.4 PROCESS AND ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

During the past eighteen months, Metro worked with policy makers, federal, state, and local government partners and transportation agencies, federally recognized tribal governments as well as community members, community-based organizations, businesses, business groups and members of the public to develop the 2023 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). The result of that work is an updated vision, goals and policies that guide transportation planning and investment decisions across the region, an understanding of the region's transportation trends⁴, needs⁵ and ⁶, priorities for investment, strategies to help meet those goals and policies, a shared understanding about available financial resources, and a recommended set of projects that make progress addressing the region's significant and growing transportation needs and challenges.

Figure 1.7 Timeline and process for development of the 2023 Regional Transportation Plan



⁴ The emerging transportation trends research summary is available at: https://www.oregonmetro.gov/sites/default/files/2022/10/12/Metro-Emerging-Trends-summary-final_1.pdf

⁵ Factsheets summarizing the regional transportation needs assessment are available at: <https://www.oregonmetro.gov/sites/default/files/2022/11/29/2023-RTP-Needs-Assessment-factsheets.pdf>

⁶ Research about trends and needs of the region's urban arterials is available at: <https://www.oregonmetro.gov/sites/default/files/2022/10/24/Safe%20and%20healthy%20urban%20arterials%20policy%20brief.pdf>

How did we get here?

The RTP brought together the input of thousands of people who live, work and travel across the greater Portland region communities of the greater Portland. Meaningful engagement and consultation with tribes, community members, community-based organizations, businesses, transportation agencies and elected officials contributed to a shared vision and strategy for investing in a transportation system that serves everyone. Engagement activities centered historically underrepresented communities, including people of color, youth, and people with limited English proficiency.

The RTP was developed with guidance from Metro Council and the Joint Policy Advisory Committee on Transportation (JPACT) with support from advisory committees including The Metro Policy Advisory Committee (MPAC), the Transportation Policy Alternatives Committee (TPAC), the Metro Technical Advisory Committee (MTAC) and Committee on Racial Equity (CORE). Integral to this decision-making process were timely opportunities for the public to provide input.

What have we heard?

Members of the public shared their transportation needs and priorities through online surveys, forums and events hosted by community based organizations. The people of the greater Portland region want safe, affordable, and reliable transportation – no matter where they live, where they go each day or how they get there.

Safety is the top concern.

People are concerned about car crashes while walking and biking. They are also concerned about personal safety in relation to hate crimes, harassment, violence, and people's unpredictable behavior. These especially are concerns for people using transit. People want to see more investment in lighting, safe places to walk and roll, improved transit stops and security (not police) in and around transit.

Investing in transit service is a priority.

Communities across the greater Portland region want access to transit that gets them where they need to go in a reasonable amount of time. Community members want transit that is accessible, affordable, efficient and frequent. Maintaining streets and sidewalks that need repair is a priority. Buses and MAX cars need to be maintained to feel safe and comfortable.

Climate action and resilience is important.

Community members point to major RTP projects that do not do enough to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. People are concerned about the transportation's impact on clean air and ecosystems and want to see investment in transit, walking and biking.

Community members also express concern about how the transportation system will adapt to climate change, especially for community members who are most vulnerable to extreme weather.

Invest in safe and accessible place to walk and roll.

Community members highlighted the many parts of the region need more sidewalks, and all sidewalks need to be ADA accessible. Community members stress the importance of making routes to transit stops and stations accessible.

Invest in communities.

Many communities want to see relatively small-scale investments infrastructure, including local road connections and safety improvements such as lighting and improved crossings.

Connecting and Collaborating

Since October 2021, numerous groups have gathered to help shape the RTP.

- 14 JPACT meetings
- 19 Metro Council meetings and workshops
- 6 JPACT/Metro Council workshops
- 35 TPAC/MTAC meetings and workshops
- 4 consultation meeting with federals, state and resource agencies
- 6 consultation meetings with tribes
- 2 business forums
- 3 Community Leaders Forums
- 7 community based organizations engaging 300+ community members
- 3 Metro Committee on Racial Equity (CORE) meetings
- 6 High Capacity Transit working group meetings
- 3 online surveys with 3,447 participants
- 41 stakeholder interviews
- 4 forums held in Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese and Russian
- 1 Focus group with people with limited English proficiency

1.5 WHAT'S NEXT MOVING FORWARD?

The greater Portland region pioneered approaches to land use and transportation planning in the past and is uniquely positioned to address the trends and challenges facing the region – mainly because the region has solid, well-integrated transportation and land-use systems in place and a history of working together to address complex challenges at a regional scale.

Today it is time to revisit how we are implementing our vision, make some corrections and find new strategies and resources to create the future we want for our region. The rest of this plan represents a new step forward to respond to the changes and challenges we face and set a new course for future transportation decisions and implementation of the 2040 Growth Concept and Climate Smart Strategy.

The pages ahead provide an updated blueprint and investment strategy for a more sustainable transportation system that links land use and transportation, protects the environment, and supports the region's economy. Translating our vision into a reality will not be a simple task – and it will take time. More work is needed, as this plan does not achieve all the goals we've defined. It represents a new step forward for our region.