

STAFF REPORT

ADVANCING RACIAL EQUITY THROUGH THE 2023 REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN (RTP) UPDATE

Date: June 7, 2023
Department: Planning, Development & Research
Meeting Date: June 15, 2023

Presenters: Molly Cooney-Mesker, Community Engagement Specialist
Kim Ellis, RTP Project Manager
Length: 45 min. (15 min. presentation and 30 min. discussion)

ISSUE STATEMENT

A major update to the [Regional Transportation Plan \(RTP\)](#) is underway and must be completed by Dec. 6, 2023 when the current plan expires.

The RTP is the state- and federally-required long-range transportation plan for the greater Portland region. The RTP is the blueprint for transportation in our region and a key tool for implementing the region's [2040 Growth Concept](#) and [Climate Smart Strategy](#). Together, these plans will help ensure that greater Portland thrives by connecting people to their jobs, families, schools and other important destinations and by allowing business and industry to create jobs and move goods to market.

We are at pivotal moment. The greater Portland region continues to grow and change. The most recent census data shows our region continues to grow more diverse. By 2045 more than 2 million people are expected to be living within the metropolitan planning boundary for the RTP – about one-half million more people than today.

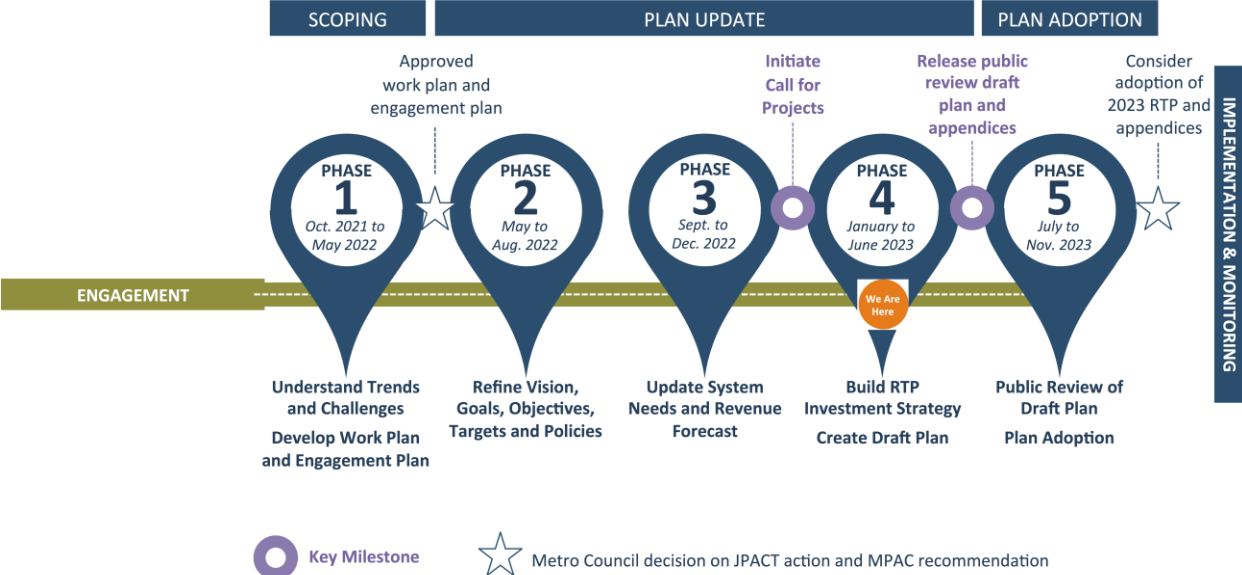
The greater Portland region is facing urgent global and regional challenges, and the future is uncertain. The impacts of climate change, generations of systemic racism, economic inequities and the pandemic have made clear the need for action. Systemic inequities mean that communities have not equally benefited from public policy and investments, and our changing climate and the pandemic has exacerbated many disparities that Black, Indigenous and people of color communities, tribal communities, 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.



Draft 2023 RTP Goals developed by JPACT and Metro Council with input from MPAC and Metro's Committee on Racial Equity (CORE) in 2022

As greater Portland continues to emerge from the disruptions of the pandemic and respond to other urgent trends and challenges, the 2023 RTP update provides an opportunity for all levels of government to work together to deliver a better transportation future. The timeline for the RTP update is shown in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1. Timeline for the 2023 RTP Update



During the past eighteen months, Metro has 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. The result of that work is an updated vision, goals and policies that guide our transportation planning and investment decisions overall, an understanding of the region’s transportation trends¹, needs² and ³, and priorities for investment, strategies to help meet those goals and policies, and a draft list of projects and programs that make progress addressing the region’s significant and growing transportation needs and challenges within available resources.

The draft 2023 RTP and project list that is being prepared for public review reflects the culmination of significant research, meaningful, inclusive engagement⁴ and policy discussions by the Joint Policy Advisory Committee on Transportation (JPACT), the Metro Policy Advisory Committee (MPAC) and Metro Council.

¹ 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
² Factsheets summarizing the regional transportation needs assessment are available at: <https://www.oregonmetro.gov/sites/default/files/2022/11/29/2023-RTP-Needs-Assessment-fact-sheets.pdf>
³ 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>
⁴ Summaries of engagement activities conducted to date are available at: <https://www.oregonmetro.gov/public-projects/2023-regional-transportation-plan/engagement>

On June 29, Metro Council will be requested to support to release the Draft 2023 RTP and draft High Capacity Transit Strategy for public review and comment. The 45-day public comment period is planned for July 10 to August 25. The comment period will include a public hearing and consultation with tribes and federal and state agencies. A schedule of the remaining steps in the process is attached for reference (**Attachment 5**).

COUNCIL ENGAGEMENT

JPACT and Metro Council provided direction on the values and outcomes to guide the 2023 RTP update through adoption of the work plan and engagement plan in May 2022. In addition:

- JPACT and Metro Council accepted the RTP Policy Framework, including an updated vision and goals (December 2022)
- JPACT and Metro Council will consider public input and technical analysis and provide direction on release of the draft RTP and list of project and program priorities for public review (June 2023)
- JPACT and Metro Council will next consider action on the adoption of the 2023 RTP (by Ordinance) (November 2023)

Metro is the regional government responsible for regional land use and transportation planning under state law and the federally designated metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for the Portland metropolitan area. As the federally designated MPO, Metro is responsible for leading and coordinating updates to the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) every five years. Metro is also responsible for developing a regional transportation system plan (TSP), consistent with the Regional Framework Plan, statewide planning goals, the Oregon Transportation Planning Rule (TPR), the Metropolitan Greenhouse Gas Reduction Targets Rule, the Oregon Transportation Plan (OTP), and by extension state modal plans. As a result, the RTP serves as both the Federal metropolitan transportation plan and the regional TSP for the region.

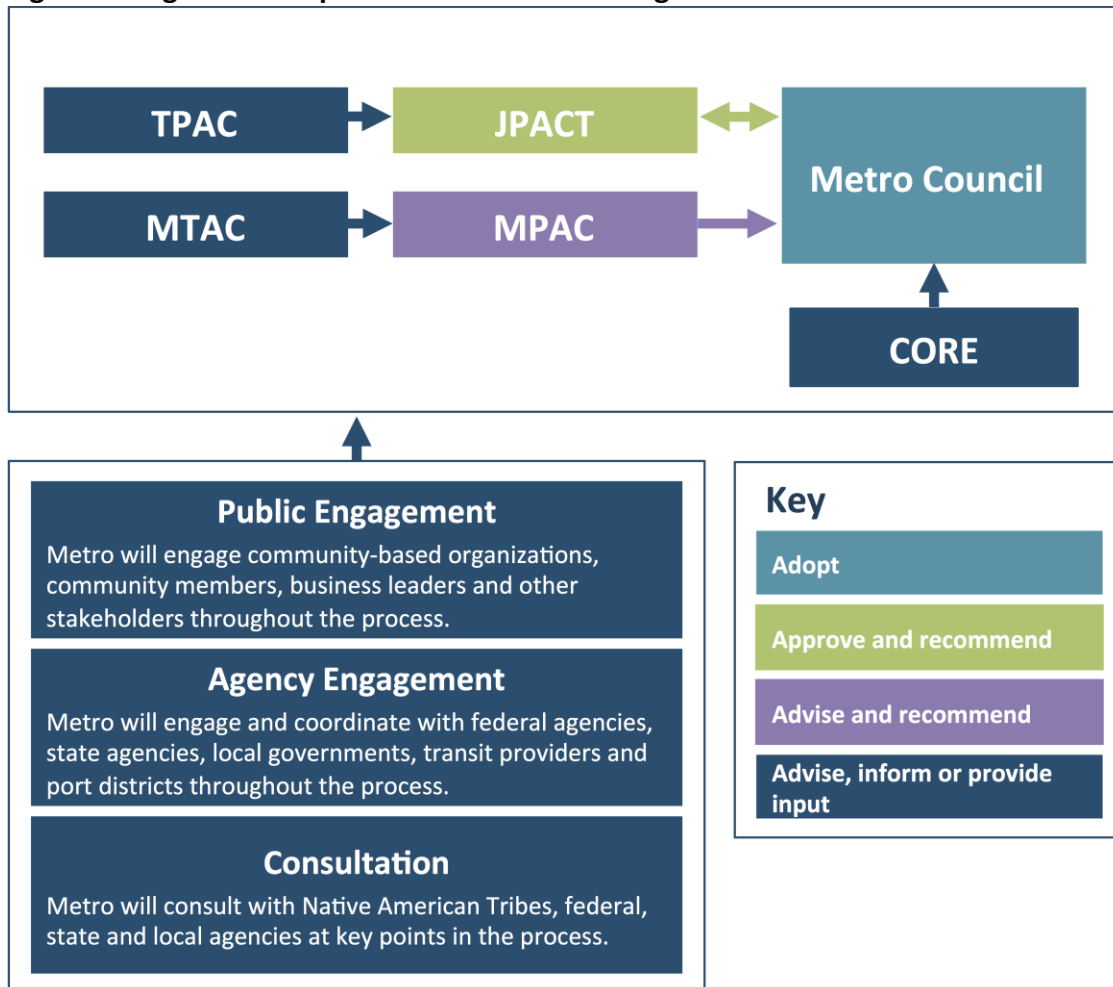
The RTP update relies on Metro's role as the designated MPO for the Portland metropolitan region and its existing decision-making structure. The decision-making framework includes the Metro Council and five advisory committees that have varying levels of responsibility to review, provide input, and make recommendations on the development of the 2023 RTP.

MPAC, JPACT and the Metro Council make recommendations at key decision points based on input from the Metro Technical Advisory Committee (MTAC) and the Transportation Policy Alternatives Committee (TPAC) and the public engagement process. 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](#).

The chart in **Figure 2** shows how the technical advisory committees make recommendations to the policy advisory committees, and the community and policy advisory committees make recommendations directly to the Metro Council. The two-way arrow between JPACT and the Metro Council indicates that final adoption of the RTP is a shared responsibility between JPACT and the Metro Council that requires joint action. This

means the Metro Council must approve the plan as recommended by JPACT or return to JPACT for revisions and a new recommendation.

Figure 2. Regional transportation decision-making framework



QUESTION(S) for CORE

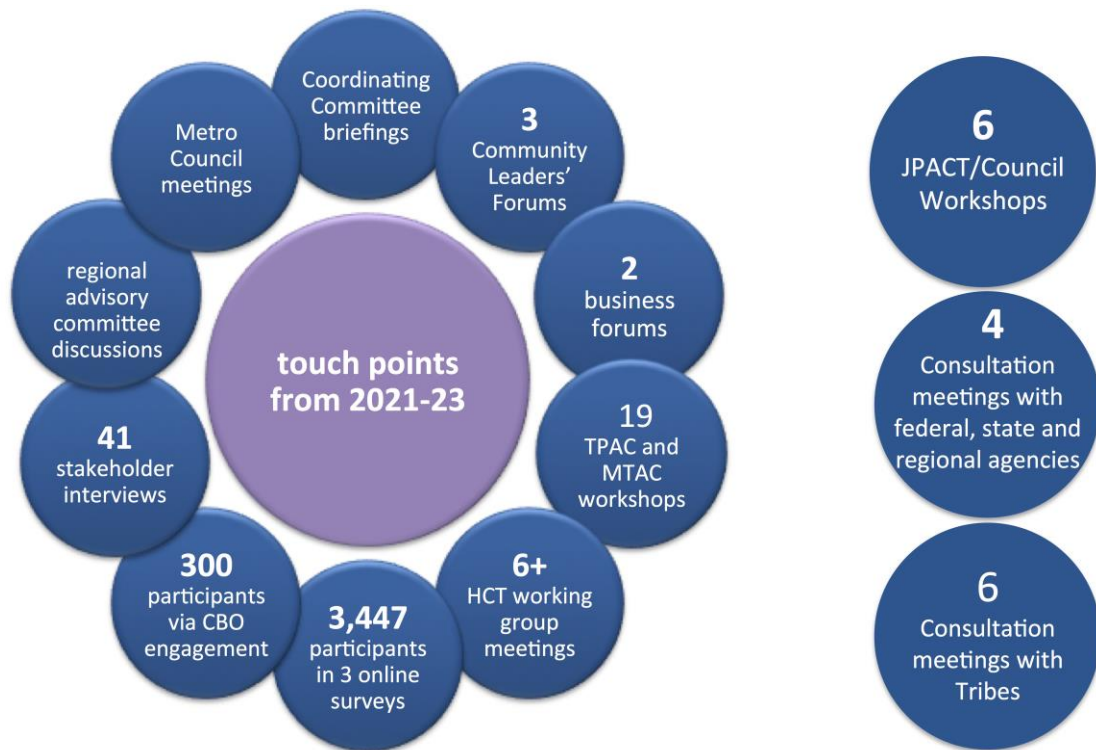
- What does it mean to you to make an equity-based transportation investment?
- Our analysis used two equity criteria to assess whether a project proposed in the RTP is advancing equity. We know these criteria are limited. What do these criteria not capture?

STRATEGIC CONTEXT & FRAMING CORE DISCUSSION

Planning and engagement for the 2023 Regional RTP is guided by the [work plan](#) and [public engagement plan](#) approved by JPACT and Metro Council in May 2022.

Development of the draft 2023 RTP and project list reflects extensive engagement with a variety of stakeholders throughout the process. **Figure 3** illustrates the range of engagement and outreach activities in support of the RTP update.

Figure 3. Summary of key touch points from 2021 to May 2023



At the March 16, 2023, CORE meeting, staff presented the draft RTP vision and goals and feedback received about investment priorities through outreach and engagement conducted throughout Fall/Winter 2022. Public engagement and outreach activities since March 2023 included:

- Community partnerships (through November 2023).** Metro partnered with seven community-based organizations: Centro Cultural, Community Cycling Center, Next Up, OPAL, The Street Trust, Unite Oregon and Verde. These community partners engaged people of color, youth and other marginalized communities in Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington counties, with a focus on engaging people at the intersection of multiple communities who have been underrepresented in decision-making processes. Organizations primarily engaged community members in the draft project list and the High Capacity Transit Strategy.
- In-language community forums:** Metro worked with community engagement liaisons to hold four in-person culturally specific forums in Chinese, Vietnamese, Spanish and Russian languages that included participants from all three counties. These are communities who are typically underrepresented in online survey feedback. The forums focused on receiving feedback on similar questions to those in the online survey including near-term investment priorities. The forums also provided opportunities to hear community members' experiences traveling around the region and their ideas for improving the system.
- Online interactive public survey (April 3 – May 1, 2023).** A third interactive public survey for the 2023 RTP provided an opportunity for the public at-large to provide

feedback on the RTP goal areas and the draft project list. The survey was promoted through Metro's email lists, website, social media and project partners. More than 880 people responded to the survey.

- **Community Leaders Forum (April 13, 2023).** Metro convened community leaders forum in early April to review the draft RTP project list and outcomes of the high level assessment of the draft project list.
- **Consultation meetings with Tribes and Federal, State and regional agencies (multiple dates in April, May and June 2023).** Metro consulted with Tribes, in coordination with Metro's Tribal Liaison, resource agencies, and with Federal, State regulatory agencies to share process information and review the draft RTP goals and policies, project list and the technical analysis completed to date, including methods and data sources. Metro also reviewed the updates made to the draft 2023 RTP responding to the feedback and information provided by Tribes and consulting agencies during the scoping phase in 2022.
- **Business Leaders Forum (May 25, 2023).** Metro partnered with the **Portland Business Alliance to convene** businesses and business organizations from across the region to discuss the draft RTP, the draft [High Capacity Transit Strategy](#) and [Regional Freight Delay and Goods Movement Study](#).

Common themes heard during the most recent engagement activities follows:

Safety is the top priority across community input.

- Concerns about safety included both personal safety and traffic safety. These concerns overlap for transit riders and people walking and biking, where there is not good lighting, sidewalks or places to wait for transit.
- Participants cited harassment, unpredictable, unsafe, racist and sometimes violent behavior on transit and at transit stops.
- Community members described feeling scared to bike, not having safe sidewalks to walk on.

Climate and equitable transportation are also important outcomes to focus on in the near-term.

- Community members expressed concerns about the impacts of added vehicle capacity on greenhouse gas emissions.
- Community members cited transit, active transportation and carpooling as climate strategies.
- Concerns about affordable transportation are a top concern related to equity, as well as equitable access to the transportation system. Affordability concerns are related to transit fares, future tolling and the cost of vehicles, and in particular electric vehicles.
- Displacement continues to also be a concern, particularly as community members consider how they could be impacted by investments in their areas.

Investments in biking and walking, transit and roads and bridges are top priorities.

- **Transit:** Community members identified a need for both investment in transit capital and operations. Improvements in frequency and reliability were reoccurring themes.
- **Investments in walking and biking:** Community members identified investments in transit stops, such as lighting, shelters and bathrooms, as priority investments. Community members across many engagement activities discussed the need for better access to transit. Barriers along sidewalks for people with disabilities who need to access transit were also cited.
- **Roads and bridges:** comments include a desire for more local connections.

Maintenance is a top community priority.

- Specifically maintaining road surfaces (fixing potholes) and transit maintenance, are important investments for community members.

In addition to community engagement, Metro staff provided briefings and presentations to regional advisory committees, including TPAC, MTAC, JPACT, MPAC and county-level coordinating committees (policy and staff).

Summary reports of all engagement activities are available on the project website at: <https://www.oregonmetro.gov/public-projects/2023-regional-transportation-plan/engagement>.

Which [Strategic Plan to Advance Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion](#) goal(s) or department racial equity plan goals does this project advance and how? The RTP update is guided by the [Metro Council's Strategic Plan to Advance Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion](#) and supporting Metro Racial Equity Framework and the [Planning and Development Department Strategy for Achieving Racial Equity](#) using a targeted universalism⁵ approach. The project team has been partnering with Metro's DEI team to apply Metro's Racial Equity Framework throughout the planning, data collection and analysis and engagement process.

The 2023 RTP engagement seeks to advance Goal A and Goal B of Metro's Strategic Plan to Advance Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion—to convene and support regional partners to advance racial equity and meaningfully engage communities of color. In addition, Metro contracted with community-based organizations to conduct culturally specific, equitable engagement, advancing Goals D and E of the strategic plan.

⁵ Targeted universalism means setting universal goals and pursuing those goals with targeted processes that are catered to the needs of each group.

What did community and stakeholder engagement look like? How did you engage with Black, Indigenous and communities of color, immigrant communities and/or members of the disability community? Since 2021, the project team has engaged the following communities, groups, public agencies and individuals in the update, including:

- **Community leaders and community-based organizations** working with marginalized and underrepresented communities⁶, health and equity interests, environmental protection, affordable housing, transportation, and social, climate and environmental justice. Engagement included individual interviews, community leader forums, community forums held in Chinese, Vietnamese, Spanish and Russian languages, community partnerships with seven community-based organizations: Centro Cultural, Community Cycling Center, Next Up, OPAL, The Street Trust, Unite Oregon and Verde, and a series of community events were held in partnership with TriMet and community organizations including Portland Community College Cascade, Rosewood Initiative, Centro Cultural and Slavic Family to inform development of the draft 2023 High Capacity Transit Strategy, a component of the 2023 RTP update.
- **Business, economic development and freight groups**, including business owners and business leaders of color, Greater Portland Inc., large and small employers, freight shippers, business organizations, associations and chambers of commerce. A business forum was held in August 2022 for business owners and business leaders of color throughout the region to share their transportation-related needs and experiences.
- **Tribes** with interest in the greater Portland region (through consultation meetings supported by Metro’s Tribal Affairs program.)
- **Local jurisdiction staff and elected officials representing counties and cities in the region** (through county coordinating committees, TPAC/MTAC workshops and regional technical and policy advisory committees).
- **Special districts**, including TriMet, SMART, C-TRAN, the Port of Portland and the Port of Vancouver (through TPAC, MTAC, JPACT and MPAC briefings and consultation activities).
- **Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council (SW RTC) and other Clark County governments** (through Regional Transportation Advisory Committee (RTAC), SW RTC, TPAC, JPACT and MPAC briefings).
- **State agencies**, including the Oregon Department of Transportation, the Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC), the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD), the Oregon Land Conservation and Development Commission (LCDC), and the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) (through TPAC, MTAC, JPACT and MPAC briefings and consultation activities).
- **Federal agencies**, including the Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (through TPAC and consultation activities).

⁶ Marginalized and underrepresented communities include Black, Indigenous and communities of color, federally-recognized tribes, immigrants, people with low income, people who speak limited English, youth, older adults and people experiencing a disability.

What are the anticipated racial equity benefits (positive) and impacts (negative) of this project/program?

Policies: Transportation equity policies and related actions in Chapter 3 of the 2023 RTP acknowledge and document existing transportation disparities and prioritize the elimination of these disparities, particularly for people of color and people with low incomes. The policies include prioritizing investments in Equity Focus Areas (EFAs), where people of color, people with low-incomes and people who speak limited English are concentrated. The policies will guide future regional and local transportation planning and investment decisions, including the allocation of federal and some state transportation funding by JPACT and the Metro Council.

Projects and Programs: The draft project list achieves mixed results on equity. The draft RTP invests equitably – there is more spending planned for equity focus areas than non-equity focus areas, but these investments do not undo longstanding inequities, nor do they undo longstanding transportation inequities in safety and access to jobs. The region’s bicycle and pedestrian networks are currently more complete in the EFAs where people of color, low-income people and people who speak limited English are concentrated, and the RTP continues to invest in completing those networks, particularly near transit.

However, the analysis shows the region is not on track to meet the goal of eliminating fatal and serious crashes by 2035 – particularly for people walking. A majority of serious crashes and bike/pedestrian crashes occur in equity focus areas on the region’s busiest streets that also serve as major transit routes. Recent data shows that these areas continue to experience three times the number of crashes that involve people walking and biking – who are particularly vulnerable to death and injury during crashes – and almost twice as many fatal and serious injury crashes as other parts of the region. While more than two thirds of capital funding in the RTP goes to projects that lead agencies identified as safety projects, and roughly half of the capital spending goes toward projects that are on the high-injury network – more of that investment is planned in the long-term rather than the near-term.

Similarly, people living in EFAs currently enjoy significantly better access to jobs via transit and driving than people living in non-EFAs, and the RTP continues to improve access to jobs in these communities relative to others. However, despite continued efforts to grow transit service during this and previous RTP cycles, driving in general continues to offer much more efficient and convenient access to jobs than transit does. Both community feedback and research emphasize that people of color and people with low incomes are more likely to rely on transit than other people are. This suggests that an equitable transportation system is one in which transit offers the same level of access to jobs as driving – and even with the investments in the RTP the region still falls short of providing equitable access via transit. Over two thirds of RTP capital spending goes toward projects that invest in the transportation equity needs identified during community engagement, and over one third goes toward projects in EFAs, with a slightly higher share of long-term funding than near-term funding devoted to these priorities.

A summary of these findings is attached for reference (**Attachment 4**). Further discussion of these and other draft findings, and feedback anticipated during the public comment period may result in refinements to the project list as the plan is finalized for consideration by JPACT and the Metro Council this fall.

Recommendations for Future Work – Chapter 8 of the draft 2023 RTP identifies future regional planning work and data and analysis tools development that are recommended to support implementation of the RTP. Recommended equity related activities include development of equitable development strategies as part of planning for major transit investments (ongoing), development of a comprehensive regional workforce and contractor equity strategy (2024), a study to identify first and last mile solutions to improve transit access and convenience for transit users throughout the region (2024-25), and continued development and use of data and tools to better assess cost burden, affordability, displacement risk and potential social vulnerability (ongoing).

BACKGROUND

A number of activities to support the 2023 RTP have been completed. Following is a summary of this work with links to more information.

2023 RTP draft vision and goals - An updated vision and five goals are guiding the 2023 RTP. The draft vision and goals are included in the attached RTP factsheet (**Attachment 1**). The safety and equity goals and objectives are attached for reference (**Attachment 2**).

Research - Research is foundational to the 2023 RTP and for Metro’s ongoing transportation planning. In the first three phases of the RTP update, Metro worked with regional partners and industry experts to build from recent stakeholder input and develop the following:

- [Emerging transportation trends technical memo](#) and [summary](#)
- Safe and Healthy Urban Arterials [policy brief](#) and [fact sheet](#)
- [Equitable transportation funding research report](#)
- [Expert review panel on the climate and transportation](#)
- [Regional Freight Delay and Commodities Movement Study](#)

Needs Assessment – Presented to Council in November, the draft needs assessment uses the latest available data organized around the updated RTP goals of safety, equity, climate, mobility and a thriving economy. The region’s transportation needs are conveyed using maps, data and input from stakeholders. A [set of fact sheets](#) provides an overview of the assessment work done to-date. The needs assessment provides information for use by local, regional and state partners as they work together to update the RTP investment priorities. The safety and equity elements of the needs assessment are attached for reference (**Attachment 3**).

Policy updates - The 2023 Regional Transportation Plan will continue to build on the [2018 RTP](#) to develop policies and strategies that address transportation needs and priorities in the region. Some of the new and updated policies in the 2023 RTP include the following: an updated [Regional mobility policy](#), update to the [Climate Smart Strategy](#) and the [High Capacity Transit Strategy](#) and Regional Pricing Policies, building from the [Regional](#)

[Congestion Pricing Study](#) . Minor updates were made to the transportation equity policies in the plan. Work on each of these policy areas will continue as the plan is finalized for adoption.

Updating the RTP Project List – Staff completed the initial RTP Call for Projects, working with the counties, cities, TriMet, ODOT and other agencies to update the region’s project priorities based on direction provided by the Metro Council and the Joint Policy Advisory Committee on Transportation (JPACT). Each city, county, coordinating committee and transportation agency provided recommendations to JPACT and Metro Council on which projects reflect their priorities and advance achievement of the RTP vision, goals and policies of the RTP. Projects primarily come from local transportation system plans, but also from transit service and master plans, park and trail plans, corridor plans, and other transportation studies that were developed and adopted through a public process with opportunities for public comment. An online map and information about the draft project list can be found at oregonmetro.gov/rtp.

Draft System Analysis Findings – The system analysis helps explain the RTP’s overall impact on regional goals. The project-level assessment takes a simple, yes-or-no approach to reviewing whether individual RTP projects have certain features that support RTP goals, and on the share of the RTP spending devoted to different types of projects. Summaries of the draft safety and equity analysis findings are attached for reference along with the criteria used for the project-level assessment. (**Attachment 4**).

A schedule of the remaining steps of the RTP update is attached for reference (**Attachment 5**). For more information about the update, visit oregonmetro.gov/rtp.

ATTACHMENTS

1. RTP Factsheet
2. RTP Safety and Equity Goals and Objectives
3. RTP Needs Assessment - Safety and Equity
4. Draft Safety and Equity Analysis Findings (and criteria)
5. 2023 RTP Schedule – June to November 2023