



Performance-Based Project Evaluation Model Initial Implementation Report

August 2024

Report Purpose

As required by ESHB 1125, Section 219(3), this report provides an update on WSDOT's continued implementation of the performance-based project evaluation model. During this period, WSDOT conducted stakeholder outreach and improved process consistency and data flow.

Background

WSDOT is developing a performance-based project evaluation model at the direction of the Legislature. The intent of the model is to align investments to the transportation policy goals in state statute. These goals include preservation, safety, stewardship, mobility, economic vitality, and environment, with preservation and safety being priorities. Additional benefits of performance-based evaluation include promoting consistency, demonstrating transparency, understanding tradeoffs, and promoting a more systemic perspective (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Benefits of a Performance-based Project Evaluation Model



Summary of Prior Work

WSDOT began working on the model in 2020, completing a feasibility study and a conceptual evaluation framework based on priorities identified in stakeholder outreach. In 2022-23, WSDOT developed objectives and criteria for each policy goal based on existing statewide transportation plans, which are informed by public engagement. The project team then developed and tested an initial version of the model.

Figure 2. Legislative Provisos for Performance-based Project Evaluation Model

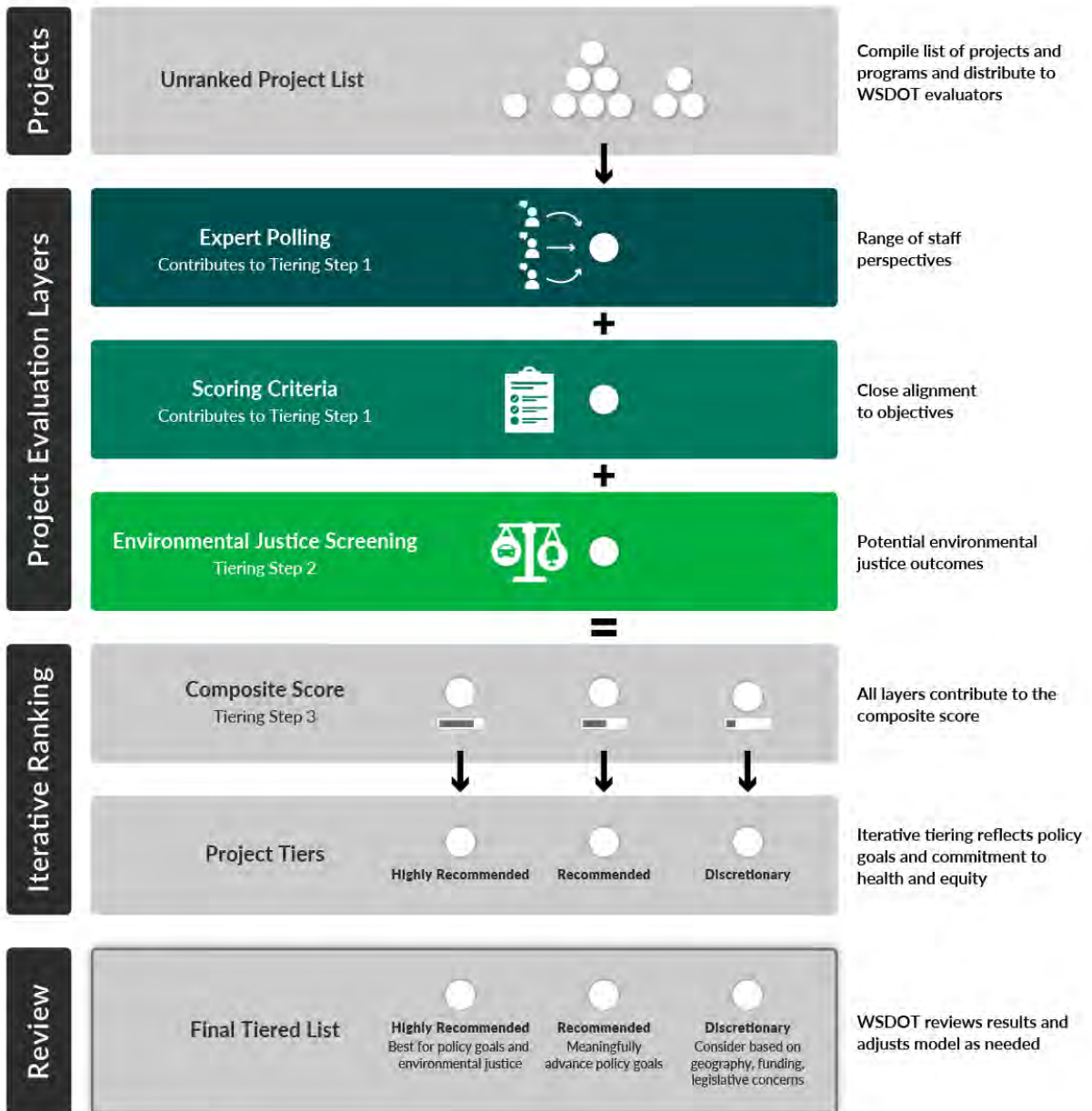


Figure 3 on the next page shows an overview of the model. WSDOT designed the model to provide information on transportation investments proposed for new revenue. Examples of new revenue include federal grant programs or state legislative funding packages like Move Ahead Washington. The evaluation requires the level of information typically available for investments proposed during the legislative process. Proposed investments may include specific transportation projects or increases in funding for programs and can be for any mode of transportation. The model has three evaluation layers. Expert polling collects information on how well proposed investments advance each policy goal based on the opinion of a broad cross section of subject matter experts. Criteria scoring assigns quantitative scores based on standardized criteria. Environmental justice screening assesses potential benefits to and burdens on overburdened communities and vulnerable populations. The evaluation results in the tiering of investments into three groups – highly recommended, recommended, and discretionary.

Figure 3. Performance-based Project Evaluation Model Diagram

Project Evaluation Model Process

This performance-based project evaluation model identifies the investments that best support Washington's statutory Transportation System Policy Goals through the use of three different project evaluation layers and an iterative tiering process.



Initial testing of the model yielded a reasonable distribution of results for a diverse group of projects and programmatic investments. These results were generally consistent with transportation officials' expert assessment of the relative benefits offered by the investments.

Update on Current Work

In 2024, WSDOT held listening sessions to reach out to representatives of tribes, local governments, and transportation advocacy organizations and seek feedback on the developed model. Following is a summary of the feedback:

- **Usefulness of Model.** Participants supported the design and concept of the model but wanted to see more testing results before making a judgement on its usefulness.
- **Environmental Justice.** Participants were unsure if the Environmental Justice Screening layer is adequate to analyze the benefits and burdens of an investment.
- **Expert Polling.** Participants suggested using outside evaluators in the scoring.
- **Investment Complexity.** Participants were concerned about project proponents designing investments to fit criteria.
- **Discretionary Tier Distinction.** In the discretionary tier, participants advised distinguishing between investments with low scores and investments with insufficient information to evaluate.
- **Starter Funding.** Participants expressed uncertainty regarding how the model evaluates pre-construction investments in planning and design.

In addition to outreach, the project team worked on improving process consistency and data flow. This involved identifying potential data sources, refining data, updating previously developed investment description inputs to match available data, and testing and updating scoring criteria based on available data. Analysis of the available data showed WSDOT either has or can access data, or that information requirements are project specific and must be provided in investment descriptions.

Next Steps

The performance-based project evaluation model is functional and solidly grounded in the statutory transportation policy goals and statewide transportation plans, which are informed by public engagement processes. Additional testing and refinement with community partners will ensure the model produces consistent and reasonable outcomes across a variety of investment types and evaluators. Next steps respond to the feedback received during the outreach process:

- **Testing with External Evaluators.** Work with metropolitan and regional transportation planning organizations to identify subject matter experts outside of WSDOT to participate in another test run of the evaluation model using a list of historic and/or proposed capital investments.
- **Refining the Model.** Further refine the model based on feedback and testing results.
- **Coordination.** Investigate how the legislature would like to use the model in coordination with its budget development process.

The implementation work on the performance-based project evaluation model funded in the 2023-25 transportation budget will be complete in June 2025.

Additionally, the project team identified potential areas of future investment focused on streamlining the evaluation model's user interface and data integration. These steps would improve the efficiency of the model and reduce the time needed to run it. Evaluator training and additional outreach would also require future resources.

- **Dashboard Development.** WSDOT staff developed a prototype dashboard for some of the data used for criteria evaluation. With additional resources, all relevant data could be consolidated into a single dashboard.
- **Data Integration.** Derive additional information from existing WSDOT data sources to include in the dashboard described in the prior bullet.
- **Data Development.** Purchase or compile data to fill in statewide data gaps such as connectivity or zoning/planned land uses.
- **Improve Investment Descriptions.** Transform the investment description prompts into a web-based form to facilitate more consistent investment descriptions.
- **Training.** Develop internal training for evaluators including videos, recorded presentations, or in-person sessions.
- **Additional Outreach.** Some listening session participants wanted a more detailed step-through of how the criteria scoring layer works. WSDOT could conduct further outreach after the next round of testing and refinement.

Please reach out to Jeremy Jewkes, Statewide Planning Manager, at jeremy.jewkes@wsdot.wa.gov with questions or requests for additional information on the Performance-Based Project Evaluation Model.