

Community Workforce Agreement and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Report December 2024

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Background

Since 2016, the Washington State Department of Transportation's Strategic Plan has had three items: Workforce Development, Practical Solutions, and Inclusion. In 2022, the Secretary of Transportation launched a new [Strategic Plan](#) that included updated goals of Resiliency, Workforce Development, and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. In the last legislative session, to enhance the equitable outcomes of WSDOT, we partnered with the Legislature to fund positions to enhance our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts, as well as implement Community Workforce Agreements. Section 218 (2) of Engrossed Substitute House Bill 1125 required a report of these activities.

Anti-Racism Policy & DEI Planning Executive Order

On July 16, 2021, Secretary Millar published the Agency's First Executive Order on [Anti-Racism Policy & Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Planning](#). This Executive Order outlined the agency's commitment to actively combatting racism and strengthening its anti-racist, diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts to guarantee that our state's multimodal transportation system serves all Washingtonians.

To further WSDOT's commitment to being an anti-racist organization, the Office of Equity and Civil Rights (OECR), in partnership with the Office of Human Resources and Safety (HR), created an agency-wide workgroup to develop a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Plan for implementation.

DEI Plan Updates

WSDOT's DEI plan is a living document with seven primary focus areas. The focus area updates as of the beginning of November 2023 are as follows:

Internal Workforce: This focus area continued to work on creating a WSDOT DEI HR desk manual to embed DEI throughout the employee experience. This sprint has been led by WSDOT HR subject matter experts, who ensure that WSDOT managers and staff have an agency DEI reference guide. These professionals drafted a respectful workplace policy and began an extensive interested party engagement process, including all statewide Diversity Advisory Groups, the Communications Office, the Office of Equity and Civil Rights, the Office of the Attorney General, and any other interested parties identified. The first phase is developing a respect policy before creating the DEI HR desk manual. The respect policy should be tentatively completed by the end of 2024.

Learn and Grow: This focus area created WSDOT’s Culture of Belonging program to foster a Pro-Equity and Anti-Racist (PEAR) workplace. This sprint¹ was led by the Culture of Belonging Manager, who created the framework based on the Culture of Inclusion Road trip program in WSDOT’s Olympic Region. In late July, WSDOT executive leadership approved the Culture of Belonging (COB) program; the Culture of Belonging training was launched in the Learning Center. The Community of Practice allows WSDOT employees to learn and practice the Culture of Belonging tools for WSDOT to become a PEAR workplace and agency.

Diversity Advisory Groups: This focus area has been working on establishing consistent roles and structures for the eight WSDOT Diversity Advisory Groups. Each WSDOT DAG has its own autonomy on how it serves as an employee advisory group and do not operate the same across the regions and headquarters. There is no guidance or standardization available for Diversity Advisory Groups leadership and its members on how to support DEI initiatives. This first sprint has focused on providing standardization guidance on the requirements for consistent processes related to governance, membership, budgeting, communications, etc.

This focus area worked on creating standardized guidance on the requirements for consistent processes related to governance, membership, budgeting, communications, etc. A gap analysis was completed on internal and external entities' data to understand how to create standards for governance. The DAG recommendation should be finalized in 2024.

Specific to the Washington State Ferries (WSF), WSF is making strides in its DEI journey, supported by an active and engaged Diversity Advisory Group (DAG). This group is a cornerstone of WSF’s culture, playing a pivotal role in fostering an environment of inclusion and belonging. The WSF DAG provides invaluable insights to the leadership team based on stories and data shared by staff from various locations and units during their meetings.

One of the DAG’s key achievements has been creating a trusted environment where employees from diverse backgrounds can raise concerns and collaborate on solutions.

The WSF DAG’s efforts have also been well-received by the public. Notably, the development of a Passenger Code of Conduct has significantly supported both terminal and vessel employees. This initiative is expected to reduce mistreatment, enhance the sense of belonging, and improve psychological safety for both staff and passengers.

Data-informed Decisions: This focus area worked on understanding data bias and mitigating its bias in the work performed at WSDOT. The focus was understanding diversity, equity, and inclusion research related to data justice and reporting the findings to OECR. The findings focused on AI and the impacts on marginalized groups related to data sources used for generative AI artifacts. In April 2023, the focus area identified and promoted a virtual data panel entitled “Accelerating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion by Operationalizing Data Justice” for WSDOT members to learn more about data equity. The DEI Plan Coordinator facilitated a debriefing for WSDOT attendees for the panel discussion.

¹ A sprint is a short, time-boxed period when a small, dedicated team works to complete a set amount of work.

Community Engagement: This focus area has been working on coordinating and communicating new community engagement best practices. The focus area worked on creating community engagement best practices for WSDOT employees. This deliverable was executed, and the Multimodal Development and Delivery program is actively incorporating the recommendations in training internal staff on community engagement practices.

Environmental Justice – Healthy Environment for All (HEAL) Act: The Healthy Environment for All (HEAL) Act ([Chap. 70A.02 RCW](#)) requires covered agencies to address the disproportionate exposure of Black Americans, Indigenous people, and communities of color, along with low-income communities, to environmental hazards in Washington neighborhoods. Under the HEAL Act, all covered agencies, including the WSDOT, have new and additional state-level compliance responsibilities toward environmental justice.

The most up-to-date information on the HEAL Act and Environment Justice can be found [here](#).

External Workforce & Contracting: See the [2024 PASS & OJTSS Annual Report](#).

Community Workforce Agreements Background

With historic levels of investment in transportation infrastructure at the state and federal levels and the current and future workforce and supplier demand exceeding available capacity, WSDOT is prioritizing regional efforts to expand labor capacity in the trades. WSDOT is also committed to ensuring significant transportation project investments support statewide equity goals and work as an agency to continue improving the experience small and disadvantaged businesses have contracted with WSDOT.

One tool that can support developing a pipeline of qualified local workers is a Community Workforce Agreement (CWA). A CWA is a Project Labor Agreement designed to benefit under-represented and under-served communities' access to capital construction investments made in their communities. These benefits include access for local workers to participate in projects, opportunities for available local contractors to engage in construction opportunities, and the expansion of qualified local workers contributing to regional economies.

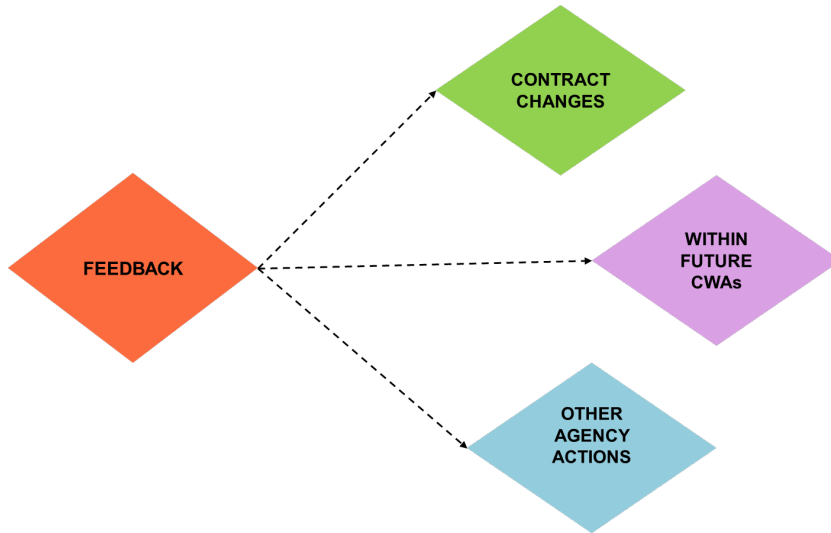
In Spring 2019, WSDOT included its first pilot CWA as part of the construction contract for the SR 520 Montlake Project. WSDOT identified the SR 520 Portage Bay Bridge & Roanoke Lid Project as the next WSDOT contract to include a CWA, subject to negotiations with the Seattle/King County Building and Construction Trades Council and the Northwest Carpenters

Engagement process overview

In 2022 and the first part of 2023, WSDOT engaged interested parties to collect feedback about CWAs both from its first pilot on the SR 520 Montlake Project and other regional agency CWAs. Outreach focused on the under-represented and under-served business community, prime and subcontractors, pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship organizations, and workers. Key activities

included hosting listening sessions, participating in meetings and briefings, online surveys, and hosting meetings with interested parties to share a summary of feedback and discuss how the feedback informed the next steps for the agency.

WSDOT is committed to working to address the feedback in multiple ways moving forward. These included as part of negotiating upcoming and future CWAs, potential changes to construction contracts, and other actions to address ways small and disadvantaged businesses experience WSDOT contracting, including on contracts with a CWA.



SR 520 Portage Bay Bridge & Roanoke Lid Project – Second Pilot CWA

Procurement activities for the project began in late 2022, and in June 2023, the negotiated CWA for the project was shared publicly as part of the contracting process. In June 2023, WSDOT shared an update about the CWA engagement process, the specifics of the second pilot for the SR 520 Portage Bay CWA, and the next steps. The presentation highlighted how WSDOT addressed feedback to date. These included:

- Changes to the SR 520 Portage Bay CWA
 - Higher and new aspirational apprenticeship goals
 - Continued inclusion of a preferred entry program for graduates of pre-apprenticeship programs
 - Increase in the number of core workers upfront
 - Commitment to CWA training and support services
 - First-of-its-kind Childcare Reimbursement Pilot Program
- Creation of new pilot programs
 - Dual Benefit Reimbursement Pilot Program
 - Accelerated Partial Payment Pilot Program
- Hiring a third-party CWA administrator

2024 Status Update

Key activities in 2024 have included:

- Due to a significant gap between construction bids and available funding for the SR 520 Portage Bay Bridge & Roanoke Lid Project, which builds a new, seismically resilient Portage Bay Bridge and constructs a landscaped freeway lid over the highway in Seattle’s Roanoke neighborhood, was paused in late 2023 due to cost escalation to allow policymakers to determine a path forward during the 2024 Legislative session. Following legislative direction, the contract was awarded in the summer of 2024. Learn more about this work on [the Portage Bay Bridge and Roanoke Lid Project webpage](#). In a parallel timeline, WSDOT completed procurement for a Third Party Administrator and, in November 2024, will kick off the CWA process with more information sessions and training to come.
- Significant progress on the SR 520 Montlake Project (first pilot CWA), which replaces the old, structurally vulnerable eastbound bridge over Union Bay and adds a dedicated HOV/transit lane. This project also builds a three-acre, landscaped lid over the highway in Montlake and, east of the lid, a bicycle and pedestrian land bridge over the freeway. Learn more about this work on [the Montlake Project webpage](#).

As of the compilation of this report, the following projects are complete:

- The SR 520 West Approach Bridge North Project constructed a new, three-lane bridge across Union Bay for westbound traffic between the floating bridge and Seattle’s Montlake neighborhood. Learn more on [the West Approach Bridge North Project webpage](#).
- The SR 520 Floating Bridge and Landings Project replaced the world’s longest floating bridge with an even longer, safer bridge that includes a new, separated path for bicyclists and pedestrians. Learn more on [the Floating Bridge and Landings Project webpage](#).
- The SR 520 Eastside Transit and HOV Project rebuilt a 2.3-mile stretch of SR 520 between I-405 and Lake Washington. The project added a dedicated HOV/transit lane, three landscaped freeway lids and two median transit stops. Learn more on [the Eastside Transit and HOV Project webpage](#).
- The SR 520 Pontoon Construction Project built 33 of the new floating bridge’s 77 pontoons in Aberdeen, Washington. We built the other 44 pontoons in Tacoma, Washington. Learn more on [the Pontoon Construction Project webpage](#).

Next Steps

- Montlake Project: All major project elements will be open to the public by the end of 2024. Finishing touches on landscaping and other minor features will continue through 2025. The team is planning a community-focused opening ceremony for the Montlake bicycle and pedestrian land bridge in mid-December.
- I-5/Express Lanes Project: The project will open the new reversible HOV/transit ramp at the Mercer Street exit by December 2024. The project will also finish constructing the new flyover ramp between SR 520 and I-5 by the end of 2024. However, the ramp will not open to traffic until the completion of the Portage Bay Bridge and Roanoke Lid Project in 2031.

- Portage Bay Bridge and Roanoke Lid Project: In-water work to build the north and south work trestles for the Portage Bay Bridge began in November 2024. The bridge will be built in three stages. In the first phase, crews will build the new Portage Bay north bridge for westbound traffic. When the new north bridge is complete in 2027, both eastbound and westbound traffic will be temporarily moved to the new north bridge.

Following the traffic shift onto the new north bridge, construction will enter the second stage: we will remove the existing bridge, slated to be complete in late-2028, and then build the south bridge, slated to be complete in 2030. This stage also includes constructing the Roanoke lid and completing the 10th and Delmar surface streets. In the final stage, crews will finish building the new south bridge. Once construction for the new south bridge is finished, both directions of the Portage Bay Bridge will be completed and ready for traffic. The project is slated to be completed in 2031.

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