

# WSDOT/ACEC-WA Executive Liaison Committee

Monday, January 26, 2026 – 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm

Virtual: MS Teams

DRAFT Meeting Minutes

## Introduction

### Present Attendees:

Mark Gaines  
Kerri Woehler  
Todd Trepanier  
Robin Mayhew  
Evan Grimm  
Leann George  
Lisbeth Panush  
Van Collins  
Art McCluskey

Richard Patterson  
Ron Paananen  
Jennifer Saugen  
Erik Jonson  
Jilma Jimenez  
Allison Dame Camden  
Brian Nielsen  
Steve Roark

### Agenda Overview

Leann George reviewed the agenda. Hearing no additions or objections, the agenda was accepted, and the meeting proceeded.

### WSDOT HR updates on workforce needs, staffing, hiring

Todd Dowler, Director of Human Resources and Safety, provided an update on WSDOT's Highway/Modal Engineering workforce and compensation trends. Engineering staffing levels remain generally stable with predictable seasonal increases during summer months and are distributed statewide. Turnover for Transportation and Bridge Engineers peaked in FY22 and has declined in recent years, with resignations also decreasing in FY26 to date. The 2024 Washington State Employee Compensation Survey shows the State lags the market by 16.5% in total compensation overall, with Civil Engineer–benchmarked classifications approximately 26% behind the market, continuing to pose recruitment and retention challenges. [1-26-2026 ACEC-ELC PPT.pdf](#)

Alvina Mao, Workforce Development Manager, outlined programs WSDOT uses to strengthen internal talent pipelines, including partnerships with the University of Washington that support advanced education and professional development. These programs provide structured coursework, applied research opportunities, and competitive selection processes, enabling employees to build specialized transportation expertise while supporting workforce development and long-term agency capacity. [ASCE\\_DD\\_Presentation.pdf](#)

Krystle Jones, Talent Acquisition Manager provided a statewide recruitment check-in for engineering positions, reporting active hiring across Transportation Engineers, Bridge Engineers, and Project Engineer classifications. Average time to hire generally ranged from the mid-40s to mid-

60s days, with some variation by classification and level, and several positions filled through in-training pathways. Recruitment efforts are ongoing, including the Transportation Engineer Intern program, which is currently accepting applications through March 30, 2026. [Recruitment Check-in WSDOT ACEC-ELC.pdf](#)

Heidi Mabbot, Class, Compensation, and Reporting Manager presented an overview of WSDOT's 2027–29 agency class and compensation priority proposals, including required criteria, evaluation factors, and the multi-phase review and bargaining timeline coordinated with OFM. The presentation outlined how turnover, recruitment challenges, classification changes, and salary compression or inversion inform proposals, and highlighted key priority areas across engineering, ferry, and marine classifications, with final legislative approval and potential implementation targeted for July 1, 2027. [WSDOT ACEC 2025-27 Agency Priority Proposals and Timeline-January2026.pdf](#)

### **Subcommittee Updates**

#### Business Administration – Erik Jonson/ Ron Paananen

- We met in January and focused on the implementation of the final rule for the Small Business Program. We are keeping the discussion going to reinforce this as folks are trying to grasp the change.
- During our last meeting we had two attendees that missed the meeting. One of our members,Carolynn Simmons will be retiring after our meeting next month.

#### Project Delivery – Jennifer Saugen

- Our attendance has been consistent with half of the subcommittee attending the meetings. We are working with ACEC on how to transition members out and in.
- Our group met in January and looked at the turnback process to review the consultant side of the process. Rafael was planning to reach out to Evan, to discuss updates on bridge hits.

#### Design/Build – Art McCluskey/Richard Patterson

- We have a large group of 45 members that includes AGC. We have meetings every 4-6 weeks. We hold Hybrid meetings with about 12 members who attend in person and the rest are virtual attendees.
- Our group has three topics that have been carried over from last year's work.
  - Build cost adjustment for design build projects.
  - Comment resolution and comment issues.
  - Lane restriction.
- We do discuss various topics and check in on how templates are working.

#### Structures & Geotechnical - Evan Grimm

- We have 17 members on our subcommittee and 12-13 members attending our meetings on a regular basis.
- Always get great participation during our meetings, we have recently updated our membership, and this has been great for engagement and participation. We need to do this on WSDOT side.
- We had an in-person meeting early in January that almost everyone attended. We highlighted some projects, Chris Hall provided some key lessons between design build and progressive design build, technical side of things

- Design Review research – We are trying to move this forward and did get a two-page disclaimer from our AG. We continue to work on how we present this concept. Greg Hess plans to present to a bunch of local agencies and get their feedback on what we are trying to accomplish.

### **WSDOT/ACEC Annual Meeting**

Leann George confirmed the date and location of the WSDOT/ACEC Annual Meeting. It will be held at the Hotel Murano in Tacoma, WA on Tuesday, June 16, 2026. It is time to start thinking about the topics and presenters. Julie Meredith, Secretary of Transportation, is scheduled to speak and the committee needs to discuss what topics Julie should prepare to speak on.

Leann will send a link to a document for the committee to share their thoughts, and this will be added to the upcoming agenda.

### **WSDOT Updates**

Tood Trepanier

- Governor Ferguson wants to be a more responsive government.
- It has already been a challenging year, balancing an increased volume of emergency response efforts alongside regular day-to-day responsibilities.
- Mother nature hit Washington with severe flooding, which caused us to reach out for external help.
- The Governor's Transportation Budget focuses on preservation. It is nice that it appears these needs are finally being seen across the state. We have a large preservation backlog and also need to figure out how to complete other high priority work. We are dealing with emergencies which are driving home the importance of these investments.
- It continues to be disheartening when it comes to our work and incidents with our WSDOT Family working on our roads. Unfortunately, there were a couple incidents with loss of life. Drivers' behavior is a constant issue.
- The WSDOT/ACEC partnership is more important than ever.

Kerri Woehler

- Some Safety stats were shared, final 2025 fatality numbers are still being confirmed; however, preliminary data indicates a slight reduction for the second consecutive year. Fatalities exceeded 800 in 2023, decreased to over 700 in 2024, and declined further in 2025. Despite ongoing funding and project delivery discussions, safety remains a consistent priority, including continued investment in core preservation efforts.
- OMB Funding Freeze: In response to a January 20, 2026, OMB memo initiating a federal funding review of 14 states, including Washington. This follows public statements indicating potential funding impacts to sanctuary jurisdictions beginning February 1, 2026.

Assistant Attorneys General (AAGs) and divisions were asked to remain alert and coordinate with their respective clients regarding any potential funding disruptions or related issues tied to the OMB review, February 1, 2026. sanctuary jurisdiction concerns, or any alleged fraud findings associated with the review. Any observed disruptions or concerns are to be reported to [dataworkgroups@atg.wa.gov](mailto:dataworkgroups@atg.wa.gov) for coordination with the federal litigation team. There are a couple of specific programs where we saw some impacts, I currently don't have the details. These impacts are being tracked.

### **Legislative updates**

- It is still early into the session to have a lot to share.
- Discussion focused on requesting legislative support to identify additional revenue sources. The Governor has suggested bonding as a potential solution, with questions raised regarding implementation and feasibility.
- Van expressed concerns about budget sustainability, including vote alignment and overall palatability. He cautioned against using bonding for this type of issue, noting the long-term financial implications.
- Allison indicated she preferred not to focus on bonding at this time and asked Kerri and Todd whether there are specific bills raising concerns. Kerri noted safety-related bills, including those addressing blood alcohol level standards.

### **Strategic Planning – Mark/Allison/All**

Mark Gaines and Allison Camden led this portion of the meeting, reviewing the top section of the draft Mission-Vision-Values document and discussing submitted comments. Due to time constraints, discussion of the current draft was brief. Mark and Allison agreed to provide one additional opportunity for collaborative input.

Leann George will distribute a link to the most current draft of the Mission-Vision-Values statement for further review and feedback.

All proposed updates will be discussed at the next meeting with the goal of reaching collaborative agreement on an updated Mission-Vision-Values statement.

### **Upcoming Meetings**

- March 17, 2026, from 1-2:50 pm / Virtual Only Meeting
- May 19, 2026, from 2-3:60 pm / Virtual Only Meeting
- June 16, 2026, from 8 am- 3 pm / In-Person Annual Meeting (Hotel Murano)

### **Action Items:**

- Leann will send a link to committee to submit June 16<sup>th</sup> WSDOT/ACEC Annual Meeting topic/presenter ideas
- All committee members submit ideas for the June 16<sup>th</sup> WSDOT/ACEC Annual Meeting
- Mark and Allison will discuss the potential for Erik and Ron to present on the cost-plus-fixed fee process at an upcoming WSDOT/ACEC ELC meeting.
- Mark and Alison will review the input and provide some draft language for final discussion and approval of the WSDOT/ACEC ELC Mission-Vision-Value document.
- Leann will send a link for the committee to provide in put on the Draft Mission-Vision-Value document.
- All Committee Members submit suggested changes to the Mission and Vision document February 5<sup>th</sup>.

### **Adjourn**