



# Ensuring Consistent Access to Regional Transportation Coordinators

## 2025–27 Operating Budget Decision Package

### RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY

Regional Transportation Coordinators (RTCs) are employees of educational service districts (ESDs), and their primary role is to ensure that school districts have local access to the knowledge, training, and oversight necessary to run a complete, effective, and safe student transportation program. Because these positions are funded as a separate budget line item as opposed to being included in the prototypical school funding formula, funding for RTCs does not automatically adjust alongside the salary allocations in the prototypical school funding formula. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) requests funding to increase RTC salaries over the next four years.

### FISCAL DETAIL

Operating Expenditures	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Fund 001-1 (program 022)	\$181,000	\$203,000	\$226,000	\$249,000
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$181,000</b>	<b>\$203,000</b>	<b>\$226,000</b>	<b>\$249,000</b>
<b>Biennial Totals</b>	<b>\$384,000</b>		<b>\$475,000</b>	
Staffing	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
FTEs	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Average Annual</b>	<b>0.0</b>		<b>0.0</b>	
Object of Expenditure	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Obj. N	\$181,000	\$203,000	\$226,000	\$249,000
Revenue	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Fund 001	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>
<b>Biennial Totals</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>		<b>\$0.00</b>	

### PACKAGE DESCRIPTION

A unique state budget item provides \$939,000 a year to pay for the salaries and benefits of RTCs. Working out of the nine regional ESDs, RTCs provide school districts with direct access to the knowledge, training, and oversight necessary to run their student transportation programs.

## **What is the problem, opportunity, or priority you are addressing with the request?**

Due to its placement in the budget as a separate item instead of being incorporated into the prototypical funding model, funds for RTC salaries and benefits are not automatically increased alongside district staff salaries and have not been adjusted since 2019. This means that without direct action by the Legislature to appropriate additional funding for RTCs, they are not budgeted to receive raises or cost-of-living increases, making these positions increasingly difficult to both recruit and retain as the wage loses value against inflation.

## **What is your proposal?**

OSPI proposes a one-time increase of \$181,000 in the 2026 fiscal year, and the addition of an inflation factor to the budget item that drives this funding so that the funds and the wages they pay do not become stagnant again over time. This increase will allow RTCs to be paid a competitive wage without ESDs having to draw on other funding sources to increase salaries alongside factors such as inflation.

## **How is your proposal impacting equity in the state?**

1. RTCs work with the school districts in their regions to provide support and oversight of districts' transportation services. Ensuring all districts can access services—including on-site services when needed—from RTCs at a consistent level of service allows all students in the state to benefit from high-quality transportation to and from school.
2. At the forefront of every program, policy, and decision, OSPI actively focuses on ensuring all students have access to the instruction and support they need to succeed in our schools. This proposal was developed with and has the support of many school districts statewide.
3. OSPI regularly meets with external stakeholders to identify and elevate issues that improve student outcomes and respond to the needs of public schools throughout Washington.
4. Funding this proposal will ensure that all school districts across the state have access to a regional transportation coordinator when needed.

## **What are you purchasing and how does it solve the problem?**

These funds will ensure that the salary and benefits of the regional transportation coordinators are paid for by the state, which frees up ESD fiscal resources currently used to cover the deficit to be used primarily for travel so that the coordinators can gain an on-the-ground view of a district's program operations in their respective regions.

## **What alternatives did you explore and why was this option chosen?**

This option was chosen because this budget line item is the sole source of state funding for RTCs, positions that are an essential support for districts to effectively transport students to and from school. There are no other available options to link RTC salaries to current state funding mechanisms. Taking no action to address stagnant RTC wages will further deplete the buying power of this budget item and negatively impact districts' ability to recruit and retain the valuable services of RTCs.

## What resources does the agency already have that are dedicated to this purpose?

The current maintenance level funding for this purpose continues to stand at \$939,000 per fiscal year and has not been adjusted since 2019. This level of funding is not adequate to recruit and retain a sufficient number of knowledgeable and effective RTCs. Underfunding RTCs will in turn negatively impact district student transportation programs.

## ASSUMPTIONS AND CALCULATIONS

### Expansion, reduction, elimination or alteration of a current program or service:

This proposal provides additional funding to the budget item that covers RTC salaries and benefits so that the costs associated with providing an existing service to districts can continue without further restriction.

### Detailed assumptions and calculations:

OSPI used data for the 2024–25 school year as provided by the educational service districts as a baseline for actual costs related to the regional transportation coordinators. To establish the new investment for fiscal year 2026, OSPI then took the cost above the allocation for the 2024–25 school year and inflated it by 3.7%.

The estimated new additional investment of \$181,000 was inflated by 2% in each of the future years to arrive at the following values:

- Fiscal Year 2026: \$181,000
- Fiscal Year 2027: \$203,000
- Fiscal Year 2028: \$226,000
- Fiscal Year 2029: \$249,000

### Workforce assumptions:

None.

### Historical funding:

#### Fiscal Year 2026

- FTE = 5 FTE
- Total Funds = \$939,000
- Near General Fund = \$939,000
- Other Funds = \$0

#### Fiscal Year 2027

- FTE = 5 FTE
- Total Funds = \$939,000
- Near General Fund = \$939,000
- Other Funds = \$0

## STRATEGIC AND PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES

### Strategic framework:

Ensuring that every student who needs transportation services can access them through a district's program is critical for students to attend school. The RTCs play a critical role in supporting the districts within their region in providing these necessary services to students.

### Performance outcomes:

Without sufficient funding, RTCs will not be able to perform the duties they were hired to fulfill. School districts are not receiving the services they have grown to expect from RTCs. Appropriate funding will allow the RTCs to complete all job duties at school districts statewide, ensuring consistency, efficiency, and safety in school district transportation services statewide.

## OTHER COLLATERAL CONNECTIONS

### Intergovernmental:

None.

### Stakeholder impacts:

School districts and educational service districts support efforts to maintain consistent levels of service from regional transportation coordinators.

### Legal or administrative mandates:

None.

### Changes from current law:

None.

### State workforce impacts:

None.

### State facilities impacts:

None.

### Puget Sound recovery:

N/A

### Governor's salmon strategy:

N/A