



Sustaining Washington's Regional Transportation Coordinators

2027–29 Operating Budget Decision Package

Agency: 350 Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

Budget period: 2027-29

Budget level: PL

RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY

Regional Transportation Coordinators (RTCs) are employees of Educational Service Districts (ESDs) who provide school districts direct access to the technical knowledge, training, and oversight necessary to run safe, compliant, and effective student transportation programs. Because RTCs are funded as a separate state budget line item rather than through the prototypical funding formula, their compensation does not automatically increase with statewide salary allocations. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) requests full funding to restore RTC staffing to the authorized nine positions statewide and to protect that funding from future erosion.

FISCAL DETAIL

Operating Expenditures	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031
Fund 001-1 (Program 022)	\$1,232,000	\$1,297,000	\$1,364,000	\$1,433,000
Total	\$1,232,000	\$1,297,000	\$1,364,000	\$1,433,000
Expenditures				
Biennial Totals	\$2,529,000		\$2,797,000	
Staffing	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031
FTEs	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Average Annual		0.0		0.0
Object of Expenditure	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031
Obj. E	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$2,000
Obj. N	\$1,230,000	\$1,295,000	\$1,362,000	\$1,431,000
Revenue	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031
Total Revenue	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Biennial Totals	\$0		\$0	

PACKAGE DESCRIPTION

RTCs deliver in-region technical assistance, training, and oversight so districts can operate safe, efficient, and legally compliant transportation programs for all students. The Legislature currently funds RTC salaries and benefits through a dedicated state line item in the operating budget.

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

Because RTC compensation is outside the prototypical funding formula, the line item has not kept pace with statewide salary increases or inflation. Over the past two biennia, the RTC line item has been underfunded to the point that only four positions are currently filled instead of nine. Without corrective action, the program's purchasing power will continue to erode, making recruitment and retention increasingly difficult and jeopardizing the statewide network of transportation supports that districts rely on. This threatens program quality and the availability of reliable transportation, particularly for students requiring specialized transportation services.

What is your proposal?

OSPI requests restoring the RTC program to its intended funding level, 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 in funding will allow RTC salaries and benefits to be paid a competitive wage without districts having to draw on other funding sources to increase salaries alongside factors such as inflation.

How is your proposal impacting equity in the state?

Please describe in detail how this proposal is likely to benefit communities and populations who have historically been excluded by governmental decisions. Include both demographic and geographic information about communities.

Experience demonstrates that the most disadvantaged students receive the worst provisions when systems, including the student transportation formula, fall short. OSPI requests funding to ensure that special passengers, including students with disabilities, homeless students, and students in foster care, have reliable and consistent transportation to and from school. Ensuring special passengers receive the same treatment as their peers will make Washington's student transportation operation significantly more equitable.

Describe how your agency engaged with communities and populations, particularly those who have been historically excluded and marginalized by governmental decisions?

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. School districts provide direct services to students with disabilities, homeless students, and students in foster care.

What input did your agency receive and how was it incorporated into your proposal?

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.

Explain why and how these equity impacts will be addressed, i.e., consider communities or populations excluded or disproportionately impacted by the proposal.

Funding this proposal will ensure that special passenger populations receive the same transportation services offered to their classmates.

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

This proposal funds state-supported salaries and benefits for nine RTC positions located within the nine ESDs. OSPI requests \$1,232,000 in FY 2028, \$1,297,000 in FY 2029, \$1,364,000 in FY 2030, \$1,433,000 in FY 2031 and ongoing funding beyond 2031 to fully fund nine RTC positions across the nine regional ESDs. Restoring full RTC capacity will establish statewide access to technical expertise and compliance oversight; reduce the extent to which ESDs and districts must divert local funds to cover RTC salary gaps, increase RTC ability to conduct on-site reviews, training, and system improvements by funding travel and operational needs; and strengthen districts' ability to recruit and retain qualified transportation staff.

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

The only alternative is to take no action to address stagnant RTC wages, which will further deplete the buying power of this budget item and negatively impact districts' ability to recruit and retain the valuable services of RTCs. The proposed option was chosen as this budget item is the sole source of state funding for RTCs, positions that are essential to maintain 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.

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. 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.

Both the 2023-25 and the 2025-27 budgets provided up to \$939,000 a year for regional transportation coordinators and related activities.

Detailed assumptions and calculations:

We estimate the costs in fiscal year 2028 for each of the nine districts to include \$183,720 for salaries and benefits, \$22,269 for supplies and travel, \$11,135 for facility and technology costs, and \$23,884 for indirect costs calculated at 11% of the direct costs. That is a rounded \$241,000 annually per district. Nine fully-funded districts would cost a total of \$2,169,000.

With 3% inflation, those full costs would be \$2,234,000 in fiscal year 2029, \$2,301,000 in fiscal year 2030, and \$2,370,000 in fiscal year 2031.

Factoring in current ongoing future funding of \$939,000 per year, this request is for an additional \$1,230,000 in fiscal year 2028, \$1,295,000 in fiscal year 2029, \$1,362,000 in fiscal year 2030, and \$1,431,000 in fiscal year 2031.

An additional cost for the OSPI is an estimated \$2,000 annual cost for use of the Education Grants Management System for the distribution of the grants.

Workforce assumptions:

None.

Historical funding:

Fiscal Year 2028

- FTE = 0.0 FTE
- Total Funds = \$939,000
- Near General Fund = \$939,000
- Other Funds = \$0

Fiscal Year 2029

- FTE = 0.0 FTE
- Total Funds = \$939,000
- Near General Fund = \$939,000

- Other Funds = \$0

STRATEGIC AND PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES

Strategic framework:

Governor Ferguson's Priorities

This request supports one of Governor Ferguson's strategic goals.

Goal 1 – Education

Strengthening K-12 education in the state of Washington, which includes plans to invest a higher percentage of the total budget in K-12 education to ensure a strong start for Washington's younger residents. This priority references the Washington State Constitution, which declares that "It is the paramount duty of the state to make ample provision for the education of all children residing within its borders, without distinction or preference on account of race, colors, caste, or sex."

OSPI Strategic Goals

This proposal directly supports the first and fourth of [OSPI's four strategic goals](#), with primary alignment to the agency's commitment to "eliminating opportunity gaps and supporting students furthest from educational justice."

Goal 1: Equitable Access to Strong Foundations

Ensuring that every student who needs transportation services can access them through a district program is critical for students to attend school. Efficient programs reduce absenteeism and creates opportunities for students to learn and grow.

Goal 4: A Committed, Unified, and Customer-Focused OSPI

Districts rely on key centralized state resources to operate essential programs like student transportation. By advocating for this ESD resource, OSPI is acting in its role as partner and advocate for systemic needs of our shared customers: school districts.

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 ESD support efforts to maintain consistent levels of service from regional 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

OTHER SUPPORTING MATERIALS

None.

Information technology (IT):

N/A