

2023 Regional Transportation Plan



2023 Regional Transportation Plan Chapter 1

Toward a connected region

November 30, 2023

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0 Purpose	1-1
Chapter organization	1-1
1.1 Introduction	1-2
1.2 Geographic setting.....	1-4
1.3 Metropolitan transportation planning process	1-7
1.3.1 Overview of federal planning requirements.....	1-7
1.3.2 Overview of state planning requirements	1-10
1.3.3 The region has several planning boundaries with different purposes	1-11
1.3.4 Metro facilitates the metropolitan transportation planning process through Metro’s advisory committees	1-14
1.4 Process and engagement overview	1-17
1.4.1 How did we get here?	1-18
1.4.2 What did we hear?.....	1-19
1.4.3 Connecting and Collaborating.....	1-20
1.5 What’s next moving forward?	1-22

FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Portland-Vancouver metropolitan region geographic context	1-4
Figure 1.2: Cities and counties of the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan region	1-6
Figure 1.3: National goal areas and federal planning factors.....	1-8
Figure 1.4: How federal and regional transportation policies have evolved since the 1990s	1-9
Figure 1.5: Oregon’s Statewide Land Use Program guides coordinated land use and transportation planning and decision-making in the greater Portland region	1-10
Figure 1.6 Regional transportation planning boundaries.....	1-13
Figure 1.7: Regional transportation decision-making process	1-15

Figure 1.8: Timeline and process for development of the 2023 Regional Transportation Plan 1-17

Figure 1.9: Summary of key touch points from 2021 to 2023 1-21

1.0 PURPOSE

Metro is the metropolitan planning organization (MPO), designated by Congress and the State of Oregon, for the Oregon side of the Portland-Vancouver urbanized area. The agency serves 1.7 million people living in the region's 24 cities and three counties. As the MPO, Metro formally updates the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) every five years in cooperation and coordination with the region's cities, counties, the Port of Portland, the Oregon Department of Transportation, transit providers and other partners.

The RTP is a blueprint to guide investments in motor vehicle, transit, bicycle, and walking travel options and the movement of goods and freight throughout the greater Portland region. The plan identifies the region's most urgent transportation needs and priorities with the revenues the region expects to have available over the next two decades to make those investments a reality. It also establishes goals and policies to help meet those needs and guide priority investments. More resources will be needed to achieve the plan's vision, address the disruptions of the global pandemic and respond to other urgent trends and challenges facing the region.

The policies, projects and programs in the RTP help move the region closer to a safe, reliable, healthy and affordable transportation system that is environmentally responsible, moves products to market efficiently and ensures all people can connect to the education and work opportunities they need to experience and contribute to our region's economic prosperity and quality of life. Implementing the plan will take sustained, focused work from every partner in the region.

Chapter organization

This chapter is organized into the following sections:

1.1 Introduction: This section broadly describes the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and trends and challenges facing greater Portland that were the focus of this update.

1.2 Geographic setting: This section describes the geographic context of the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan region.

1.3 Metropolitan transportation planning process: This section describes Metro's role in transportation planning and planning areas of responsibility to address federal and state transportation planning requirements.

1.4 Process and engagement overview: This section describes the timeline and process for developing the 2023 Regional Transportation Plan.

1.5 What's next moving forward: This section provides a brief introduction to the rest of the plan.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The 2023 Regional Transportation Plan demonstrates the need for continued investment to build, operate and maintain the regional transportation system we need for all travelers and to meet the region’s equity, safety, climate, mobility and economic goals.

The RTP defines a shared vision and investment strategy that guides planning and investments to keep people connected and commerce moving throughout the greater Portland region. As a cornerstone of the metropolitan transportation planning process, the RTP provides a long-range blueprint for transportation in the Portland metropolitan region with a 20-year minimum time horizon. The Metro Council adopted the first RTP in 1983. The plan is updated every five years to stay ahead of future growth, address trends and challenges facing the region and respond to new federal and state requirements.



Learn more about the 2023 Regional Transportation Plan at oregonmetro.gov/rtp

Starting in Fall 2021, Metro Council and staff extensively engaged with policymakers, jurisdictional staff, federally recognized tribes, transportation agencies, community-based organizations, business groups, businesses and members of the public to update the region’s vision, goals and policies for the transportation system and understand the region’s transportation trends, needs and priorities for investment. Public engagement and consultation that shaped development of the plan are summarized in Section 1.4 of this chapter with more details provided in Appendix D of the RTP.

The greater Portland region is at a pivotal moment. The most recent census data shows our region continues to grow more diverse. By 2045 more than two million people are expected to live within the metropolitan planning boundary for the RTP—about one-half million more people than today with about half from growing families. People are shopping and working in new ways that will require different transportation solutions.

The greater Portland region is facing urgent global and regional challenges. Climate change is happening faster than predicted, and the transportation system is not fully prepared for the expected Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake. Technological changes in transportation, communication and other areas are radically altering our daily lives.

The impacts of climate change, generations of systemic racism, economic inequities and the pandemic have made clear the need for action across jurisdictional boundaries. Systemic inequities mean that communities have not equally benefited from public policy and investments, and our changing climate and the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated many disparities that Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) communities, federally recognized tribes, people with low income, women and other marginalized populations already experience. Safety, housing affordability, homelessness, and public health and economic disparities have been intensified by the global pandemic; the effects of which the region continues to experience.

As the greater Portland region continues to emerge from the disruptions of the pandemic and respond to other urgent trends and challenges, this RTP provides an opportunity for all levels of government to work together across jurisdictional boundaries to deliver a better transportation future.

The plan considers the changing circumstances and challenges facing our growing region and addresses them directly, adopting new approaches for addressing mobility and prioritizing investments to advance transportation equity, climate, safety, mobility and economic goals. The goals, policies, projects and strategies in this plan also address federal, state and regional planning requirements based on our shared values and the outcomes we are trying to achieve as a region, including implementation of the 2040 Growth Concept.

1.2 GEOGRAPHIC SETTING

The Portland-Vancouver metropolitan region is part of the broader Pacific Northwest region, also called Cascadia. Shown in Figure 1.1, the Pacific Northwest encompasses most of British Columbia, Washington, Oregon and adjoining parts of Alaska, Montana and California.

Figure 1.1: Portland-Vancouver metropolitan region geographic context



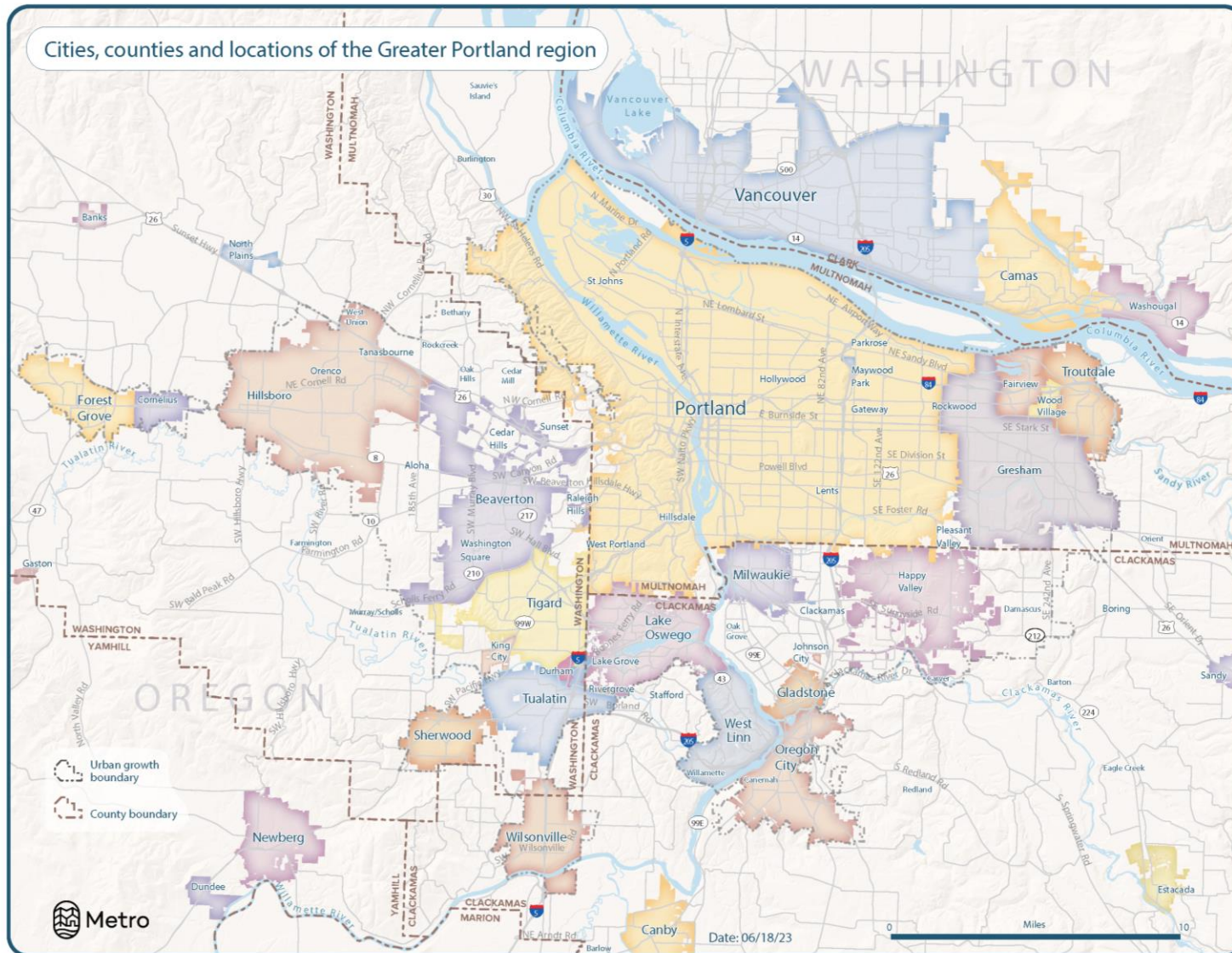
Linked together by a rich and complex natural environment, abundant recreational opportunities and major metropolitan areas, the Pacific Northwest serves as a global gateway for commerce and tourism, connecting to other Pacific Rim countries and the rest of the United States.

The greater Portland region is situated at the northern end of the Willamette Valley, a fertile river valley surrounded by dramatic natural features, with the Coast Range to the west, the Cascade Range to the east and the Columbia River to the north (including the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic area). Several snow-capped mountains are visible from different vantage points in the region, including Mt. Hood, Mt. St. Helens, Mt. Rainier and Mt. Adams. Within the region, rivers, streams, wetlands, buttes, forest lands, meadows and rolling to steep hillsides dominate the natural landscape. Outside the urban growth boundary, agricultural lands and other natural landscape features influence the sense of place for the greater region.

Although not the largest gateway on the U.S. West Coast, the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan region is one of four international gateways on the West Coast, including the Puget Sound, the San Francisco Bay area and Southern California. In this role, the region serves as a gateway to domestic and international markets for businesses located throughout the state of Oregon, Southwest Washington, the Mountain states and the Midwest. Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington counties also play a significant role in the state's agricultural production. The economy of our region and state depend on our ability to support the transportation needs of these industries and provide reliable access to gateway facilities.

The Oregon side of the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan region encompasses 24 cities and the urban areas of three counties as shown in Figure 1.2. Metro's urban growth boundary and jurisdictional boundaries are shown in Figure 1.6.

Figure 1.2: Cities and counties of the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan region



1.3 METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION PLANNING PROCESS

Since 1979, Metro has been the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) designated by Congress and the State of Oregon, for the Oregon portion of the Portland-Vancouver urbanized area. The urbanized area includes 24 cities and three counties with a population of 1.7 million. It is Metro's responsibility to meet the requirements of federal laws and regulations, Oregon's Statewide Land Use Program and the Metro Charter for the MPO area. Together, these requirements call for development of a multimodal transportation system plan that is coordinated with the region's land use plans and meets federal and state planning requirements.

Metro's transportation planning process also addresses federal and state requirements related to engagement. Metro gives meaningful opportunities for the public, federally-recognized tribes, federal agencies, state agencies and local agencies to inform the planning process. Public engagement and consultation activities that shaped development of the 2023 RTP are summarized in Section 1.4 of this chapter with more details provided in Appendix D of the RTP.

1.3.1 Overview of federal planning requirements

Metro uses a federally mandated decision-making framework called the metropolitan transportation planning process to guide its regional transportation planning and programming activities. This planning process requires all urbanized areas with populations over 50,000 to have a MPO to coordinate transportation and air quality planning and programming of federal transportation dollars within their boundaries. These activities must address the seven national goal areas and consider projects and strategies that address the ten federal planning factors shown in Figure 1.3.

The national goal areas and planning factors are addressed throughout the RTP and appendices, including:

- the plan's vision, goals and objectives (Chapter 2)
- policies to guide development and implementation of the plan (Chapter 3)
- existing system performance and regional transportation needs (Chapter 4)
- funding expected to be available to build the region's investment priorities (Chapter 5)
- the region's investment priorities (Chapter 6)
- expected performance of the plan (Chapter 7) and
- planned near-term implementation and monitoring activities (Chapter 8).

Figure 1.3: National goal areas and federal planning factors¹



MPOs are responsible for maintaining the region’s congestion management process and implementing federal performance-based planning requirements tied to the national goal areas. MPOs are required to establish targets related to safety, bridge and pavement condition, air quality, freight movement, performance of the National Highway System and to use performance measures to track their progress toward meeting those targets. Appendix L of the RTP documents the region’s approach to addressing the federal transportation performance-based planning and congestion management requirements.

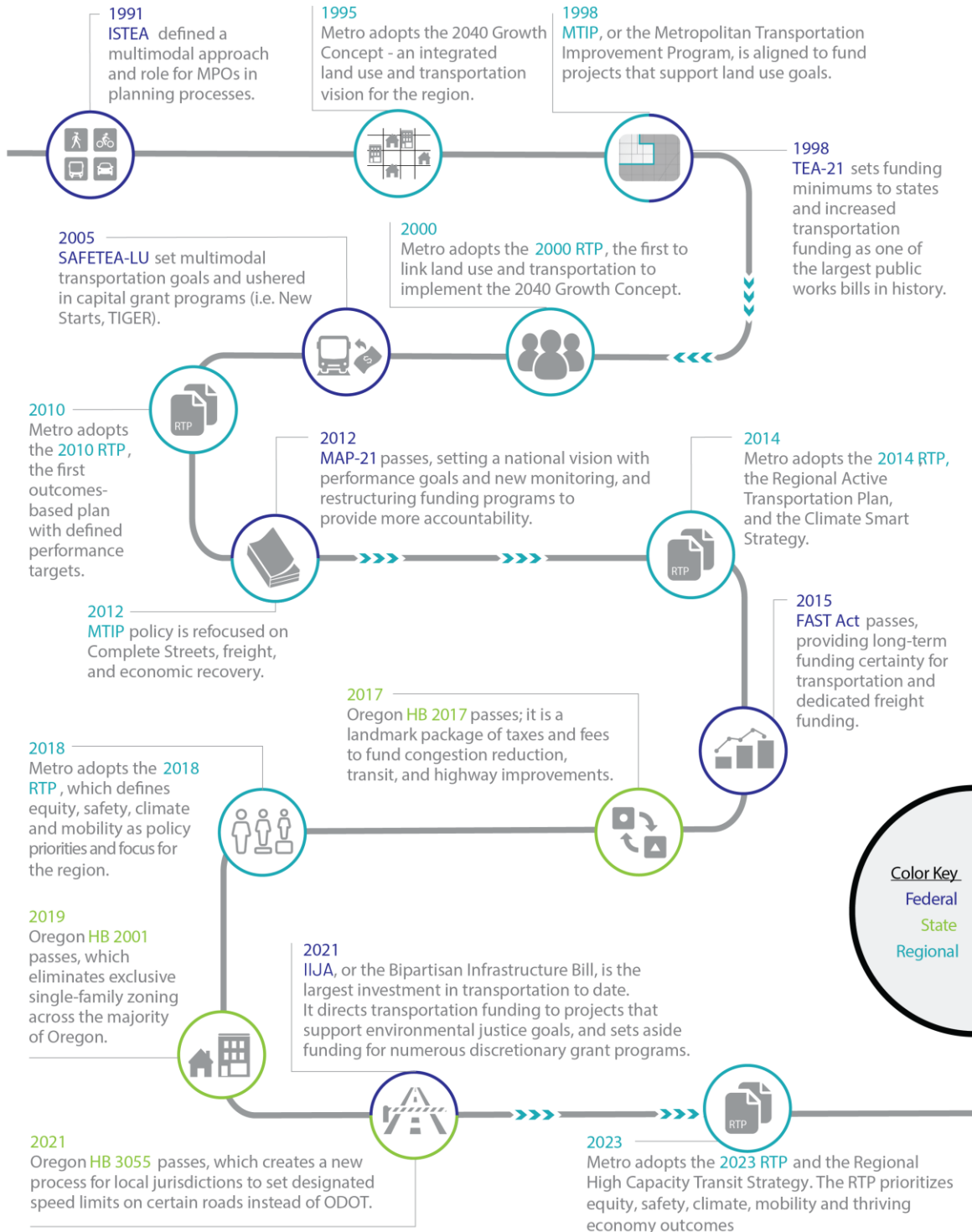
As the designated MPO for the Oregon portion of the Portland-Vancouver region, Metro is responsible for coordinating development of the RTP in cooperation with the region’s transportation providers—the 24 cities and three counties in the metropolitan planning area boundary, the Oregon Department of Transportation, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, Port of Portland, Port of Vancouver, TriMet, South Metro Area Regional Transit (SMART), Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council (RTC), Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and other Clark County governments.

Under federal law, projects and programs must be in the RTP’s financially constrained project list (Appendix A) to be eligible for federal and state transportation funding, including federal funding Metro is responsible for allocating to projects in the region.

Figure 1.4 illustrates how federal, state and regional transportation policies have evolved since the 1990s.

¹ <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-23/chapter-I/subchapter-E/part-450/subpart-C>

Figure 1.4: How federal and regional transportation policies have evolved since the 1990s



1.3.2 Overview of state planning requirements

Statewide Planning Goal 12, Transportation, defines the State's policies on transportation. Oregon Administrative Rule 660-012, referred to as the Transportation Planning Rules (TPR), implements Oregon Statewide Planning Goal 12. The purpose of the TPR is to ensure coordination of transportation and land use planning in the development of transportation system plans, when considering land use plan amendments and during development review processes. Shown in Figure 1.5, state law establishes requirements for consistency of plans at the state, regional and local levels.

Under state law:

- The RTP serves as the region's regional transportation system plan (TSP), consistent with statewide planning goals and the [Oregon Transportation Planning Rule](#) (TPR).
- The RTP must be consistent with the [Oregon Transportation Plan](#), state modal and facility plans that implement the Oregon Transportation Plan, the TPR and the [Metropolitan Greenhouse Gas Reduction Targets Rule](#) (Division 44).
- Local transportation system plans must be consistent with the RTP and with the OTP and adopted state modal plans.

In 2022 and 2023, the Oregon Land Conservation and Development Commission updated the Transportation Planning Rules to establish the Climate-Friendly and Equitable Communities program. The purpose of the CFEC rulemaking was to better align the state's transportation planning with its long-term climate pollution reduction goal. The added requirements that apply to the RTP, in some cases, and to local TSPs in the Portland metropolitan area - include:

- Conducting multimodal inventories of the transportation system.
- Prioritizing walking, biking, and transit investments to access destinations.
- Planning transportation demand management programs and services.
- Identifying investments to support greater development in transit corridors and downtowns.
- Planning for and managing parking.



Figure 1.5: Oregon's Statewide Land Use Program guides coordinated land use and transportation planning and decision-making in the greater Portland region

- Identifying investments and planning for electric vehicle charging infrastructure.
- Conducting equity analyses to understand impacts of the transportation system and identifying strategies to minimize impacts on underserved populations.²
- Selecting and using system performance measures that further community livability goals.
- Regularly monitoring and reporting progress related to increasing equitable outcomes for underserved populations and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The RTP addresses these new requirements and identifies future work in Chapter 8 that will further advance implementation of the CFEC program at the regional and local levels, including planned updates to the Urban Growth Management Functional Plan in 2024 and the Regional Transportation Functional Plan in 2024-2025.

1.3.3 The region has several planning boundaries with different purposes

Federal and state law requires several metropolitan transportation planning boundaries be defined and planned for in the region for different purposes. These boundaries are shown in Figure 1.6.

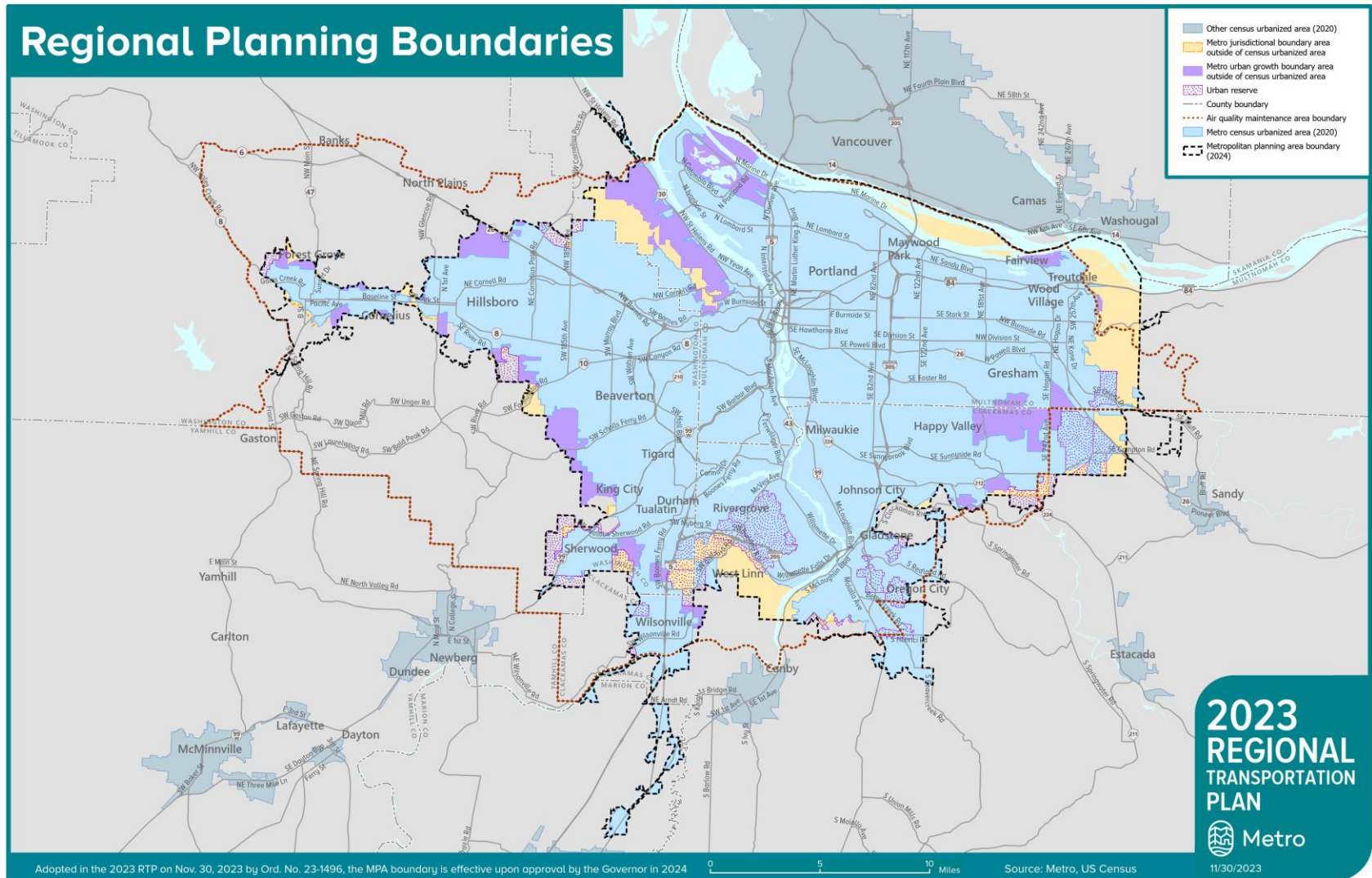
1. First, Metro’s jurisdictional boundary encompasses the urban portions of Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas counties.
2. Second, under Oregon law, each city or metropolitan area in the state has an urban growth boundary (UGB) that separates urban land from rural land. Metro is responsible for managing the greater Portland region's urban growth boundary.
3. Third, the census Urbanized Area (UA) boundary is defined to outline areas that are urban in nature and those that are largely rural in nature. The Portland-Vancouver metropolitan region is somewhat unique in that it is a single urbanized area that is located in two states and served by two MPOs. The federal census urbanized area boundary for the Oregon-portion of the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan region is distinct from the Metro urban growth boundary. The UA boundary is described in the legend of Figure 1.6 as “Census Urbanized Area (2020).”
4. Fourth, MPO’s are required to establish a Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA) boundary, which marks the geographic area to be covered by MPO transportation

² The TPR definition of underserved populations includes, but is not limited to: Indigenous people, people of color, people who do not speak English or speak limited English, people with disabilities, people with low-incomes, youth and older adults.

planning activities. At a minimum, the MPA boundary must include the urbanized area, areas expected to be urbanized within the next twenty years. The updated Metropolitan Planning Area in Figure 1.6 reflects urban areas as defined by the 2020 Census and represents the Metro region recommendation to the Oregon Department of Transportation. The updated MPA will be effective upon approval of the boundary by the Governor in 2024.

Fifth, the federally designated Air Quality Maintenance Area Boundary (AQMA) boundary is the area subject to State Implementation Plan (SIP) regulations. The Portland region's AQMA boundary was developed as part of the ozone and carbon monoxide SIP regulations. The region had previously violated national air quality standards related to ozone and carbon monoxide pollutants. In October 2017, the region achieved attainment status under the Clean Air Act Amendments. Reaching this milestone means that transportation conformity no longer is required to be performed in this region. The region continues to comply with other obligations and requirements outlined in the SIPs.

Figure 1.6 Regional transportation planning boundaries



1.3.4 Metro facilitates the metropolitan transportation planning process through Metro’s advisory committees

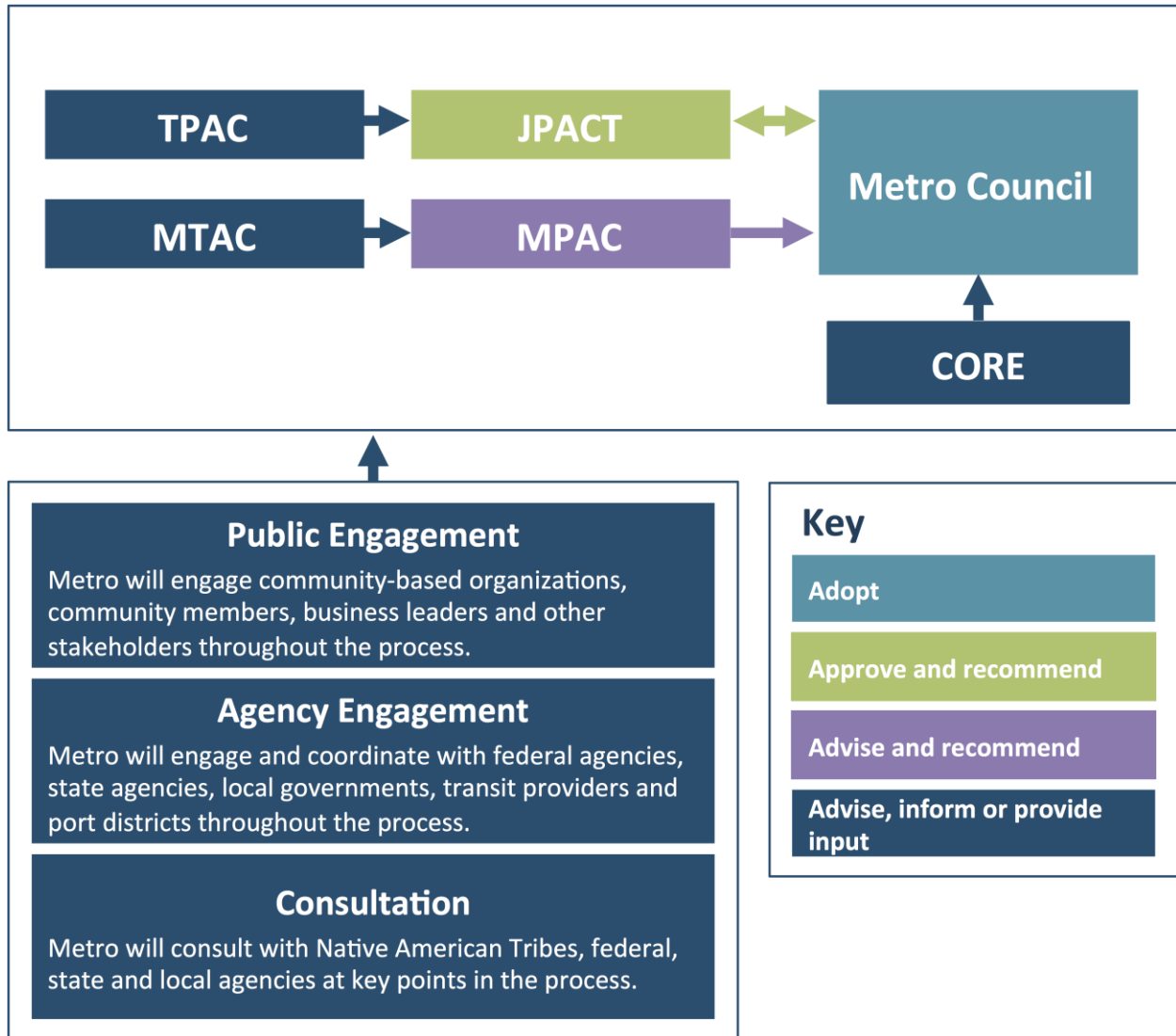
Metro facilitates the metropolitan transportation planning process, which include the Metro Council and five advisory committees including:

- the [Joint Policy Advisory Committee on Transportation](#) (JPACT)
- the [Metro Policy Advisory Committee](#) (MPAC)
- Metro’s [Committee on Racial Equity](#) (CORE)
- the [Transportation Policy Alternatives Committee](#) (TPAC) and
- the [Metro Technical Advisory Committee](#) (MTAC).

These committees have varying levels of responsibility to review, provide input and make recommendations on the development of the RTP. In addition to regular meetings of the Metro Council and advisory committees, Metro convened periodic joint workshops of TPAC and MTAC and joint workshops of JPACT and the Metro Council to shape development of the RTP.

Figure 1.7 displays the regional transportation planning decision-making process used to update the plan.

Figure 1.7: Regional transportation decision-making process



Source: Metro

JPACT is a 17-member committee that provides a forum for elected officials and representatives of agencies involved in transportation to evaluate transportation needs in the region and to make recommendations to the Metro Council. The established decision-making process strives for a well-balanced regional transportation system and involves local elected officials directly in decisions that help the Metro Council develop regional transportation policies, including updating the RTP. TPAC provides input to JPACT at the technical level.

All transportation-related actions (including federal MPO actions) are recommended by JPACT to the Metro Council. The Metro Council can approve the recommendations or refer

them back to JPACT with a specific concern for reconsideration. Final approval of each item, therefore, requires the concurrence of both bodies.

MPAC advises and makes recommendations to the Metro Council on growth management, land use and other topics of regional interest, including the RTP, at the policy level. Under the statewide land use planning program, the RTP serves as a regional transportation system plan. As a result, the MPAC also has a role in approving the regional transportation plan as a land use action, consistent with statewide planning goals and the Metro Charter. MTAC provides input to MPAC at the technical level.

The Metro Committee on Racial Equity (CORE) provides community oversight and advises the Metro Council on implementation of the Metro's [Strategic Plan for Advancing Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion](#). Adopted by the Metro Council in June 2016 with the support of MPAC, the strategic plan leads with race, committing to concentrate on eliminating the disparities that people of color experience, especially in those areas related to Metro's policies, programs, services and destinations.

In addition, the [Metro Public Engagement Review Committee](#) (PERC) advises the Metro Council on engagement priorities and ways to engage community members in regional planning activities consistent with adopted public engagement policies, guidelines and best practices.

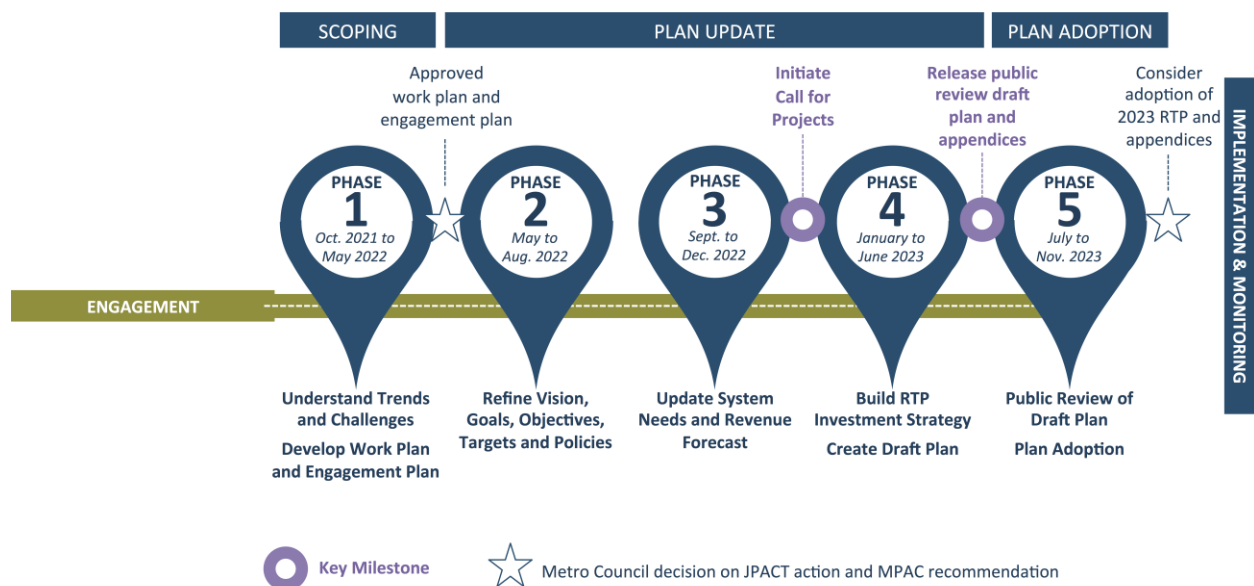
1.4 PROCESS AND ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

Over an eighteen-month period, Metro worked with regional partners to develop the 2023 Regional Transportation Plan including:

- policy makers
- federal agencies, state agencies, and local government partners
- transit providers, port districts and other transportation agencies
- federally recognized tribal governments
- community members and members of the public
- community-based organizations
- freight shippers, businesses and business groups

The timeline and process to develop the updated plan is shown in Figure 1.8.

Figure 1.8: Timeline and process for development of the 2023 Regional Transportation Plan



The result of that work is an updated vision, goals and policies (Chapters 2 and 3) that guide transportation planning and investment decisions across the region, an understanding of the region’s transportation trends and needs (Chapter 4) and about available financial resources (Chapter 5), priorities for investment and strategies to help meet those goals and policies (Chapter 6), and a recommended set of projects (Appendix A) that make progress addressing the region’s significant and growing transportation needs and challenges (Chapter 7). The update also identified planned near-term implementation and monitoring activities (Chapter 8).

1.4.1 How did we get here?

Public engagement and consultation for the 2023 RTP provided opportunities for people who live, work and travel across the greater Portland region to learn about how regional transportation decisions are made and how to have an impact on those decisions. This RTP update included an update to the region’s High Capacity Transit (HCT) Strategy. The engagement for the 2023 RTP and the HCT Strategy were closely coordinated. Meaningful engagement and consultation with tribes, community members, community-based organizations, businesses, transportation agencies and regional decision-makers and other interested parties contributed to an updated shared vision and strategy for investing in a transportation system that serves everyone.

Technical work, policy development and community engagement and consultation activities were guided by the 2023 RTP update work plan³ and public engagement plan⁴ adopted by JPACT and the Metro Council in May 2022. The work plan and public engagement plan for the 2023 RTP were developed during an initial scoping phase that sought input from Metro Council, JPACT, Metro’s Committee on Racial Equity, regional advisory committees, county-level coordinating committees, community-based organizations, public officials, business leaders and community leaders through a variety of engagement methods. The engagement was aligned with Metro’s adopted Public Engagement Guide (2013), Metro’s agency-wide Strategic Plan to Advance Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (2016), the Planning, Development, and Research Department Strategy for Achieving Racial Equity (2019), Metro’s public participation in transportation planning guide (2019) and federal and state requirements for effective, meaningful and inclusive public engagement.

While regional advisory committees served as the primary engagement mechanisms for collaboration and coordination during the 2023 RTP update, timely and meaningful opportunities for the public to provide input in advance of key milestones throughout the process were integral to this decision-making process. The RTP update included broad, region-wide engagement with a focus on elevating the voices of people who have been excluded from transportation decisions in this region and who have been disproportionately impacted and burdened by those decisions. Metro worked with community organizations who have trusted relationships with Black and Brown community members, youth, people with disabilities, people with low incomes and people who do not speak English or speak limited English. These community members are also

³ Metro. “[2023 Regional Transportation Plan Update Work Plan](#),” May 5, 2022.

⁴ Metro. “[2023 Regional Transportation Plan Update Public Engagement Plan](#),” May 5, 2022.

routinely underserved and not provided with adequate resources to participate in online engagement and broad public events.

The engagement for the 2023 RTP update launched during the COVID-19 pandemic. Engagement approaches remained flexible and adaptable to changing public health guidelines and quickly evolving ways of working and communicating. The engagement team was responsive to community feedback regarding people’s capacity to engage in the RTP in the face of urgent health and economic crises and community preferences regarding in-person and virtual engagement.

1.4.2 What did we hear?

Members of the public shared their transportation needs and priorities through online surveys, forums and events hosted by community-based organizations. The people of the greater Portland region want safe, affordable and reliable transportation—no matter where they live, where they go each day or how they get there.

Safety is the top concern.

People are concerned about car crashes while walking and biking. They are also concerned about personal safety in relation to hate crimes, harassment, violence and people’s unpredictable behavior. These especially are concerns for people using transit. People want to see more investment in lighting, safe places to walk and roll, improved transit stops and security (not police) in and around transit.

Investing in transit service is a priority.

Communities across the greater Portland region want access to transit that gets them where they need to go in a reasonable amount of time. Community members want transit that is accessible, affordable, efficient and frequent. Maintaining streets and sidewalks that need repair is a priority. Buses and MAX cars need to be maintained to feel safe and comfortable.

Climate action and resilience is important.

Community members point to major RTP projects that do not do enough to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. People are concerned about the transportation’s impact on clean air and ecosystems and want to see investment in transit, walking and biking.

Community members also express concern about how the transportation system will adapt to climate change, especially for community members who are most vulnerable to extreme weather.

Invest in safe and accessible place to walk and roll.

Community members highlighted the many parts of the region need more sidewalks, and all sidewalks need to be ADA accessible. Community members stress the importance of making routes to transit stops and stations accessible.

Invest in communities.

Many communities want to see relatively small-scale investments in infrastructure, including local road connections and safety improvements such as lighting and improved crossings.

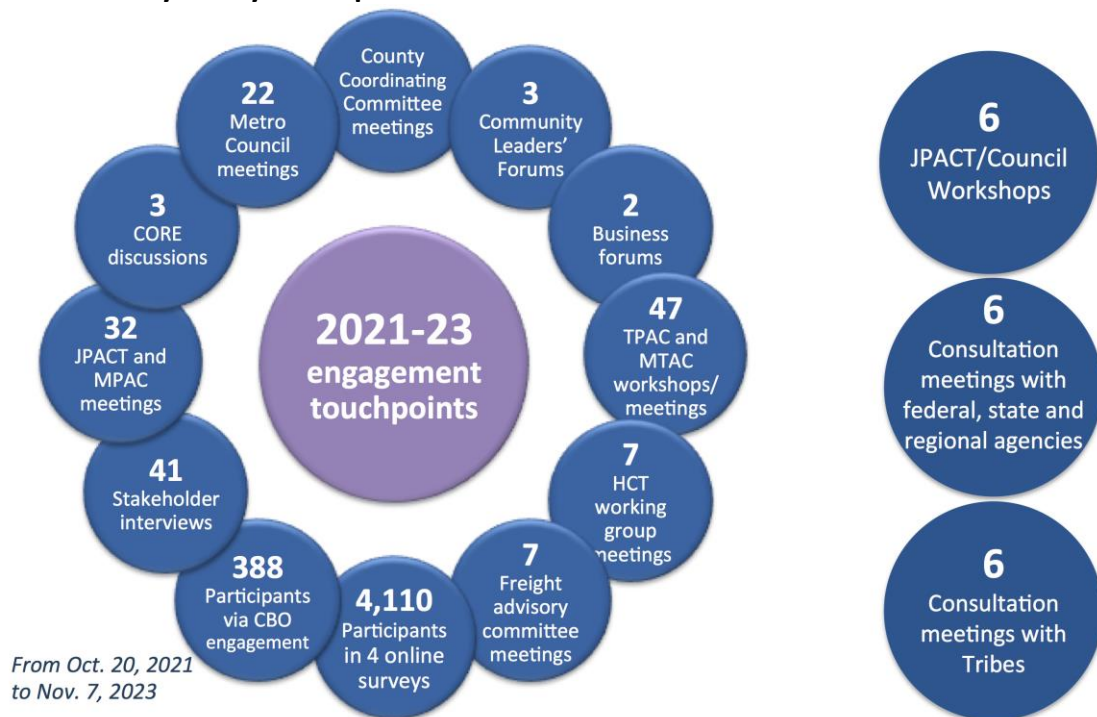
1.4.3 Connecting and Collaborating

In addition to the engagement, Metro also consulted with local, regional, state and federal governments and tribes. The information gathered from engagement activities and consultation informed Metro staff's work and was shared with transportation agency staff, regional advisory committees and decision-makers throughout the process to inform 2023 RTP policy and investment decisions. Listed below and shown in Figure 1.9, from October 2021 to November 2023, engagement and consultation activities that helped shape the RTP included:

- Four online surveys with a total of 4,110 participants
- Three public hearings
- Four in-language focus groups in Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese and Russian
- Three Community Leaders' Forums
- Seven community-based organizations engaged 380+ people
- One High Capacity Transit Strategy online open house and survey with 350+ respondents
- Ten HCT public tabling events with TriMet's Forward Together Plan
- One climate expert panel
- One modeling 101 panel
- Two business forums
- Two discussions about HCT with local chambers of commerce
- Three business focus groups, including one focused on HCT
- Six joint JPACT and Metro Council workshops to discuss major policy topics in the RTP
- 22 Metro Council meetings

- 32 JPACT and MPAC meetings
- Three Metro Committee on Racial Equity (CORE) meetings
- 47 TPAC and MTAC workshops and meetings
- Eight High capacity transit strategy working group meetings
- Periodic County Coordinating Committee briefings
- 41 interviews with elected officials and staff of local jurisdictions, state agencies, and community and business organizations from across the region
- Six consultation meetings with tribes
- Six consultation meetings with federal, state and regional agencies

Figure 1.9: Summary of key touch points from 2021 to 2023



1.5 WHAT'S NEXT MOVING FORWARD?

The greater Portland region pioneered approaches to land use and transportation planning in the past and is uniquely positioned to address the trends and challenges facing the region—mainly because the region has solid, well-integrated transportation and land-use systems in place and a history of working together to address complex challenges at a regional scale.

The rest of this plan represents a new step forward to respond to the changes and challenges we face and set a new course for future transportation decisions and implementation of the 2040 Growth Concept and Climate Smart Strategy.

The pages ahead provide an updated blueprint and investment strategy for a more sustainable transportation system that links land use and transportation, protects the environment and supports the region's economy. Translating our vision into a reality will not be a simple task, and it will take time and more work. While this plan does not achieve all the goals JPACT and the Metro Council have defined, it represents a new step forward for the region.

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If you picnic at Blue Lake or take your kids to the Oregon Zoo, enjoy symphonies at the Schnitz or auto shows at the convention center, put out your trash or drive your car – we’ve already crossed paths.

So, hello. We’re Metro – nice to meet you.

In a metropolitan area as big as Portland, we can do a lot of things better together. Join us to help the region prepare for a happy, healthy future.

Metro Council President

Lynn Peterson

Metro Councilors

Ashton Simpson, District 1

Christine Lewis, District 2

Gerritt Rosenthal, District 3

Juan Carlos González, District 4

Mary Nolan, District 5

Duncan Hwang, District 6

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