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MEMORANDUM

To: **Oregon Metro**

From: **Nelson\Nygaard**

Date: October 31, 2024

Subject: **Task 3 Regional Travel Options (RTO) Evaluation**

2019-2023 Regional Travel Options Evaluation Executive Summary

Oregon Metro's (Metro) Regional Travel Options (RTO) program seeks to create safe, vibrant, and livable communities by supporting programs that increase walking, biking, ride sharing, remote work, and public transit use. The 2019-2023 RTO Evaluation documents the contribution of the grant program towards meeting regional transportation goals and identifies opportunities for Metro to improve reporting and grantmaking processes.

In the 2019-2023 RTO grant cycle, Metro funded 56 projects. Beginning in 2021, Metro staff have organized their work into three program areas. While the 2019-2023 grant cycle did not originally define grants according to these program areas, this evaluation used the program area definitions to categorize grantee projects:

- **Commute Program:** Grantee projects market to and provide services for people going to work and higher education using non-drive-alone and active travel commute options, such as walking, biking, rolling, and taking transit.
- **Community Program:** Grantee projects focus on how people move for all types of trips, including going to the grocery store, accessing a nearby park, or traveling to an essential service like the doctor.
- **Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program:** Grantee projects are designed to reach school-age children and their parents/caregivers by providing education and encouragement around the trip to school.

Overall Impact

The 2019-2023 RTO grant cycle reported a significant number of participants, reduced drive alone trips, increased transit and active transportation trips, and generated millions of views and impressions via information sharing and marketing (Figure 1):

- **437,000 participants**, with projects supporting the Community Program reporting the highest number of participants.

- **5.9 million auto trips reduced, 5 million transit trips taken, and 1.3 million active transportation trips taken** with projects supporting the Commute Program reporting the vast majority of trips.

- **18.9 million views/impressions**, with activities supporting the Community Program generating the highest number of views/impressions.

- As a result, the RTO program reduced/prevented an estimated **25,668 metric tons of CO2** by reducing **52,888,192 vehicle miles traveled.[1]**

Figure 1   MAE Framework Data Collected by Program Area, 2019-2023 RTO Grant Cycle

Metric Type	Commute	Community	Safe Routes to School	All
Project Count	11	30	15	56
Participants	40,336	212,366	184,536	437,238
Awareness (Views/Impressions)	962,839	15,325,955	2,606,242	18,895,036
Auto Trips Reduced	4,336,115	1,399,273	175,616	5,911,004
Bike Trips	279,348	37,679	7,314	324,341
Walk Trips	261,955	8,485	24,902	295,342
Transit Trips	4,856,235	109,140	61,924	5,027,299
Bike/Walk/Transit Trips	612,999	44,684	17,227	674,910
Metric Tons of CO2	20,623	4,482	563	25,668
Vehicle Miles Reduced	42,493,927	9,235,199	1,159,065	52,888,192

Source: Data collected by program partners via Zoomgrants quarterly and final reports, 2019-2023

[1] Calculated using the Metro RTO Calculator, a tool for outcome measurement, based on a combination of Auto Trips Reduced recorded by grantees in ZoomGrants quarterly reports throughout grant cycle, and total Vehicle Miles Reduced reported by some partners in cumulative final reports. Vehicle Miles Reduced was calculated using average trip length by type from Metro's 2016 Travel Survey. These measures reflect grantee-reported data. Methods and consistency in reporting data across grantees varied widely. These measures should be considered estimates.

Key Takeaways

The RTO Evaluation Executive Summary summarizes key takeaways on the overall impact of the projects funded as well as opportunities to improve reporting in future grant cycles. The first section covers each RTO Program Area and includes the following:

- **Program Highlights** describes the quantitative and qualitative benefit of the programs and identifies key program successes and takeaways.
- **Gap Analysis** summarizes who is being served by the Metro RTO program and who is being left out, as well as opportunities to address identified gaps.

Commute Program

Commute Program projects market to and provide services for people going to work and higher education using non-drive-alone and active travel commute options, such as walking, biking, rolling, and taking transit.

Program Highlights

- Program Benefit: Commute Program efforts translated to 42,493,927 vehicle miles reduced and 20,623 metric tons of CO_2 avoided.
- Commute travel patterns have shifted dramatically, with less employees driving to work. Compiled mode split data from employer survey efforts shows that non-single occupancy vehicle (SOV) commute mode share amongst surveyed employer sites has risen significantly in the 2019-2023 RTO grant cycle compared to previous cycles (Figure 2). However, this change can be attributed to the vast increase in employees working from home. The COVID-19 pandemic and lasting changes to hybrid work schedules have significantly impacted the region's travel patterns, inviting an opportunity for RTO to re-think approaches to travel options programming for commuters.

Figure 2.   Non-Single Occupancy Vehicle (SOV) Commute Mode Share, Employer Surveys 1997 - 2023
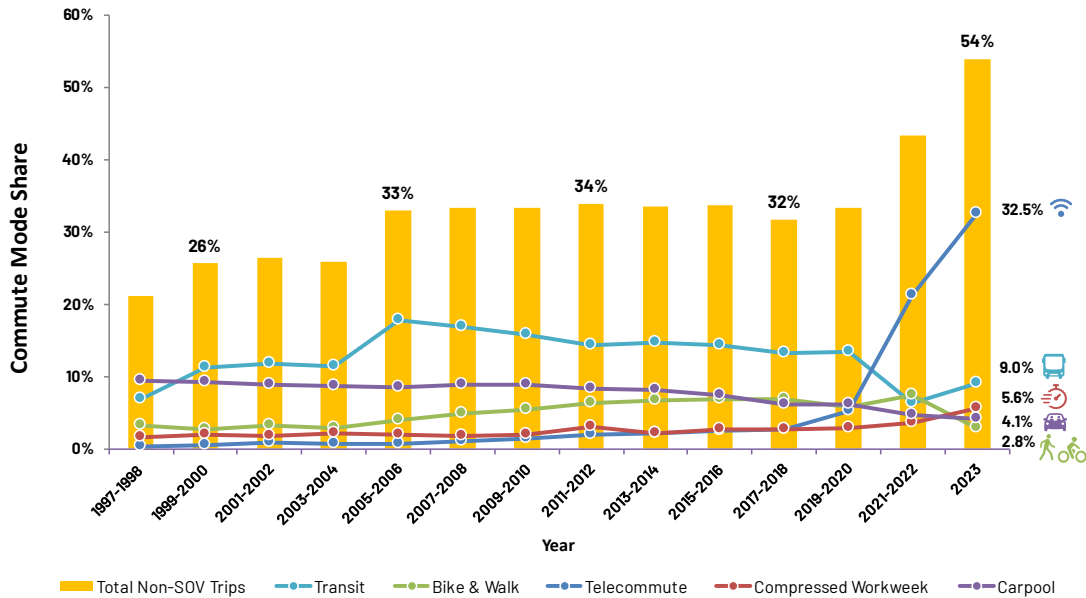
Source: Employer survey data compiled by TriMet, June 2023.

- Employer pass and engagement programs had a proven effect on reducing drive-alone trips. Employers that conducted modal surveys of employees and participated in a TriMet employer program in the 2019-2023 grant cycle had a cumulative drive-alone rate of 48%, compared to a drive-alone rate of 69% for employers who conducted modal surveys but did not participate in a TriMet employer program.

- During the pandemic some commute programs shifted to focus on initiatives serving frontline and essential workers. WTA launched the Commuter Kickbacks program with incentives targeted towards essential workers. Commuter Kickbacks ran from 2021-2023 and the percentage of participants that were frontline and essential employees ranged from 26-35%. Serving shift and essential workers' travel needs should continue to be a priority for future RTO Commute programming.

- Targeted engagement and communication with specific populations helped identify barriers to transportation access. Shifting to more digital marketing improved outreach and standardized training efforts. Success relied on selecting the most effective communication methods for target populations.

- Projects that implemented tailored incentives and participation strategies saw an increase in participation. Projects that addressed participation barriers, such as providing bikes and helmets or holding events at accessible times, saw increased participation. Incentives that were carefully chosen to resonate with focus populations were effective at improving participation.

Gap Analysis

A wealth of data to support analysis of the Commute Program is currently recorded, including mode split based on employer surveys and transportation program status at worksites; however, these resources come from multiple sources and are stored in different formats. A recommendation for the RTO program moving forward is to refine the coordination of data collection, in order to enhance its utility to inform measurement of impacts and identification of needs for future outreach and programming. This effort is already underway in the current 2023-2026 grant cycle.
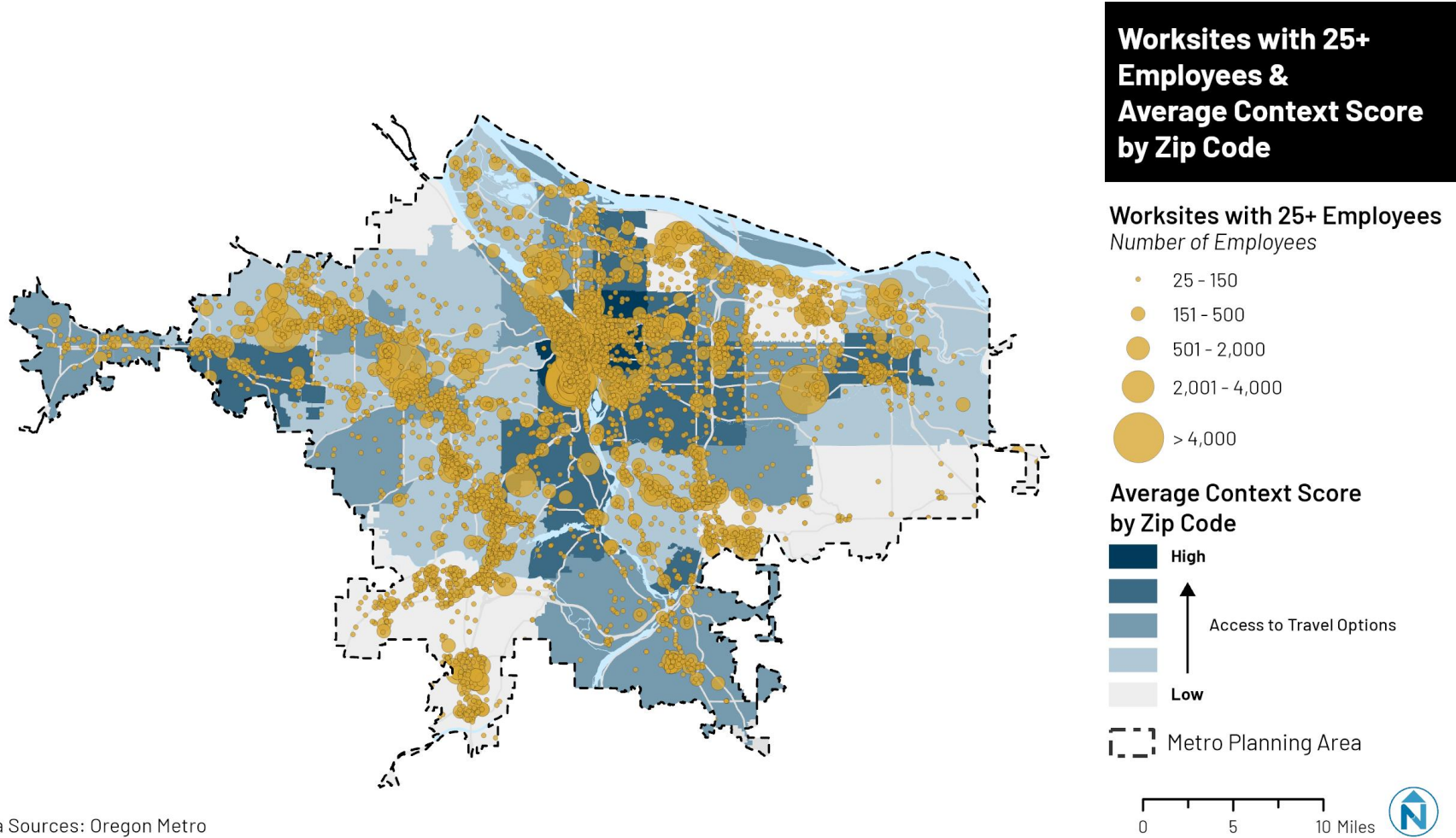
This evaluation used the information available to make informed recommendations about where the commute program could best benefit from focusing its efforts. In addition to data provided by commute program partners, Metro's Data Resource Center developed a 'Context Score' tool that can produce an index of travel options-related metrics for a given location in the Metro region. This score evaluates a given location's relative suitability for accessing travel options, including:

- Proximity to parks
- Bike route density
- Sidewalk density
- Transit access (density of transit stops weighted by number of total weekday headways)
- Urban Living Infrastructure (density of amenities)
- Intersection density
- Block size density

Metro recognizes that a person's mode choice depends upon the options available – regional residents cannot reasonably be expected to walk or bike without adequate active transportation infrastructure, or to ride transit without adequate transit service.

Figure 3 illustrates context scores summarized by zip code, as well as worksites in the Metro region symbolized by number of employees. A higher context score indicates higher access to transportation options, and a better existing physical environment for promoting and sustaining active transportation. Metro can use these context scores to help support programming tailored to best support employees in a given area. For example, providing education and incentives to try transit or active modes is suitable in areas with high context scores, whereas working towards providing commuter services such as vanpool or employee shuttles may be more suitable in areas with low context scores. Density of employment can help focus and tailor outreach and programming efforts.

Figure 3 Worksites by Employee Size and Average Context Score by Zip Code

Worksites with 25+ Employees & Average Context Score by Zip Code

Worksites with 25+ Employees
Number of Employees

- 25 – 150
- 151 – 500
- 501 – 2,000
- 2,001 – 4,000
- > 4,000

Average Context Score by Zip Code

High

Access to Travel Options

Low

Metro Planning Area

0   5   10 Miles

Data Sources: Oregon Metro

Community

While the SRTS and Commute Programs focus on trips between home and school or work, the Community Program focuses on how people travel to all other destinations by focusing outreach to a specific geography or population.

Program Highlights

- Program Benefit: Community projects translated to 9,235,199 vehicle miles reduced and 4,482 metric tons of CO2 avoided.
- Community projects prioritized awareness, with over 15 million views/impressions reported by Community projects, 80% of all reported this grant cycle.
- Needs-based incentive programs had a proven effect on reducing drive-alone trips. Transportation Wallet: Access for All, an element of PBOT's Core Community project, offers low-income individuals and households a package of transportation options at no cost. From the post-program survey, 76 percent of people that owned a car reported driving alone less due to the transportation wallet.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Community Cycling Center launched an Emergency Food Delivery Program delivering 300,000 lbs. of food to 4,895 participants by bike. The launch of this program led to the creation of a New Columbia neighborhood advocacy group, creating a space for the community to voice concerns about transportation infrastructure impacts.
- Community projects varied in nature and reported on a wide range of quantitative and qualitative metrics that helped grantees tell their stories and describe their results. Reported results that helped tell their stories include the number of bikes donated or given away, number of partnerships with CBOs, and testimonials provided by project participants.
- Holistic project approaches that addressed intersectional community needs, such as food insecurity and needs, were successful in engaging participants. Targeted engagement, especially multilingual engagement, identified specific barriers to accessing transportation options.
- Staffing and adaptability were critical to project success. Hiring culturally specific staff deepened community relationships, and adapting outreach methods, such as narrowing focus or using text messaging communication during the pandemic, improved participant engagement.

Gap Analysis

- Community projects serve a wide range of audiences. Each project may have a specific audience, which is dependent on its partnerships with community organizations, and it remains a challenge to understand the level of engagement with a specific audience unless specified by project partners.

- Generally, cost, convenience and safety (real and perceived) are reported as barriers to using travel options by several community partners.

- Outreach by Ride Connection to Latinx & Asian communities identified key culturally specific barriers to travel options: language, income, literacy, transportation options awareness, trust, and immigration status. Older travelers within these community groups, in particular, experience language barriers that limit their participation in filling out forms, navigating websites and participating in in-person events such as travel training.

- Due to the nature of the trips and people that community projects are attempting to influence (which includes: travel to and from many different start and end points, sporadic and choice-based contact with potential participants, and participants that may have many different schedules and destinations they are trying to navigate), tracking coverage and and impact can be a challenge to assess program-wide.

- Research suggests that changes in travel behavior due to the pandemic is causing a rise in non-work-related trips throughout the day (due to an increase in employees working from home). Metro's Community Program is uniquely positioned to expand its efforts and play a larger role in influencing travel behavior for these types of trips. Focusing on identifying travel options gaps and needs both within neighborhoods/communities and at major destinations (such as the Portland Airport, health care centers, large event sites, and major retail hubs) is recommended to assist RTO in identifying future programming to serve community-based trips.

Safe Routes to Schools

The 2019-2023 RTO grant cycle was the first cycle to formally include dedicated Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS) funding. SRTS is designed to reach school-age children and their parents/caregivers by providing education and encouragement around the trip to school. Metro is one of many funders of SRTS in the region, with one of the largest school districts (Portland Public Schools) providing robust programming funded through other sources. This evaluation only examined Metro funded projects, which means that it is not reflective of activities at all schools in the region.

Program Highlights

- Program Benefit: SRTS projects translated to 1,159,065 vehicle miles reduced and 563 metric tons of CO2 avoided.
- The most common activities performed were organized ride/walk/transit trips, Learn-to-Ride and bike/ped safety education, and marketing/informational campaigns.
- Most SRTS project activities happened at elementary schools, and they had the highest number of educational activities, active trips, and auto trips reduced by school enrollment.
- Several partners incorporated bike and pedestrian safety education into classroom learning to increase participation. Applying a District-wide approach to education enhanced equity: Beaverton School District found that, in previous years of programming, primarily affluent schools were choosing to incorporate optional SRTS programming into their classroom. During this grant cycle they adopted a district-wide policy to provide pedestrian education in all 34 elementary schools, which has been effective at ensuring a more equitable program.
- Success of SRTS programs rely on the enthusiasm and participation of volunteers. Some partners reported that the enthusiasm of one champion was a catalyst of change, whereas others reported that lack of volunteers led to programs drying up. Keeping volunteers engaged through advocacy and incentives is essential.
- Partners found that incorporating parents, caregivers, or older students in bike education programming and pairing it with access to bikes and bike accessories helped expand project impact. In particular, the Community Cycling Center found that for families that may not be as comfortable with biking, teaching parents how to bike increased the likelihood of the student being allowed and encouraged to ride a bike.

Gap Analysis

There are 18 school districts and 321 schools in the Metro Planning Area (MPA). In order to support regional planning and coordination for SRTS, RTO and Metro's Data Resource Center developed an [online SRTS mapping tool](#) that provides an interactive comparative analysis of safety and equity data for all schools in the region. This tool includes a one-mile "walkshed" for each school site, and Metro assigned all schools in the region a **Walkshed Score,** which combines metrics for physical infrastructure limitations (barrier streets, crashes, missing sidewalks) with student population demographic metrics (students of color, students with a disability, English learners, school-based income levels, absenteeism) to create a relative score ranging from 1 to 5, with 5 indicating higher safety needs & priority student populations. This tool can be used to help understand how local schools compare to others, and where projects should be prioritized to address specific school-based user and safety needs.

Additionally, during the 2019-23 grant cycle SRTS partners submitted data regarding activity levels at individual schools throughout the region, which contributed to this gap analysis. Some partners who completed SRTS activities as part of a larger RTO project did not fill out tracking sheets for individual schools, and some activities were focused on an entire district or geographic area rather than individual schools- and are thus not reflected in the analysis of individual school activity.

Figure 4 (below) illustrates schools in the Metro area with a high walkshed score (indicating high need) that were **not** served directly by RTO-funded program activity during the 2019-23 grant cycle. Conversely, Figure 5 illustrates RTO-funded program activity coverage by school district as well as at the individual school site level, along with walkshed score.
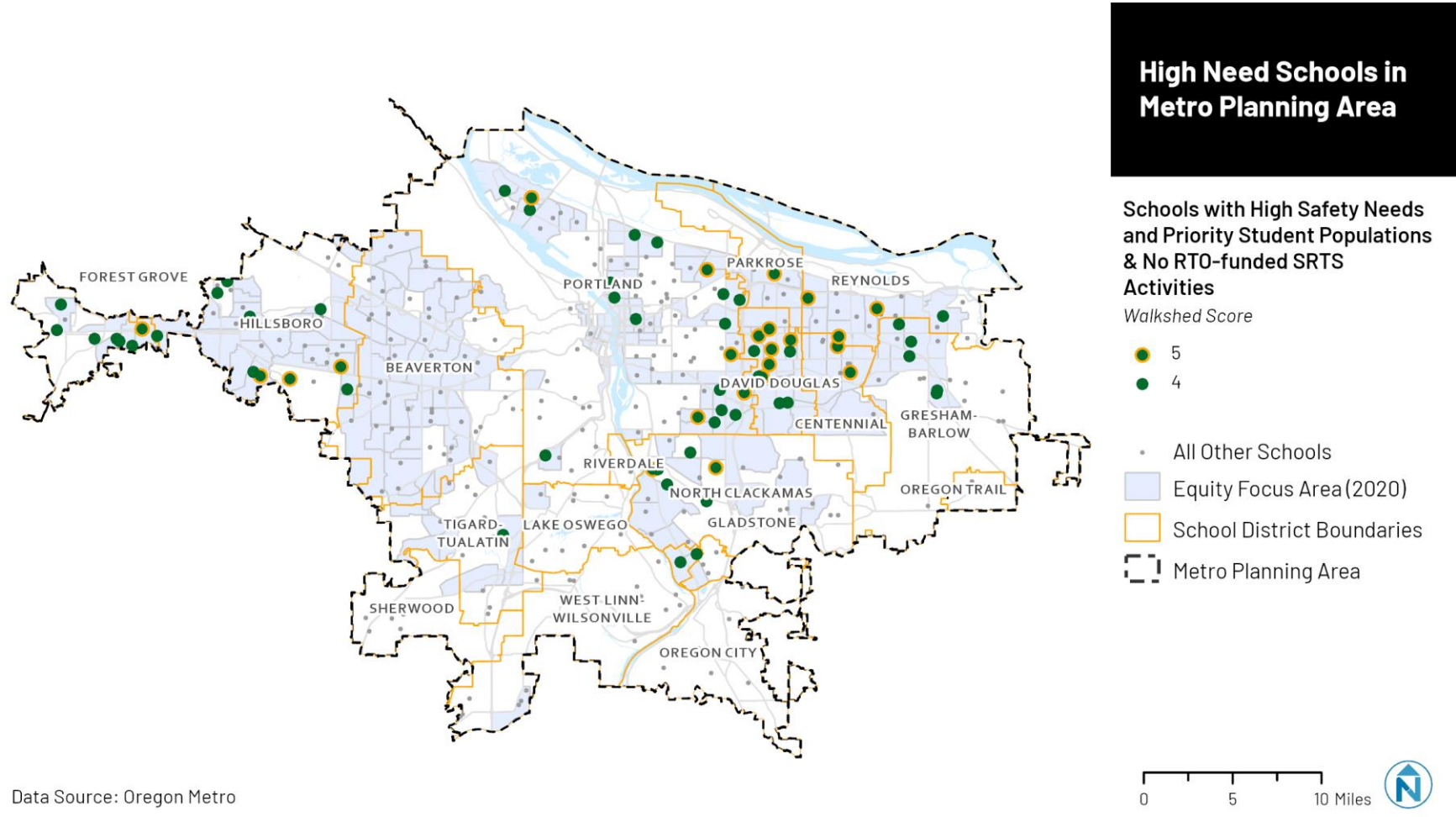
The RTO program does not fund all SRTS programming in the MPA, however this gap analysis looked at activities across schools funded by Metro in comparison to all schools in the MPA. The SRTS gap analysis gathered the following takeaways:

- Metro-funded SRTS projects served 17 out of 18 school districts in the region (Forest Grove is the only district not served by a Metro-funded SRTS project, at the individual school or district-wide scale). Some projects served large geographic areas, so while 17 districts had access to a SRTS coordinator or SRTS offerings, they may not have offered individual school-based activities.
- Metro RTO-funded SRTS projects served about half of all Title I schools in the MPA (46%) and half of all RTO-funded SRTS activities occurred at Title I schools (50%).
- SRTS projects are successfully targeting schools with high walkshed scores (reflecting higher relative need): 61% of schools with a walkshed school of 5 had one or more program activities. However, SRTS projects at elementary schools with low walkshed scores (reflecting lower relative need) were more likely to have multiple activities:

31% of elementary schools with low walkshed scores had 2+ activities. Metro should explore how to understand barriers and expand activities at individual high need schools, with learning potential from the projects serving schools with low walkshed scores.
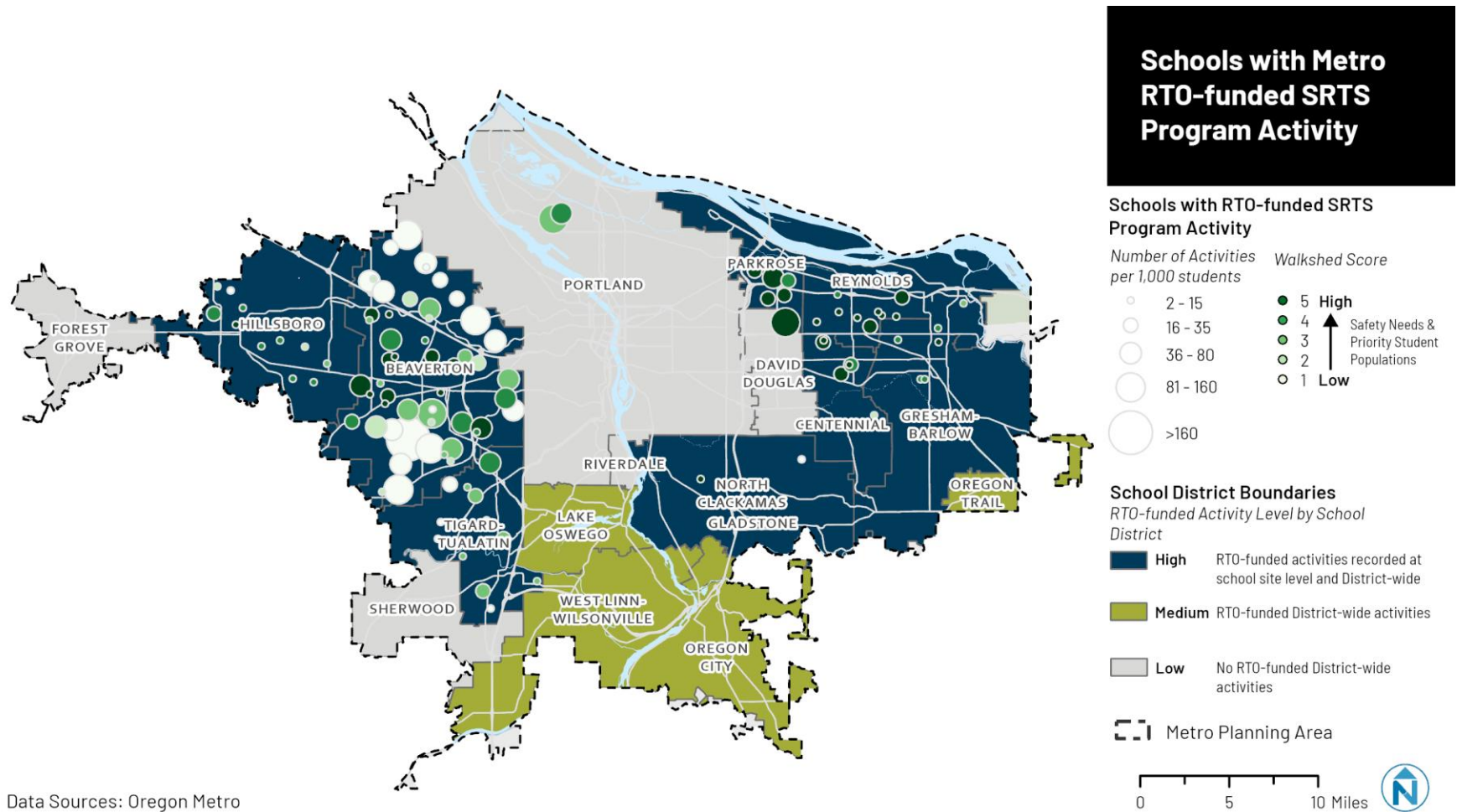
- The reported number of auto trips reduced was higher at schools with low walkshed scores (reflecting lower need). This could indicate that schools with more resources or less infrastructure barriers are more likely to influence mode shift.

- Metro should prioritize serving individual schools with higher walkshed scores and lower levels of activity. Figure 4 illustrates clusters of schools within districts that fall into this category, including Hillsboro, Forest Grove, David Douglas (and schools in outer east Portland adjacent to David Douglas).

- Since Metro does not fund all SRTS projects in the region, more data is needed to accurately assess who is being left out of SRTS programming. Consider partnering with fellow SRTS providers in the region to collectively track data on whether high need schools are being served.

Figure 4 Schools with High Walkshed Scores and no RTO-funded SRTS activities

High Need Schools in Metro Planning Area

Schools with High Safety Needs and Priority Student Populations & No RTO-funded SRTS Activities

Walkshed Score

● 5
● 4

· All Other Schools

Equity Focus Area (2020)

School District Boundaries

Metro Planning Area

Data Source: Oregon Metro

0   5   10 Miles

Figure 5   RTO-funded SRTS Program Activity and School Walkshed Score

Schools with Metro RTO-funded SRTS Program Activity

Schools with RTO-funded SRTS Program Activity

Number of Activities per 1,000 students
- 2 - 15
- 16 - 35
- 36 - 80
- 81 - 160
- >160

Walkshed Score
- 5 High
- 4
- 3
- 2
- 1 Low

Safety Needs & Priority Student Populations

School District Boundaries
RTO-funded Activity Level by School District

- **High** — RTO-funded activities recorded at school site level and District-wide
- **Medium** — RTO-funded District-wide activities
- **Low** — No RTO-funded District-wide activities

Metro Planning Area

0   5   10 Miles

Data Sources: Oregon Metro

Impact of Pandemic on Grant Cycle

COVID-19 caused large disruptions in the way people traveled and interacted throughout the region. The pandemic impacted the ability of RTO Program partners to complete activities as originally intended.

- **Commute:** The COVID-19 pandemic and lasting changes to hybrid work schedules have significantly impacted the region's travel patterns. Total non-SOV trips increased from 32% to 54%. A large portion of this change can be attributed to an increase in remote work from 3% in 2017 to 32.5% in 2023[2].

- **Community:** Projects were interrupted by stay-at-home orders, which put in-person meetings and events on pause. Post-pandemic engagement has yet to return to pre-pandemic levels, and overall participation in events remains low. Virtual participation has allowed for trainings to be recorded and posted online for more access to information.

- **SRTS:** COVID-19 led to the cancelation of in-person activities and adjustment in staff workload to accommodate health and safety concerns. During school closures SRTS projects pivoted to encouraging and creating safe outdoor places for kids to walk and roll outside**.** These activities successfully encouraged active transportation for school-age children but did not directly replace auto trips.

Recommendations

Due to the unique nature of each program area, measuring outcomes across programs will never be a simple process. Based on the 2019-23 grant cycle evaluation, the following are recommended areas of improvement for Metro to consider.

- **Focus on data collection processes that will help Metro measure tangible impacts.**
  - Modal trip data can support measurement of some of the most tangible outcomes (vehicle miles reduced, emissions reduced/prevented, health outcomes improved) that support regional goals. However, modal trip reporting varies across the grant program.
  - Many projects facilitate the distribution of resources to encourage mode shift, but the long-term benefits of these interventions remain unclear.
  - In order to accurately and consistently measure and report on impact across grants, RTO should continue to develop data collection systems and tools to

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[2] See Figure 2. Source: Employer survey data compiled by TriMet, June 2023.

assist grantees with measurement, an effort which is already underway during the 2023-26 grant cycle.

- Metro should collaborate with agencies and partners involved in employer data collection to streamline processes and optimize the use of data for program measurement and planning.

- **Mitigate barriers to reporting and take responsibility for some tracking internally.**
  - Metro should clarify the distinction between project-level outputs and derived outcomes to partners and clarify partner responsibility in reporting.
  - Metro should track year-to-year trends at program, district, and regional levels based on reported data.
  - Metro could develop a database or partnership customer relationship management tool (CRM) that allows all grantees to view existing and past partnerships, creating a CBO directory internal to RTO grantees.

- **Encourage qualitative and narrative reporting to help tell nuanced stories of success.**
  - In the case of many projects, the documented experiences of individual participants illustrated the benefits of a program or service.
  - Metro should provide clear, guiding questions and prompts to grantees in order to facilitate collection of qualitative information and stories to illustrate success.

- **Use information and feedback gleaned from partners during the 2019-23 grant cycle to inform performance measures to support RTO's 2022 Racial Equity Strategy.**
  - Metro's existing MAE framework includes the following metrics intended to support equity: 'increasing access to travel options for people of color, seniors, youth, people with disabilities, low-income residents, and/or Title 1 or equivalent schools' and 'Percent of investment focused on meeting equity goals'. However, the format in which reports were structured made it challenging to assess how successful projects were in supporting these metrics.
  - Metro should revisit these metrics as well as methodologies for capturing information from partners in order to better understand how the RTO program contributes to meeting equity goals.
  - Ask that partners identify target audiences and report out on success of reaching these audiences, to improve understanding of who is and is not being served by RTO programs. Encourage that partners use data and tools to inform this process, including Metro's [SRTS Mapping Tool](#) and [Social Vulnerability Explorer.](#)