

# PROJECT SELECTION: EQUITY PILOT PROGRAM



Puget Sound Regional Council

## What is Project Selection?

PSRC competitively selects transportation projects and allocates approximately \$300 million each year in federal transportation dollars. At the start of each funding cycle, PSRC's Executive Board adopts a Policy Framework to guide the project selection process in support of the region's long-range plans: VISION 2050, the Regional Transportation Plan and the Regional Economic Strategy.

## What is the Equity Pilot?

The Equity Advisory Committee (EAC) worked with PSRC staff throughout 2023 to develop an equity pilot program and explore strategies to elevate equity in the project selection process. Approximately \$6 million of PSRC's 2025-2026 Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) funds was awarded to transportation projects using best practices related to equity in transportation funding. The EAC shared lessons learned from the experience with the Executive Board that will shape PSRC's project selection process moving forward.

## Why create an Equity Pilot?

The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) has centered equity as a strategic goal throughout their programs (such as the Justice40 Initiative) to address decades of underinvestment in disadvantaged communities, reducing disparities and inequities in the transportation system.

Consistent with federal policies like these, PSRC boards have directed staff to make targeted investments to reduce disparities and prioritize services and access to opportunity for people of color, people with low incomes and other historically underserved groups.

Research has shown that equitable cities that expand access to resources like public transportation also experience an expansion of opportunities, such as new jobs from innovative ideas developed by those who were previously marginalized. PSRC's hope is that the Equity Pilot results will help connect communities to opportunities, reduce disparities and help raise the ceiling of the region.



## What was the process?

PSRC developed a workplan to co-create the Equity Pilot with the EAC. It included four (4) phases of work (Educate, Design, Implement and Adopt). Below are major milestones in the workplan and links with more details.



### EDUCATE

Staff and the EAC began the process with a series of meetings during the first quarter that explored PSRC's current project selection process and how other peer MPOs across the country have incorporated equity into their processes.

### DESIGN

The EAC provided feedback on what the Pilot Program should look like, and a subcommittee of members joined staff meetings to co-create the questions, guidance, evaluation process, etc.

### IMPLEMENT

Staff evaluated responses to the questions in the pilot that were submitted by project sponsors and ranked projects for a funding recommendation to the board. The EAC then shared recommendations for the next full project selection process, based on their experience designing the pilot.

### ADOPT

The Executive Board adopted a new Project Selection framework based on the lessons learned from the Equity Pilot, which will inform the future of project selection at PSRC.

## What were the results?

Eight project applications were submitted to the Equity Pilot program, requesting just under \$6.4 million. The Executive Board approved the list of projects recommended through the Equity Pilot Program and adopted all the recommendations shared by the EAC. Specific criteria recommendations included updates to how community engagement and displacement risk is evaluated, and incorporating equity throughout the entire process rather than limiting it to one section.

The board's adoption of these new criteria underscores a new standard for inclusive decision-making in transportation planning. As these recommendations permeate the fabric of project selection processes, they wield immense influence, shaping the allocation of \$300 million annually towards transportation initiatives. Through this concerted effort, PSRC is poised to address the pressing transportation needs of marginalized communities in an unprecedented manner, catalyzing tangible progress towards a more equitable future for everyone in the Puget Sound region.