Follow-Up on WSDOT's Long-Term Estimates of Bridge Preservation Needs

Legislative Auditor’s Conclusion: WSDOT has taken steps to improve its long-term estimates of bridge preservation needs, but will need to continue its work to provide complete and reliable estimates.
Joint Legislative Audit & Review Committee (JLARC)

16 Member Committee

- Established in statute.
- Equal number of House and Senate members, Democrats and Republicans.
- Nonpartisan staff conduct studies using professional audit standards.
- Studies are assigned by the Legislature or the Committee itself.

JLARC Chair
Senator Mark Mullet

Vice Chair
Representative Ed Orcutt

Secretary
Senator Lynda Wilson

Assistant Secretary
Representative Gerry Pollet

Vacant
Preservation

- Reduce, delay, or prevent deterioration
- Extend service life

Long-range planning required under state and federal law.

3,932 bridges and structures

$259 million for bridge preservation (2019-2021)
Follow-up on 2015 JLARC report

“WSDOT can provide reliable long-term pavement estimates, but accuracy of bridge estimates is uncertain.”

2015 Legislative Auditor Recommendations:

1. WSDOT should improve long-term estimates of bridge preservation needs.

2. WSDOT and OFM should develop a process to improve stakeholders’ confidence in its estimates.
WSDOT has acquired a bridge management system

Capabilities

- Forecast deterioration
- Analyze life cycle costs
- Determine budget needs
- Evaluate funding scenarios

Implementation is not complete.
2015
WSDOT issues plan to improve estimates

2017
Federal regulations require improvements

2018
WSDOT begins implementation of bridge management system

July 2020
WSDOT system fully operational (expected)

Progress is similar to other state departments of transportation.
Legislative Auditor’s Recommendation

WSDOT should report to the Legislature on its progress with implementing its bridge management system.

WSDOT concurs
WSDOT can improve communications

Reported needs: $2.7 billion

Incomplete

Does not include:
• Border bridges
• Moveable bridge components
• Seismic retrofits

Out of date

• Created in 2016
• Costs have increased by hundreds of millions
Stakeholders would benefit from more detail and information

Some communications have misrepresented the analysis used to develop the estimates.

- WSDOT reported needs of $550 million per biennium for bridge preservation (2011-21).

Connection between funding and bridge improvement is unclear.

- WSDOT reported the state is underfunding bridge preservation, while also showing bridge conditions improving.
OFM concurred with 2015 recommendations

In 2015, OFM stated it would “work with WSDOT to identify opportunities for improvement, emphasizing clarity, predictability, timeliness, transparency and accountability.”

OFM has not yet completed steps to help improve stakeholder confidence in bridge estimates.
Legislative Auditor’s Recommendation

WSDOT and OFM should develop and implement a plan to communicate long-term preservation needs accurately, reliably, and transparently.

WSDOT and OFM concur