The Washington State Transportation Commission (WSTC) was created on March 19, 1951, with Governor Langlie signing HB 199. At the time, the Commission was referred to as the “State Highway Commission”, and the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) referred to as the “Department of Highways” – each agency being renamed in 1977.

A CHANGE IN GOVERNANCE – CHAPTER 1

Julia Butler Hansen (1907-1988), a veteran Democratic State Representative from Cathlamet in Wahkiakum County and chair of the House Roads and Bridges Committee, was the driving force behind the 1951 bill creating the five-member Highway Commission to run the Department of Highways.

Representative Butler Hansen had a focused goal in creating the commission: to insulate a modern highway department from changing political winds. Leading up to this, since 1929 the Director of the Department of Highways was appointed by the Governor, resulting in a new director and often a new direction with each new Governor.

Along with this sweeping administrative change, the 1951 Legislature also provided a substantial funding increases for the Highway Department. An unprecedented $67 million bond issue was passed that year by the Legislature - the biggest bond issue in the department’s history up to that point. It was used in part to modernize Highway 99 and widen the Snoqualmie Pass Highway (before it was I-90) to four lanes.

Governor Authority Retained

No more than three of the five Highway Commissioners could belong to the same political party. To ensure geographical representation, no more than three members could reside on the same side of the Cascades, and each had to be from a different Congressional district. Governor Langlie was able to put his stamp on the commission as he appointed the first set of commissioners to staggered terms (subsequent terms were for six years), and this authority remains in-tact today.

The first Highway Commission meeting was held on July 9, 1951.
In 2005, 54 years after the WSTC’s creation, the pendulum continued to swing with the Legislature placing the WSDOT back under the Governor as a cabinet agency. The WSTC was retained and its role was refined and adjusted to the role it serves today. The WSTC has grown from its original composition of 5 members from across the state, to 7 members from across the state, with the law continuing to require three members be from East of the Cascades, and four from the West. The Secretary of Transportation and the Governor's Office have been added as Ex-Officio members. While the original law required that only three Commissioners could come from the same political party, and no two could reside in the same Congressional District, this limitation was removed as part of the governance change in 2005.

Roy Jennings, Chair (Clark Co.), 2021
Debbie Young, Vice-Chair (San Juan Co.), 2021
Jerry Litt (Grant Co.), 2021
James Restucci (Yakima Co.), 2021
Hester Serebrin (King Co.), 2021
Shiv Batra (King Co.), 2021
Kelly Fukai (Spokane Co.), 2021