



# Route Jurisdiction Study

*Washington State  
Transportation  
Commission Meeting*

May 13, 2025



# Agenda

- Project Status
- Draft Final Report Preview:
  - Study Background
  - Existing RJT Process
  - Assessment & Key Findings
  - Recommendations
- Next Steps:
  - **May** - Request Transportation Commission approval
  - **June** - Submit Final Report to the Legislature

# Status of the Project

## Task reports completed:

- ✓ Route Jurisdiction History and Context
- ✓ Legal and Policy Review
- ✓ Outreach and Engagement Plan
- ✓ Approach to Transfer Review Process and Evaluation
- ✓ Evaluation of State Route System
- ✓ Research Scenarios and Preliminary Findings

## Still in Progress:

- ❖ Draft Final Project Report – Target date 5/23

## Agency Coordination Meeting

- Met with representatives from TIB, CRAB, and WSDOT in April to share preliminary recommendations
- Discussed how to improve coordination across agencies for both RJT and Administrative Transfers
- Group will continue to meet
  - More clearly define roles and process and pre-request coordination
  - Discuss steps to implement recommended evaluation methods

# *Final Report Preview*

# Route Jurisdiction Study Background

# Legislative Direction

The Route Jurisdiction Study will:

- Determine if changes are needed in jurisdictional assignment between the state, county, and city road systems
- Review current criteria used to define the state highway system to determine whether changes are appropriate
- Submit a report of study findings and recommendations to the transportation committees of the legislature by July 1, 2025

# Overview of Study Process

## Assessment of Existing RJT Process

- Stakeholder interviews
- Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis



## Assessment of Existing State Highway System

- Data collection and analysis of current state routes



## Development of Recommendations

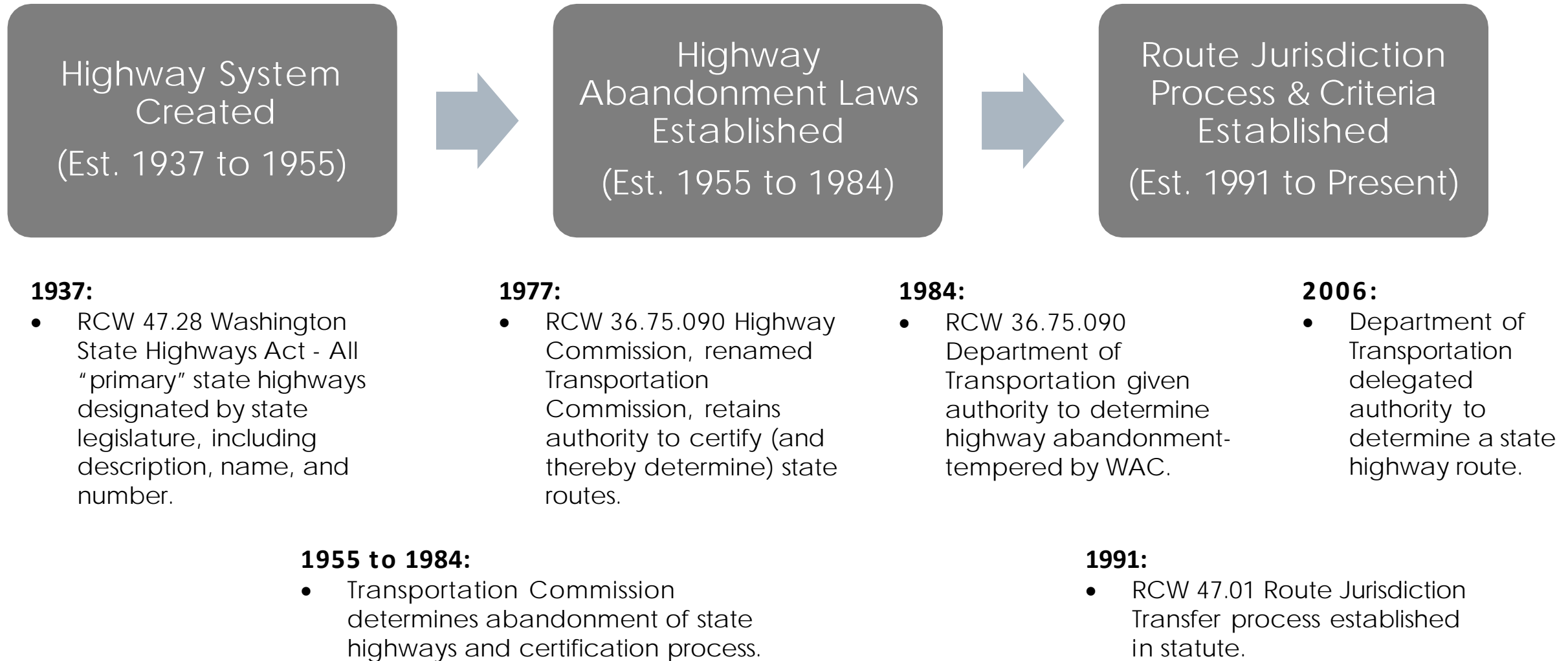
- RJT Process
- Data-Driven Evaluation Methods
- Policy & Network Considerations

# Stakeholder Engagement

- Subcommittee
- Full Commission
- Steering Committee
  - WSDOT
  - TIB
  - CRAB
  - AWC
  - WSACE
- Tribal Transportation Planning Organization
- Public work session

# Existing RJT Process

# State Routes/ Jurisdiction –Historic Milestones



# Current Roles for Route Determinations

Legislature/ State Law	WSTC	WSDOT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• State routes are listed in RCW 47.17 and changes require legislative amendment.</li><li>• Authorizes WSDOT to build new alignments, freeways, or bypass routes based upon funding being provided.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Receives requests from WSDOT or local agencies for route jurisdiction transfers and submits agency request legislation for recommended transfers. (RCW 47.01.425 )</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Authorized to abandon or turn back to local agencies, state routes no longer needed to connect the state highway system. (RCW 36.75.090)</li><li>• While this is a route transfer, it is not required to be assessed under the WSTC's RJT program, nor does it require Legislative approval as required in law under the current RJT process.</li></ul>

# RJT Process and Administrative Transfers

- **Use the RJT process** whenever a proposed route transfer would require changing the description of a state route in statute (RCW 47.17).
- **Use WSDOT's administrative transfer process** to realign a route to a different roadway if the new alignment remains consistent with the route description in statute.
- **To implement transfers once a decision is made**, WSDOT uses existing authorities to designate or abandon a route segment from the state system.

# Existing Process

- During 'analysis' step, TIB staff currently evaluate a route by applying the criteria that are defined in RCW 47.17.001
- If approved, WSTC submits agency-request legislation to amend RCW listing State Highways (RCW 47.17)



# Existing Criteria: Rural Highways

**Should** be designated as a state highway if it:

- Is designated as part of the national system of interstate and defense highways (popularly called the interstate system); or
- Is designated as part of the system of numbered United States routes; or
- Contains an international border crossing that is open twelve or more hours each day.

**May** be designated as a state highway if it is part of an **integrated system** of roads and:

- Carries >300,000 tons annually and provides **primary access** to a rural port or intermodal freight terminal;
- Provides a **major cross-connection** between existing state highways;
- Connects places exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics:
  - A **population center** of 1,000 or greater;
  - An **area or aggregation of areas** having a **population equivalency** of 1,000 or more
  - A county seat;
  - A major commercial-industrial terminal in a rural area with a **population equivalency** of 1,000 or greater; or
- Is designated as a scenic and recreational highway.

# Existing Criteria: Urban Highways

**Should** be designated as a state highway if it:

- Is designated as part of the interstate system;
- Is designated as part of the system of numbered United States routes;
- Is an urban extension of a rural state highway into or through an urban area and is necessary to form an **integrated system** of state highways;
- Is a principal arterial that is a connecting link between two state highways and serves **regionally oriented through traffic** in **urbanized areas with a population of 50,000 or greater**, or is a spur that serves **regionally oriented traffic** in urbanized areas.

*Bolded red text denotes ambiguous terms*

# Assessment & Key Findings

# Assessment of Existing Process: SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ensures affected communities have a chance to comment.</li><li>• Provides a review to maintain network connections.</li><li>• Criteria in statute provide indicators of legislative intent.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Poorly defined terms in criteria.</li><li>• Little guidance to distinguish between urban streets that perform a local or non-local function.</li><li>• Lacks solutions for non-concurrence transfers.</li><li>• No direction when costs or implementation responsibilities may need to be addressed.</li><li>• Does not encourage exploring other ways to solve problems.</li><li>• Three transfer mechanisms are not coordinated, and there is no central record of transfers.</li></ul>
Threats (Risks)	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Can result in inconsistent and inconclusive outcomes.</li><li>• Can reduce trust between agencies.</li><li>• Opportunities may be missed to better align road administration with the most suitable level of government.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Streamline and provide flexibility for concurrence transfers.</li><li>• Incorporate checklists and multiple factors in evaluation step.</li><li>• Promote collaborative problem solving and build towards agreement.</li><li>• Reduce uncertainty that implementation costs and risks will be addressed.</li><li>• Provide tools and a process to resolve differences between transfer parties.</li><li>• Align transfer processes in statute.</li></ul>

# Assessment of Existing Process: SWOT Analysis

## **Finding: There are opportunities to improve the RJT process and evaluation methods.**

The assessment found the following opportunities for improvement in the existing RJT process and transfer request evaluation methods:

- Streamline process for concurrence transfers, when all transfer parties agree.
- In non-concurrence cases, include clear steps to promote collaborative problem solving.
- Encourage coordination across agencies for all transfer processes.
- Develop alternative criteria and analysis methods that provide clear, consistent, and measurable information about a route or segment, to replace the ambiguous terms in the existing criteria.
- Identify policy and network considerations to account for how the route or segment relates to the rest of the state route network and broader policy goals.

# Assessment of Existing System: State Highway Characteristics

Assessment of current criteria and previous legislation revealed 3 state highway characteristics:

- **Connectivity:** State highways should connect key population, activity, and economic centers.
- **Function:** Roadways that are used as key freight routes, carry high vehicle volumes, or are part of the interstate highway system or United States numbered route system should be included in the state highway system.
- **Continuity:** Together, state highways should provide a continuous system of routes across the state. The system should also integrate with routes in the states of Oregon and Idaho and the province of British Columbia at state borders. Parallel routes should serve different travel patterns to avoid redundancy in the system.

# Assessment of Existing System

- Collected data on all 180+ state routes in Washington to measure state highway characteristics:
  - Connectivity
  - Function
  - Continuity

**Finding: Wholesale realignment of jurisdictional assignment is not warranted.**

The analysis of current state routes revealed that most current state routes show strong state route characteristics for at least one state highway characteristic:

- There is no urgency for making wholesale transfers from the current system.
- There was not support among participating agencies and associations for revising current route ownership between jurisdictions.

# Recommendations



## Recommendation: Update statute to address state route characteristics

**RCW 47.17.001 (Criteria for changes to system) should be revised.** The statute should include the following elements:

- High-level principles that all federal Interstate or designated U.S. routes are state routes, and that all state routes should exhibit strong connectivity, continuity, and functional characteristics.
- Cross-references to ensure consistency in the application of route jurisdiction-related statutes and add clarity on the relationship between RJT and Administrative transfers
- Expanded authority for the Commission to define analysis methodology through rule-making under RCW 47.01.425.



## Recommendation: Update statute to address state route characteristics

**RCW 47.17.001 (Criteria for changes to system) should be revised.** The statute should include the following elements:

- Policy and network factors to be considered in assessing a transfer request

Consideration	Proposed Policy Guidance
Environmental Sensitivity & Resilience	Consider which agency can best prevent damage and maintain or restore access
Equity/ HEAL Act	Avoid additional burden to disadvantaged communities and consider additional targeted outreach
Sole Connections	Consider local preference for ownership if a proposed transfer would remove the only state route connection for a population center
Network Efficiency	Maintain a connected state route network that avoids gaps and minimizes unnecessary redundancy

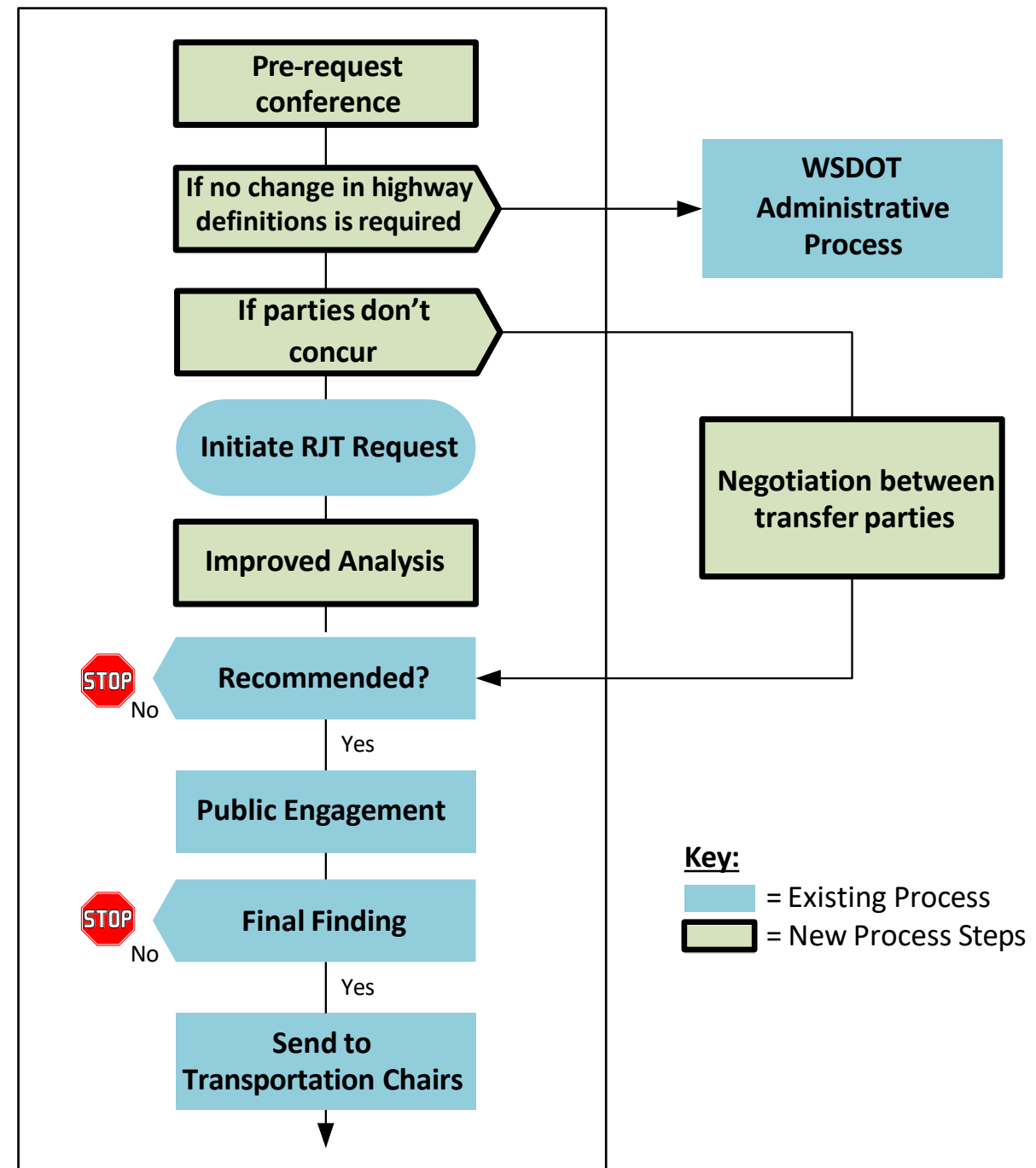


## Recommendation: Update RJT rules to implement process and evaluation changes

To implement the proposed improvements to the RJT process, the current RJT rules in 468-710 WAC will need to be updated.

The revised RJT process would include new process:

- Pre-request conference
- Concurrent process between parties to the transfer to develop agreement over disputed costs and conditions of the transfer.

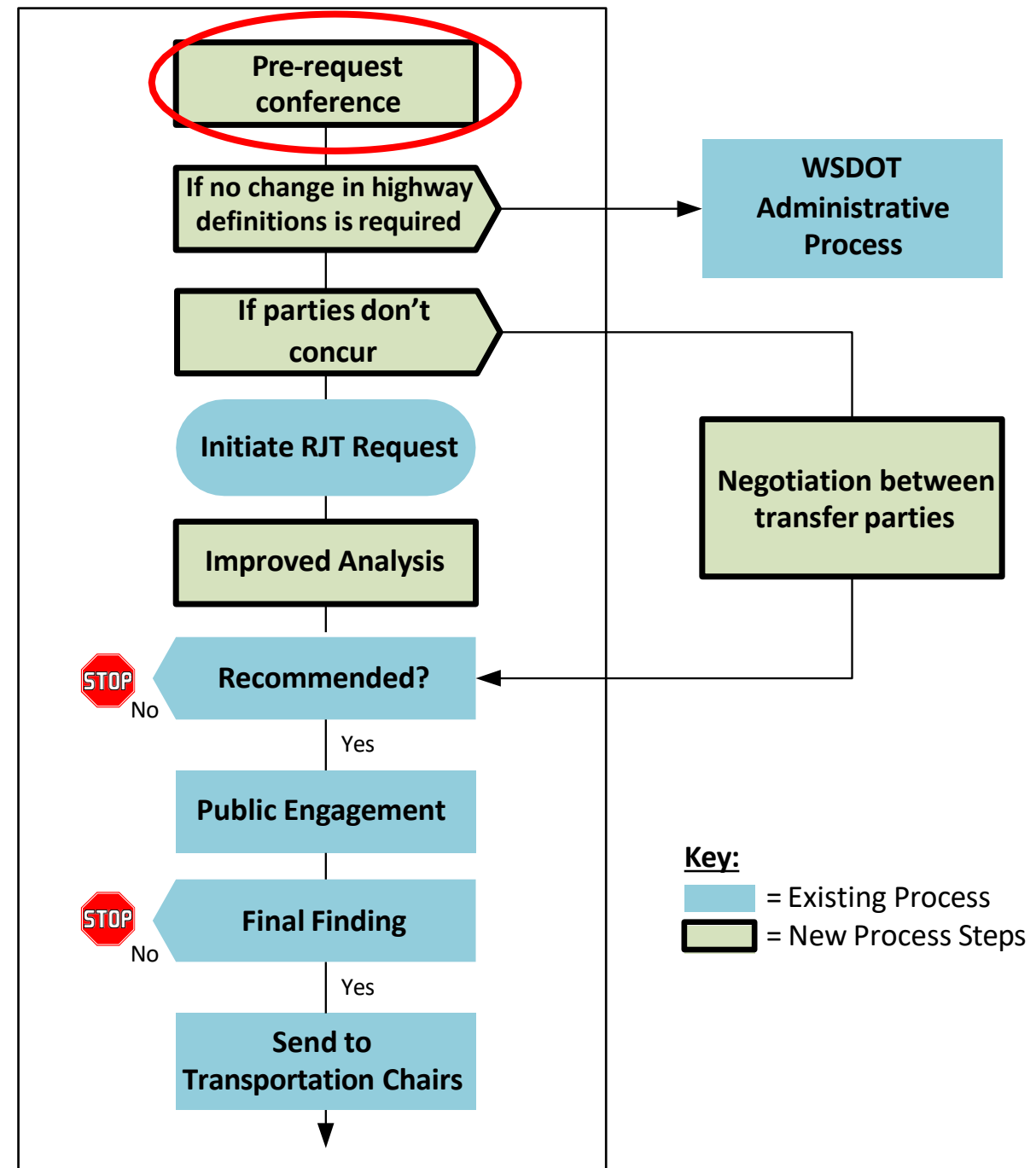




**Recommendation: Update RJT rules to implement process and evaluation changes**

### Pre-request conference

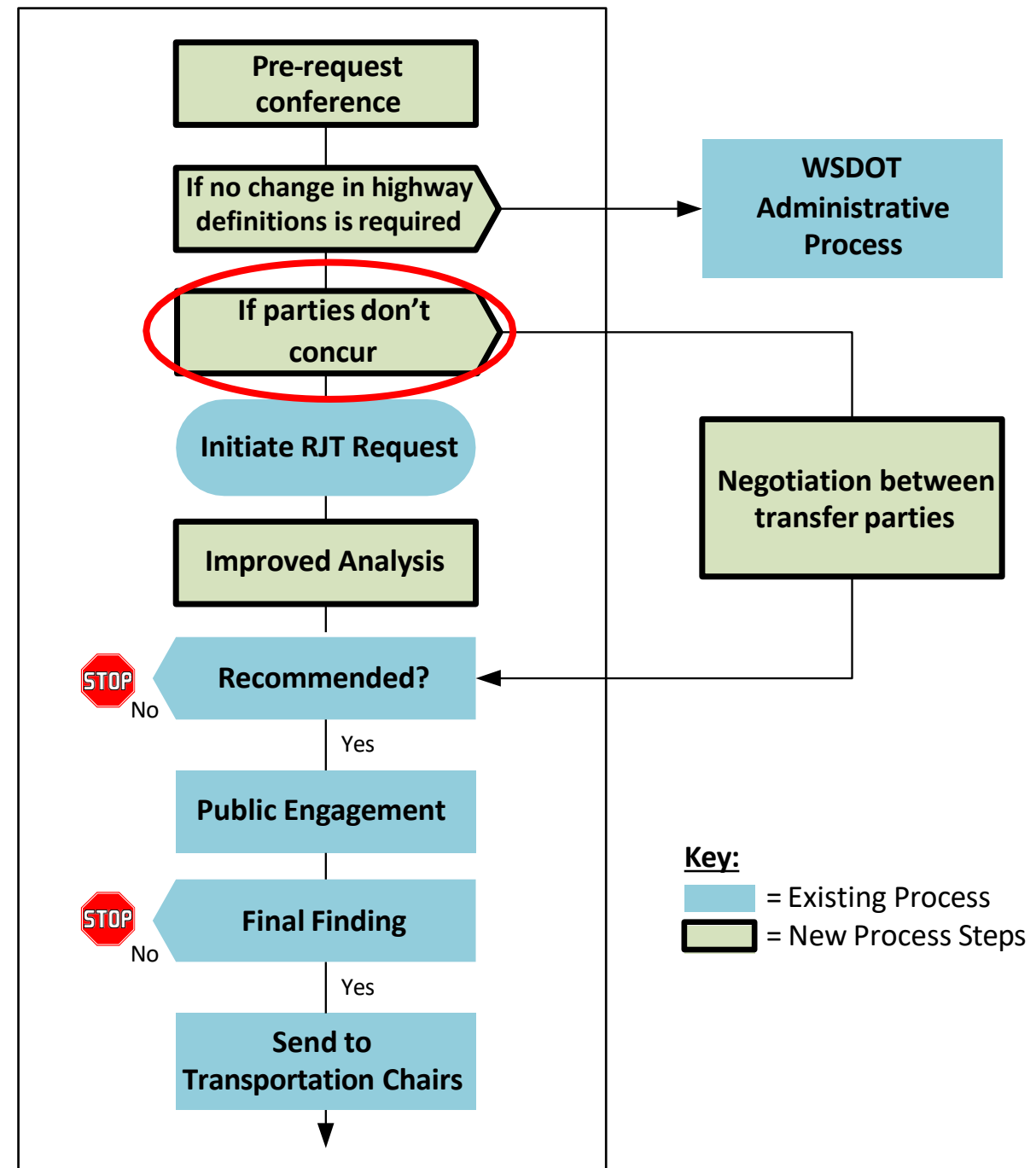
- Does request involve a change to state highway definitions in RCW 47.17?
  - If not, use WSDOT's administrative process
- What problem does the request aim to solve?
- Is a transfer the best way to address the problem?
- Do parties concur? What are areas of concern?





## Recommendation: Update RJT rules to implement process and evaluation changes

- If transfer parties disagree about **costs and transfer conditions**, negotiate in parallel process.
- If parties disagree about **whether the transfer supports state route objectives**, broaden analysis scope as needed to address areas of disagreement.

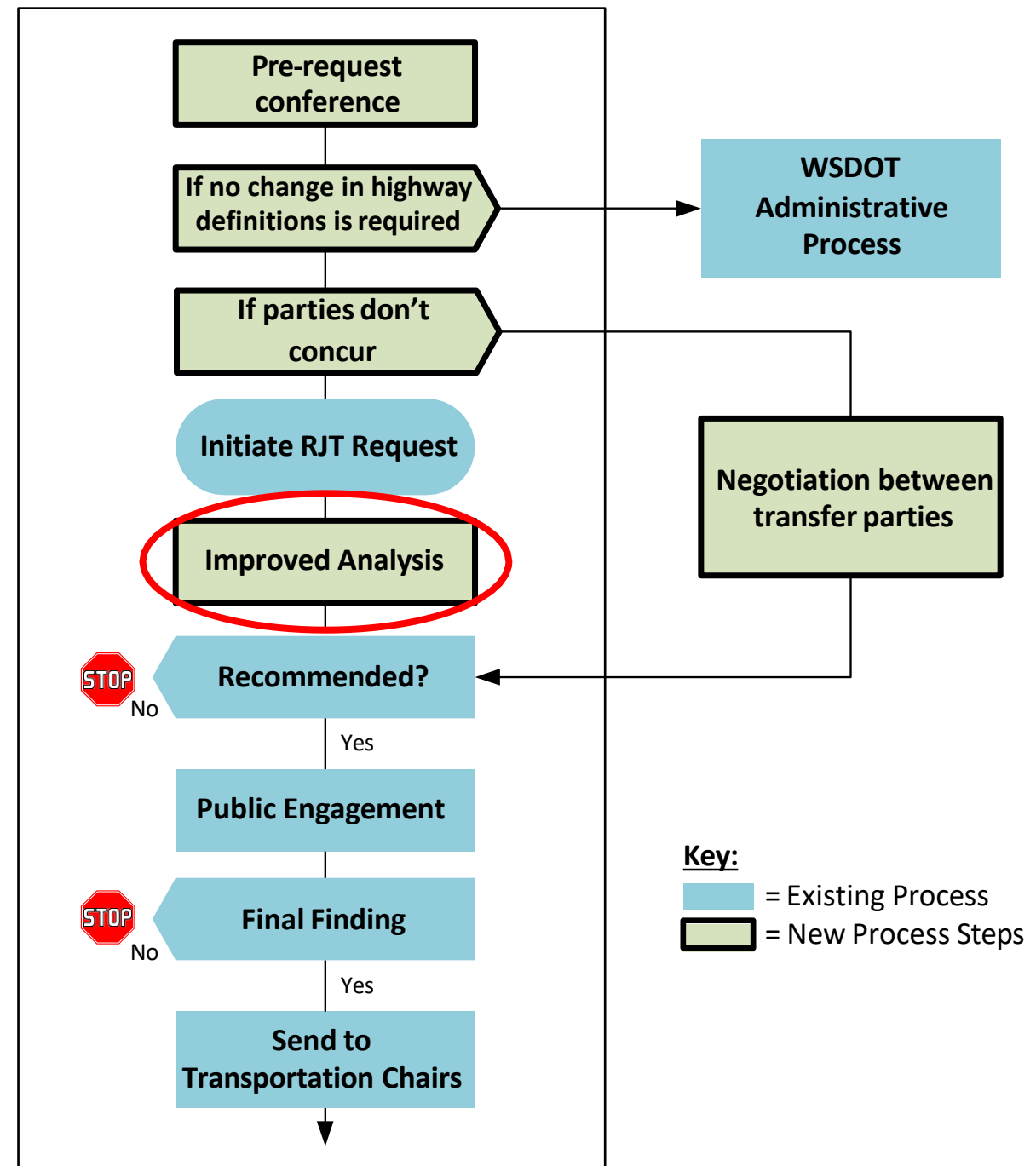




## Recommendation: Update RJT rules to implement process and evaluation changes

The revised analysis methods would use a set of evaluation factors to measure the state highway principle:

- Connectivity
- Function
- Continuity



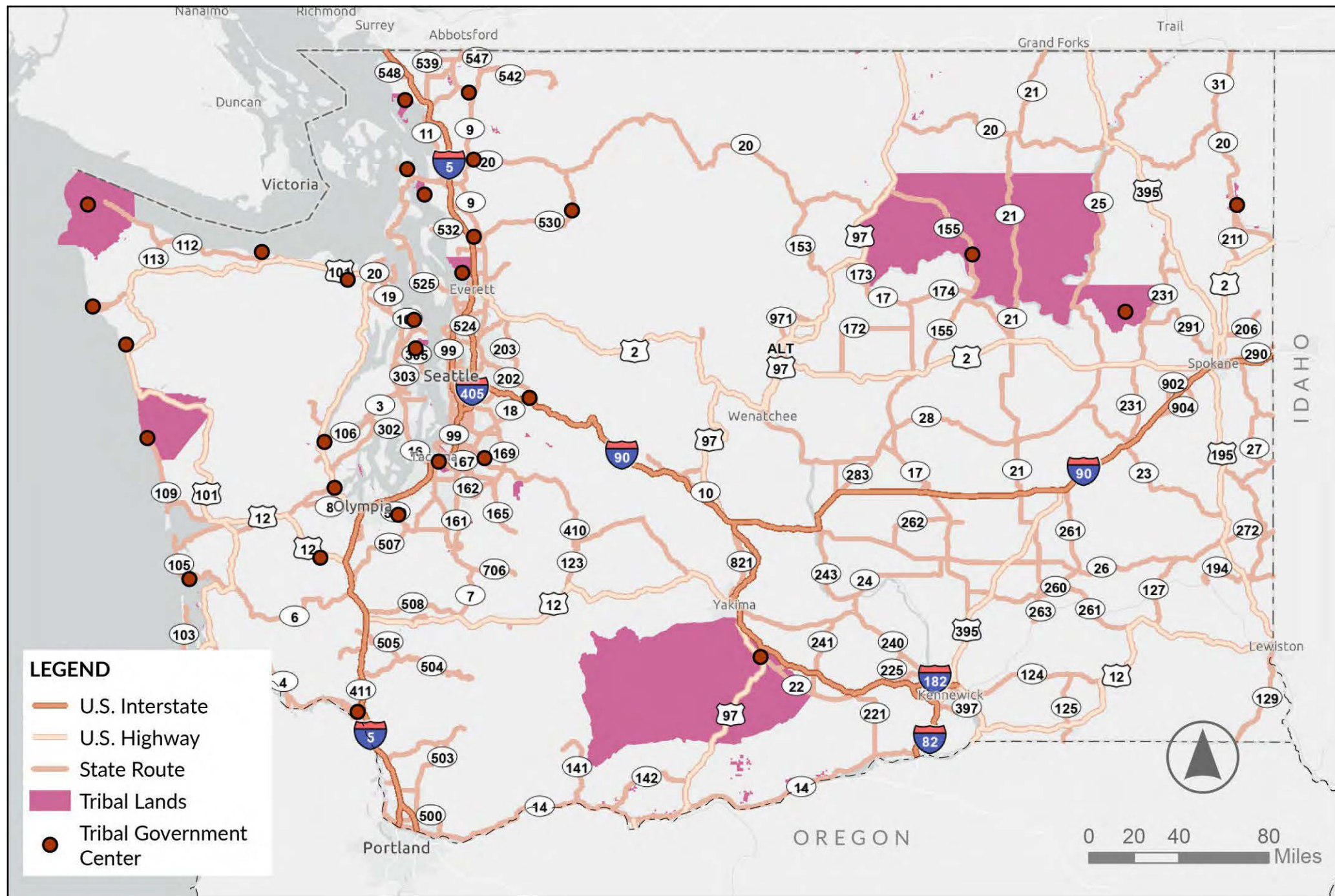


**Recommendation: Update RJT rules to implement process and evaluation changes**

State Highway Characteristics	Recommended Evaluation Factors
Connectivity	Cities/Census Designated Places
	County Seats
	Transportation Hubs
	State Facilities
	Parks & Rec
	Tribal Access
	Agricultural Access
Function	Scenic Byway
	HSS
	NHS
	Freight Route
	Max AADT (at any point on route)
Continuity	Border Crossing
	Continuity with other state routes

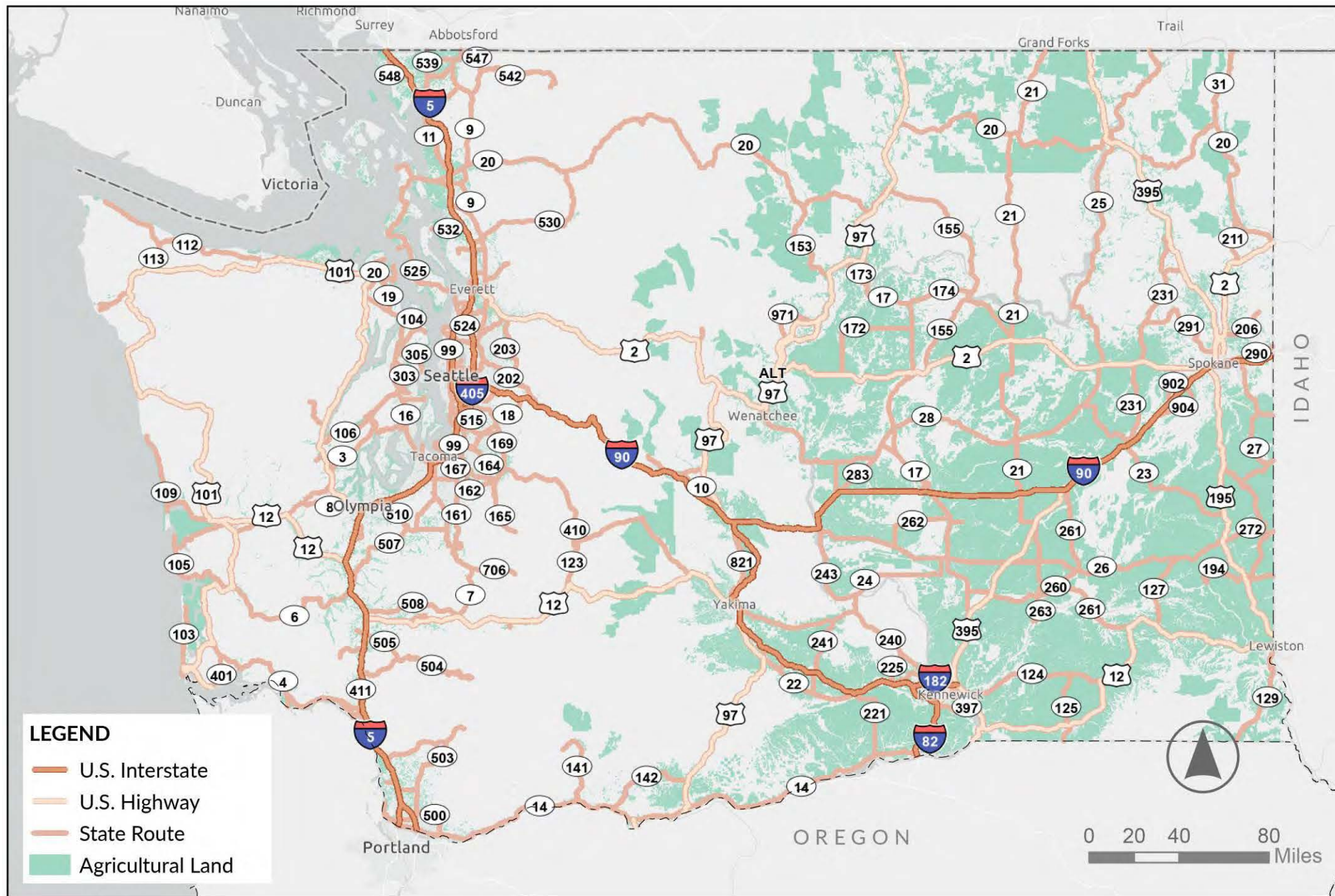
# Tribal Access

Route Jurisdiction Study

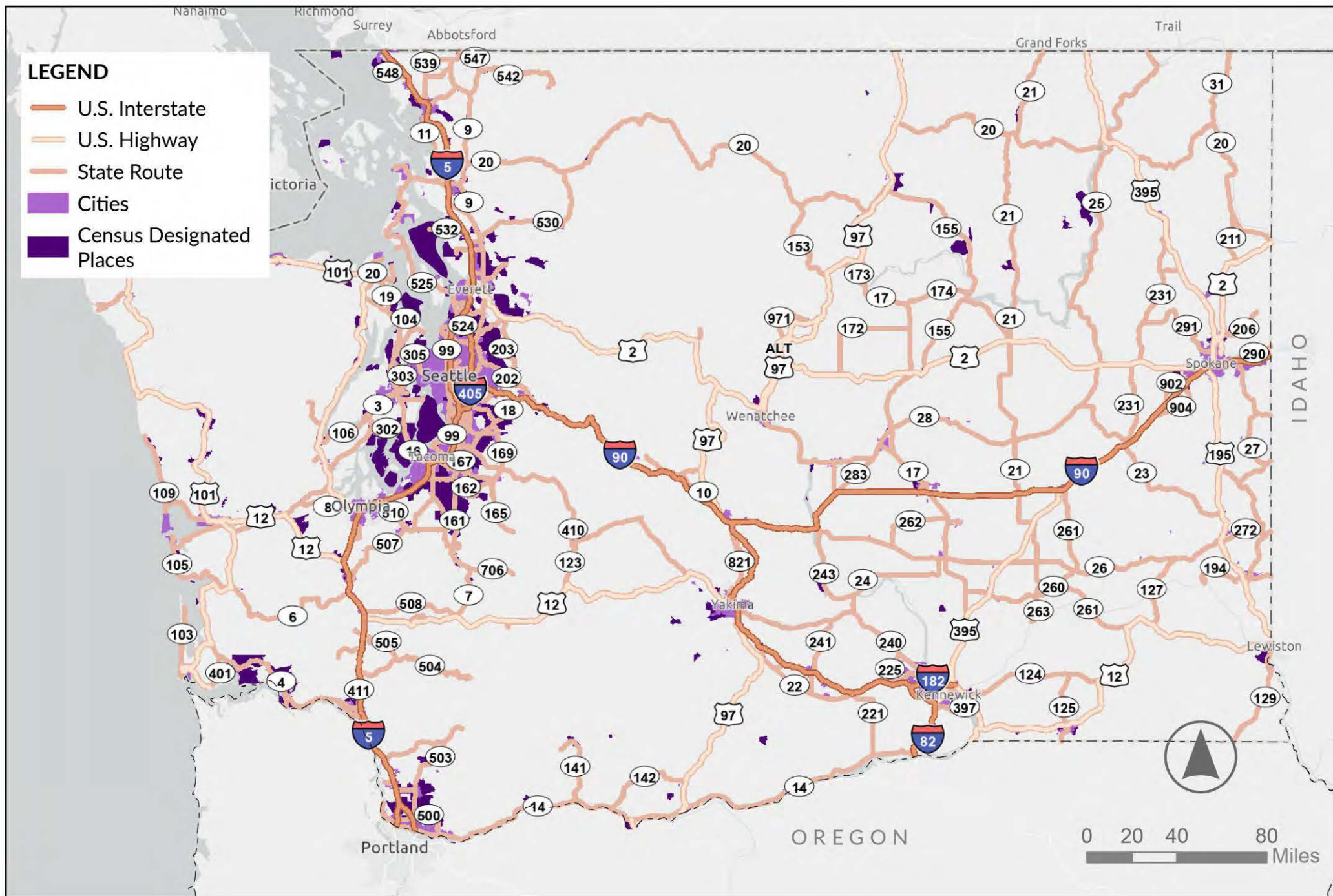


# Agricultural Access

Route Jurisdiction Study



# Cities and Census Designated Places





## Recommendation: Update RJT rules to implement process and evaluation changes

An Excel spreadsheet template was developed to implement the recommended evaluation factors and scoring methodology

Transfer Request Evaluation Summary			
<b>Segment requested for transfer:</b> SR 501 between MP 16.91 and MP 19.88			
<b>Requested action:</b> Transfer from WSDOT to Ridgefield			
<b>LOCATION OF SEGMENT REQUESTED FOR TRANSFER</b> <div> <div>City of Vancouver</div> <div>Blurock Landing</div> <div>Round Lake</div> <div>City of Ridgefield</div> </div>			
EVALUATION FACTORS	Segment 1	Segment 2	Segment 3
<b>CONNECTIVITY</b>			
NUMBER OF CITIES CONNECTED	High	Low	High
TRANSPORT HUB	High	Low	Low
STATE FACILITIES	Low	Low	Low
PARKS AND REC	Low	Low	Low
COUNTY SEAT(S)	High	Low	Low
TRIBAL SEAT OF GOVERNMENT	Low	Low	Low
TRIBAL RESERVATION ACCESS	Low	Low	Low
AGRICULTURAL ACCESS	Medium	High	Medium
<b>FUNCTION</b>			
SCENIC BYWAY	High	Low	Low
HSS	High	Low	Low
NHS	High	Low	Low
FREIGHT	Medium	Medium	Medium
MAX AADT	High	Low	High
<b>CONTINUITY</b>			
BORDER CROSSINGS	Low	Low	Low
CONNECTIONS TO OTHER ROUTES	High	Low	High
<i>Bolded factors indicate higher weight in roll-up scores below</i>			
SUMMARY	Segment 1	Segment 2	Segment 3
<b>OVERALL RANKINGS*</b>			
CONNECTIVITY	High	Low	Medium
FUNCTION	High	Low	Low
CONTINUITY	High	Low	High
* Rankings indicate how the segment compares to current state routes in each category: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High = Top third of scores (strong state route characteristics)</li> <li>• Medium = Middle third of scores</li> <li>• Low = Lowest third of scores (weak state route characteristics)</li> </ul>			



## Recommendation: Agree on inter-agency roles

- WSTC, TIB, and CRAB should confer to identify and **clarify roles in carrying out evaluations** of RJT requests.
- WSDOT and WSTC should confer to identify opportunities to better **align and coordinate RJT action of the WSTC and turnback actions of WSDOT**, to ensure they are consistently reported to the Legislature. Possible steps could include:
  - Using the **pre-request conference as the starting point for all route transfers** to ensure the correct transfer process is applied (RJT or WSDOT Administrative Turnback Process)
  - Ensuring **records are kept in a central location** for all jurisdiction transfers
  - Discuss how to **improve understanding of jurisdiction transfer processes and statutes by practitioners**, for example, through updates to websites, manuals, and/or developing a Route Jurisdiction Transfer Guidebook.

# Next Steps

# Next Steps

- Share draft Final Report for review
- June Meeting - ask for report approval or delegated authority to the RJT Subcommittee to complete study



*Thank you!*