

## Washington State Tribal Consultation Process Case Study

Although many Tribes nationwide are new to collaboration with metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and regional transportation planning organizations (RTPOs), there is strong potential for collaboration between these agencies and the Tribal entities that are within, or adjacent to, their planning areas. In western Washington State, two federally-recognized Tribes have participated as members of the Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC), an MPO and RTPO responsible for planning in both the metropolitan and rural areas of Thurston County. The strong working relationships between the two Tribes and TRPC have helped the entities conduct highly coordinated long-range planning for Tribal roadways.

### History of the Tribal Consultation Process in Thurston County

In the mid-1990s, the Nisqually Indian Tribe and the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation each expressed interest in being involved in the development of TRPC's Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and accessing potential funding for transportation projects. In response to this interest, TRPC's executive director personally invited Tribal



The construction of two roundabouts on State Route 510 began in June 2013, one full year ahead of schedule. (Courtesy of Jim Longley, Nisqually Tribe)

transportation staff to take part in the development of the RTP and other Council activities. The Tribal governments responded positively to TRPC's outreach efforts and began coordinating with TRPC on specific Tribal transportation issues. The Nisqually Tribe and the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation became full dues-paying members of TRPC in 1996 and 2002 respectively; leading to a level of involvement comparable to that of municipalities, school districts, and other member agencies. A representative from the Chehalis Tribe eventually served as vice-chair of the Council's Executive Board for several years.

The respectful and collaborative relationship between the Tribes

and TRPC goes beyond monthly meetings and other formal engagements. Thurston County's RTP, developed in coordination with all TRPC members, includes an emphasis on collaboration between Tribal and non-Tribal agencies. TRPC policymakers and staff build personal relationships with Tribal partners by participating in Tribal events, which leads to closer professional relationships. The high level of familiarity between TRPC staff and Thurston County's Tribal communities supports their fruitful working relationships.

### TRPC's Relationship with the Nisqually Tribe

Largely due to the fact that an elected Nisqually Tribe representative sits on TRPC's Executive Board, the coordination between the Tribe and

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TRPC is continuous. TRPC planners engage in discussions with Tribal representatives on land-use and transportation issues during TRPC regular monthly meetings and one-on-one communication as needed. The Tribe's transportation planner also sits on the TRPC Transportation Policy Board, the Council's principal advisory body on regional transportation planning. The Nisqually Tribe's involvement on the Transportation Policy Board has contributed to the development and construction of several transportation projects for the Tribe, such as recent intersection improvements on State Route 510.

### **TRPC's Relationship with the Nisqually Tribe**

In 2010, the Nisqually Tribe identified the need for safety improvements along State Route 510, which bisects the Nisqually Reservation, separating residential and civic areas from a primary employment center. Between 2007 and 2009, crashes at the intersection of State Route 510 and Reservation Road, adjacent to the Nisqually Reservation boundary, resulted in one fatality, 51 collisions, and over 40 injuries, including many Tribal members.

To address the route's safety issues, the Nisqually Tribe and Thurston County jointly organized a safety study of the entire State Route 510 corridor focusing on two hazardous intersections adjacent to the reservation boundary. Thanks to the close

working relationship developed at TRPC meetings between the Nisqually transportation planner and the Thurston County roads director, the Tribe was able to lay the groundwork for an interlocal agreement between the Nisqually Tribe and Thurston County to share the responsibilities and costs of the one-year safety study. The safety study team, which consisted of a broad range of representatives from the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), Thurston County, TRPC, and the Nisqually Tribe, concluded that the construction of two roundabouts would be the ideal solution for the hazardous intersections. Washington State Legislators were impressed that the Tribe and Thurston County had jointly and unanimously developed an effective plan of action for the project. In response, the Legislature appropriated \$5 million in Federal funding to cover all of the project's costs.

The project moved from initial planning to construction relatively quickly for an undertaking of its size. WSDOT began designing the two roundabouts in late 2012 and construction began in June 2013, a full year ahead of the original schedule. The reconstructed intersections will improve safety through the corridor to benefit all travelers that traverse it, including the larger Nisqually community. The roundabouts are expected to reduce injury crashes by 75 percent and

reduce delays by about 90 percent. The State Route 510 project is an example of how a Tribe's involvement with an MPO or a RTPO can help participating jurisdictions develop relationships with potential partnering agencies.

### **Lessons Learned**

The Nisqually Tribe's consistent involvement with TRPC demonstrates the benefits of a Tribe's active role in transportation planning at the regional level. The Nisqually Tribe's direct involvement in regional decisionmaking has improved the level of knowledge and respect between the Tribe and other government jurisdictions and has advanced Tribes' transportation priorities within the region. The respectful and collaborative relationship between the Nisqually Tribe and TRPC has fostered a working environment in which Tribal and regional transportation planners find it easy to work toward the best outcomes for all jurisdictions in a region.

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