

2023

TRI-CITIES LEGISLATIVE

Council



REPRESENTING:

Pasco Chamber of Commerce

Tri-Cities Hispanic Chamber of
Commerce

Tri-City Development Council (TRIDEC)

Tri-City Regional Chamber of Commerce

Visit Tri-Cities

West Richland Chamber of Commerce

2023 POSITION PAPERS:

Education

Energy & Lower Snake River Dams

Mental Health

Transportation

PASCO
Chamber of Commerce



To our elected officials:

The Tri-Cities Legislative Council submits for your consideration our 2023 Legislative Platform that reflects unanimous support of our member organizations. These legislative priorities represent input solicited from cities, counties, ports, community organizations, public utilities, businesses, educational institutions, and other stakeholders.

We encourage you to review the positions and consider these perspectives as you evaluate creation and negotiation of and/or voting on legislation. This platform represents critical opportunities for the Tri-Cities to maintain and enhance its resiliency and vibrancy in the short and long term.

We invite you to reach out for clarification, information, or additional perspective. Thank you for consideration.



K-12 and POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION PRIORITIES

AT ISSUE

The Tri-Cities Legislative Council (TCLC) supports continued funding at the state level of education for K-12 and beyond that ensures adequate local control, competitive salaries, modern infrastructure, and technology integration.

TCLC POSITION

K-12 Education

The TCLC recommends the Legislature reformulate the **regionalization factor** in the review and rebase of salaries that will begin 2023, stemming from 2017's EHB 2242. The three major school districts in the Tri-Cities request that no district go backward in current formulas and that all districts receive fair regionalization. Specifically, the TCLC encourages changes to the formulation that will enable a more equitable assessment including:

- The calculation and application of regionalization factors be adjusted using school districts' labor markets, instead of only factoring in the cost of housing.
- The calculation and application of experience factors to be adjusted, making the system more transparent and equitable.

The TCLC recommends legislature continue implementation of Phase 1 recommendations from the 2019 **Staffing Enrichment Workgroup** that began in 2022 by:

- Improving Prototypical School Funding model levels to promote school cultures of learning and growth
- Supporting students by regularly meeting social-emotional and mental health needs
- Addressing increased responsibilities in supervisory duties of their staff members
- Providing additional professional development to close achievement gaps.

Post-Secondary Education

The TCLC supports the addition of \$4.4 million to the 2023-25 operating budget and beyond to bring salaries of faculty and staff at **the WSU College of Nursing** to the 50th percentile of its peer institutions. Low salaries have contributed to high turnover for faculty and staff while the college is a critical resource to the state in producing nursing degrees in Spokane, the Tri-Cities, Yakima, and Vancouver. Increasing salaries would also reduce risk of being cited in its next reaccreditation cycle, which in the past have noted low salaries as a potential risk and can require reductions in enrollments.

The State's **community colleges and technical schools** have built consensus around priority operational needs and priority capital projects. We appreciate their collaborative approach. The TCLC supports a budget that funds \$1.7 billion in **capital investments** to maintain and modernize aging community and technical college campuses. Current funding levels would only cover maintenance projects and delay any enhancements to learning.

The TCLC also supports an **operating budget** allocation for these community and technical colleges that includes:

- \$157 million to provide fully funded, competitive compensation. A salary increase of 6.5 percent for each year of the biennium, for a total increase of 13 percent, would retain talent at our these institutions, which have experienced increased turnover and greater challenges recruiting in a highly

competitive job market. The 13 percent increase would be in addition to routine state general wage increases.

- \$26 million to advance equity, diversity, and inclusion as required but not fully funded by Senate bills 5194 and 5227 that were passed in 2021.
- \$77 million for workforce-development programs and updated equipment to build the skilled workforce needed in health care, advanced manufacturing, transportation, and aerospace. These programs are critical to the success of major Washington industries yet are more cost-intensive with their specialized equipment, consumable materials, and small class sizes, in addition to inflation.
- \$93 million to expand learning technology as students have adopted more virtual learning as a permanent option beyond the pandemic. Colleges need to expand hybrid and online options, upgrade audio and visual equipment, equip more students with laptops, and train faculty and staff to support student success in a virtual and hybrid environment.

CLEAN ENERGY & LOWER SNAKE RIVER DAMS

AT ISSUE

Since 2019, the Washington State legislature and executive branch agencies have adopted clean energy, climate, and carbon-reduction policies and rulemakings intended to reduce the state's greenhouse gas emissions across all economic sectors. Combined, the Clean Energy Transformation Act (CETA), Climate Commitment Act (CCA), and Low Carbon Fuel Standard (LCFS) – as well as agency rules restricting the use of natural gas in residential and commercial buildings – represent an ambitious program of transformation. These policies establish Washington State as a leader in the transition to a clean energy economy; however, cumulatively these mandates will place considerable stress on the existing electric grid, potentially jeopardizing our region's long history of providing reliable, affordable, low-carbon electricity to consumers and businesses.

To meet decarbonization requirements, it is imperative we maintain our existing firm and dispatchable clean energy generators, including the hydroelectric system—specifically the four Lower Snake River Dams—and Columbia Generating Station, the northwest's only commercial nuclear power plant. Hydropower and nuclear energy account for approximately 75% of the state's electricity generation. However, these existing resources are insufficient to meet current and future electricity demands. The siting and construction of new clean energy facilities is imperative to success, and the state must establish a regulatory and permitting framework that will support the expeditious deployment of such projects.

TCLC POSITION

The Tri-Cities Legislative Council (TCLC) supports the continued operation of the Lower Snake River Dams and the Columbia Generating Station nuclear power plant. The TCLC also supports the development, commercialization, and deployment of next-generation energy technologies, such as small modular reactors and advanced nuclear power plants. These innovative technologies can reliably generate carbon-free electricity for the grid and provide high-temperature steam and process heat for industrial applications. They also create increased economic development by attracting new industries and businesses to the state.

TCLC recommends maintaining our existing low-cost clean energy facilities while new resources are developed to support the state's carbon-reduction initiatives. The transition from carbon-based to clean energy by 2045 is a delicate balancing act, requiring our region to simultaneously introduce and decommission energy sources while preserving jobs and limiting negative economic impacts. To achieve success, the following actions are recommended:

- Preserve the operation of the Lower Snake River Dams for critical carbon-free, baseload generation.
- Support development of small modular reactors (SMRs), which offer carbon-free, cost-effective, and reliable power capable of pairing with renewable resources and providing balance to the electric grid.
- Ensure regulations across all industries are compatible and do not place excessive costs on consumers.
- Revise regulatory frameworks to expedite the siting and permitting of new energy projects, which will attract new clean energy technologies, supply chains, and businesses.
- Require state agencies to work with utilities and private sector entities to regularly evaluate resource adequacy and grid reliability to guide future energy planning, with regular reports made to the state legislature.
- Respect local control and guarantee localities a voice in the permitting decisions for new energy projects within respective geographic jurisdictions.
- Support funding for the Institute for Northwest Energy Futures at Washington State University Tri-Cities.



MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS PRIORITIES

The Tri-Cities Legislative Council (TCLC) recognizes that mental health issues can impact nearly every aspect of Washingtonians' lives. And the solutions exist in many programs, departments, and institutions funded by Washington State.

This year, the TCLC has identified mental health as a top priority and is recommending specific mental health programs be funded to help support our citizens, businesses, and economy.

Social Work Program at WSU Tri-Cities

The TCLC supports Washington State University's (WSU's) request for \$2.3 million in the 2023-25 biennial operating budget and beyond to establish a four-plus-one bachelor's-plus-master's degree program in social work at WSU Tri-Cities. The four-plus-one model produces master's-educated and licensed social workers one year sooner than traditional models. Funding would provide for six positions a year.

Establishing this expedited program would address critical and growing needs in the mental health industry and provide graduates in an underserved area of the state. The Tri-Cities is one of the state's largest population centers, yet the nearest social work programs are a one-hour drive away.

Graduates of WSU Tri-Cities' bachelor's program will be qualified to serve as caseworkers, family service workers, rehabilitation specialists, mental health assistants, and activity directors.

At full maturity, the bachelor's program is expected to produce 50 graduates annually and the master's program 25 graduates annually.

Behavioral Health Services Recovery Center and Community Resources

The TCLC supports an effort by Benton County to fund and build a behavioral health services recovery center in the Tri-Cities. The recovery center is expected to provide more than 550,000 individuals access to a full continuum of behavioral health services.

A partnership with the state is critical to its timely completion. Benton County anticipates design completion by mid-2023 with estimated construction costs of more than \$13M.

The TCLC further supports greater access to community-based behavioral health services, like substance use disorder treatment. It also supports state funding to help communities establish alternative response programs, like co-responder programs, and other options beyond law enforcement response for behavior health issues.

Public Safety and Behavioral Health

The TCLC supports allocation of \$925,000 annually to fund two Basic Law Enforcement Academy classes in the Tri-Cities that would expedite the training of police officers in the growing Tri-Cities area once hired. This becomes increasingly important with rising crime rates. Currently, Academy classes are only offered in Burien and Spokane.

Additionally, the TCLC encourages, in support of mental health and wellness:

- Increased funding for alternative response teams, treatment facilities for adults and juveniles, and funding for social workers, treatment providers, and system navigators to help direct people to treatment.

- Allowing officers to take a custodial action for the possession of controlled substances, and fund adequate treatment options.
- Clarification that officers can engage in vehicular pursuits when appropriate.



REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PRIORITIES

AT ISSUE

The Tri-Cities metro area is the 4th largest in Washington State and has experienced significant growth over recent decades. The region anticipates continued strong economic and population growth, building on its position as a regional transportation, commerce, medical services, and food-processing hub. The influx of people and industry continues to put high demands on the region's transportation system, and the Tri-Cities Legislative Council (TCLC) has identified the following issues as priority:

Preservation of Existing Infrastructure

Local agencies and the Washington State Department of Transportation face serious ongoing challenges to maintain their existing transportation facilities. An increase in dedicated state collected and distributed preservation funding is needed, as is an improved system of local option funding sources. The TCLC supports funding for programs and projects that are part of the solution for meeting long-term preservation needs.

Increased Funding for Transportation Improvement Board (TIB) and County Road Administration Board (CRAB)

All-weather rural roads are vital to the transportation of the \$1.6 billion in agricultural goods produced in Benton and Franklin County. It is critical to increase Rural Arterial Program funds administered by the County Road Administration Board to construct and maintain the all-weather roadways. The Tri-Cities is one of the fastest growing areas in the state, and many of the area's roadways have fallen below standard. Current TIB funding levels do not adequately support the Complete Streets improvements needed to support to the area's increasing population and travel diversity.

Projects to Support Economic Development

The implementation of Tax Increment Financing in 2021 created a revised tool for local governments to bond infrastructure projects against future anticipated revenues. This creates a permanent version of Local Revitalization Financing that has been successful in the Tri-Cities. It is important to regularly assess the tool's impact and modify regulatory barriers to increase return-on-investment and enhance economic vitality. This will aid in developing the following projects:

- Broadmoor Development, Pasco
- Reimann Industrial Center, Pasco
- Vista Field, Kennewick
- Lewis and Clark Ranch, West Richland
- Horn Rapids Industrial Park, Richland
- Central Richland – Waterfront, Richland

Sylvester / SR 395 Bike and Pedestrian Overpass – City of Pasco (Est. \$4 million)

The City of Pasco has identified a need for low economic, underserved residential citizens living on the west side of SR 395 to access commercial businesses on the east by non-motorized means. The existing structure does not provide sufficient area to accommodate these bike/pedestrian needs. A separate pedestrian and bicycle bridge over SR 395 is proposed at or near this location. This project will provide access and ensure safe, efficient opportunities for underserved citizens to access essential businesses. The city proposes to partner with WSDOT for design and construction of these facilities.

Island View to Vista Field Trail System – Cities of Kennewick and Richland (Est \$16 million)

This project would create new connectivity to address the most pressing active transportation barrier in the Tri-Cities region, which is the SR 240 in the Columbia Center Boulevard area. It would connect city streets in Richland and Kennewick to a new grade-separated crossing of SR 240. The system will be constructed in the vibrant and growing Columbia Center / Vista Field area of Kennewick and the growing Island View area of Richland that includes the Columbia River waterfront. A system plan was produced in 2021. The major system elements, including a bridge over SR 240, are estimated to cost \$16 million.

SR 224 / Red Mountain Transportation Improvements – City of West Richland (Est. \$31 million)

The Red Mountain area is forecasted to see continued growth in the coming years. Recent analysis of current and future traffic has identified needed improvements to the SR 224 corridor, and this proposal would add capacity and improve traffic operations on SR 224. These proposed improvements, along with the planned local investments, will provide the infrastructure needed to address future multimodal access and capacity needs. The City of West Richland recently contributed \$541,000 to increase the funding for the design, environmental permitting, and right-of-way work. Preserving the existing \$25 million in Connecting Washington funding is critical.

Interchange Improvements SR 240 / I-182 / Aaron Drive – City of Richland (Est. \$30 million)

SR 240 is the most congested roadway in the Tri-Cities metropolitan area. The intersection at Aaron Drive is a bottleneck for both regional highway travel and intracity travel. A practical interchange improvement concept has been developed. Grade separating improvements will reduce congestion and improve safety, reversing the current trend of congestion and serious crashes. The project can be implemented in the existing right of way and will impact no sensitive environmental resources. The estimated project cost is \$30 million.

SR 12 At-Grade Crossing Improvements at 'A' Street and Tank Farm Road – City of Pasco (Est. \$30 million)

This portion of the SR 12 corridor, which has seen a recent increase in crashes, would benefit from the development of a preliminary design, along with the development of construction plans and estimates, to address significant safety concerns. With a preliminary design and estimate completed, the City of Pasco and WSDOT could establish financial participation requirements for private developments that will impact these locations.

Badger Corridor Subarea/Urban Interface Projects – Benton County (Est. \$34.35 million)

The Badger Corridor Subarea is a rapidly developing urban portion of Benton County located south of Richland and Kennewick incorporated limits, generally located between the Horse Heaven Hills and Interstate 82 (I-82). I-82 and an active BNSF rail line present unique challenges when proposing improvements to address the capacity constraints, safety concerns, and lack of active transportation facilities within the subarea. Proposed improvements include Badger Road/I-82 roundabout & pathway project (Capacity/Safety & Active Transportation Pathway - \$20.85 million), Reata Road widening & pathway (Capacity and Active Transportation Pathway - \$8.5 million), and Badger Road pathway (Active Transportation Pathway - \$5 million).

George Washington Way Corridor Improvements – City of Richland (Est. \$22 million)

George Washington Way is the heaviest traveled and most congested arterial street in the Tri-Cities, supporting both regional commute traffic and intracity travel in central Richland. Planning improvements include: 1) relieve paralyzing congestion and provide capacity for planned economic and population growth and 2) add active transportation features to this corridor in central Richland to support the city's urban redevelopment vision. The total investment is estimated at \$22 million, which will be accomplished in up to five phases.

Columbia Center Boulevard Corridor Improvements – City of Kennewick (Est. \$12 million)

Columbia Center Boulevard serves the commercial center of the Tri-Cities. This includes the regional Columbia Center Mall and Costco store, along with other high-traffic generators like Target and Lowes. It is near the new Vista Field urban development. This project will improve the Deschutes and Quinault intersections and widen Columbia Center Boulevard to three through lanes in each direction to address the safety and congestion issues in this corridor. The estimated cost is \$12 million.

New Overpass at I-82 and Georgia Street – City of Kennewick (Est. \$20 million)

The planning of a new overpass of Georgia Street over I-82 to serve Kennewick's fast-growing Southridge area and future Urban Growth Area expansion. The initial phase of the project would construct an overpass and create a direct connection to greatly reduce vehicle miles traveled. Timing will depend on traffic growth. The TCLC anticipates the overpass will need to be converted into a full interchange when traffic volumes warrant it. The city understands the project will require FHWA approval and will seek private development contributions to help fund the project. The estimated cost for the initial phase overpass is \$20 million.

Port of Benton - Rail Crossing, Tie and Rail Replacement (Est. \$8 million).

The proposed project will replace the five at-grade crossings located at (1) Cemetery / Swift Blvd., (2) Van Giesen St., (3) Airport Way, (4) Saint St., and (5) SR 240. Additionally, the Port of Benton needs to replace up to 14,000 ties (as much of the ties currently in place are near or at failure). Finally, approximately 3 track miles of rail needs to be replaced with heavier rail due to the increased rail traffic. This rail line is ranked in the top three in the state for short line tonnage; currently serving more than 13,000 rail cars with approximately 1.2 million tons of freight annually. The estimated cost of the project is \$8 million.