

STAFF REPORT

IN CONSIDERATION OF RESOLUTION NO. 26-5564 FOR THE PURPOSE OF ACCEPTING THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE REGIONAL EMERGENCY TRANSPORTATION ROUTES UPDATE PHASE TWO REPORT

Date: May 4, 2026
Department: Planning
Meeting Date: May 21, 2026

Prepared by: John Mermin,
john.mermin@oregonmetro.gov

ISSUE STATEMENT

Emergency transportation issues can fade into the background. While our region is primarily focused on seismic events, the 2020 wildfires in Clackamas County and last year's fires in the Los Angeles area provide a reminder of the potential for large scale emergency events that could impact our region. First designated in 1996, Regional Emergency Transportation Routes (RETRs) are travel routes that, in case of a major regional emergency or natural disaster, would be prioritized for rapid damage assessment and debris-removal to aid the movement of first responders, people who need medical care, fuel, supplies and equipment. It is important to note that the scope of the RETR project is focused on emergency *response* after disaster hits, not on evacuation or recovery planning, though its maps and reports can be useful to those efforts.

In 2019-2021, the Regional Disaster Preparedness Organization (RDPO) and Metro partnered on the first phase of the Regional Emergency Transportation Routes (RETR) project that reassessed and updated the routes for the 5-county region (which includes Clackamas, Columbia, Multnomah and Washington counties in Oregon and Clark County in Washington). Phase 1 evaluated potential routes with a range of connectivity, resilience, and equity criteria to establish an agreed upon set of designated RETRs that connect Statewide Lifeline Routes in Oregon, local ETRs, and provide connectivity and access to state and regional critical facilities and essential destinations. The RETR work group included a multi-disciplinary team of emergency management, transportation, and public works staff supporting the phase 1 planning project. The primary outcome of phase 1 was adding 89 new routes (305 miles) to the regional network.

The purpose of phase 2 was to develop a tiering methodology and prioritization framework to inform which RETRs should be evaluated, cleared and opened first, next and last in a catastrophic scenario; and to guide on-going maintenance and capital investments to ensure top tier routes are increasingly resilient.

ACTION REQUESTED

Staff will be seeking Approval of Resolution 26-5564 accepting the tiered regional routes, findings and recommendations of the Regional Emergency Transportation Phase two report at the May 21 JPACT and Council meetings.

IDENTIFIED POLICY OUTCOMES

Metro continues to play an important role in assisting local emergency management agencies with disaster planning related to regional functions, such as data and mapping, disaster debris management and emergency transportation route designation to improve disaster response coordination and help reduce loss of life, injury and property damage during disasters.

Guided by regional natural hazard policies in Chapter 5 of the Regional Framework Plan and Goal 5 in Chapter 2 of the 2023 RTP (Climate action and resilience), this work supports implementation of the region's Climate Smart Strategy, 2023 RTP and Metro's Disaster Debris Management Plan. This work also advances the 2023 RTP's transportation equity goals and policies, and Metro's agency-wide racial equity goals and Strategic Plan to Advance Racial Equity Diversity and Inclusion.

Pending Council approval of Resolution No. 25-5564, this work will inform planning, policy and investment priorities in the 2028 RTP update and ongoing efforts to improve the region's resilience and to develop funding strategies to make these routes more resilient.

POLICY QUESTION(S)

Does the RETR final Report adequately correlate to the 2023 RTP Policy outcomes described above?

POLICY OPTIONS FOR COUNCIL TO CONSIDER

The project recommendations will serve as a tool to provide information to the region. This project will give the council the opportunity to bring recommendations from this study into the next RTP update.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends that the Metro Council approve Resolution No.26-5564

STRATEGIC CONTEXT & FRAMING

Relationship to Metro goals and policies

This project advances regional natural hazard policies in Chapter 5 of the Regional Framework Plan, Goal 2 (Transportation Equity) and Goal 5 (Climate Action and Resilience) in Chapter 2 of the 2023 RTP, and Metro's agency-wide equity goals and Strategic Plan to Advance Racial Equity Diversity and Inclusion. This work supports implementation of the 2023 RTP and Metro's Disaster Debris Management Plan, and

support ongoing local, regional, and state efforts to improve regional resilience and emergency preparedness.

Known opposition, support, and community feedback

There is no known opposition. There is strong support from local jurisdictions and public agencies concerned about infrastructure and emergency preparedness. The project team engaged a technical work group, practitioners, community-based organizations, policymakers and regional advisory committees throughout the project:

- **RETR Phase 2 Project Work Group:** The RDPO and Metro convened a multi-disciplinary project work group composed of transportation and emergency management planners and engineers from seventeen agencies. The work group met six times between 2024 and 2026 and guided key project decisions, including defining the prioritization framework, refining criteria weighting, reviewing draft maps, and validating the final tiering structure. Their iterative feedback ensured the methodology was technically sound, operationally relevant, and regionally consistent. The Acknowledgement Section in the report lists members of the work group and the agencies they represent.
- **Practitioner Workshops:** The project team held three technical workshops between March and November 2025 that brought together a broad set of practitioners—first responders, public works staff, utility providers, and planners from across the five-county region. Participants contributed critical infrastructure insights, reviewed draft prioritized routes, and provided county-specific refinements to the tiered network. Their expertise grounded the framework in real-world emergency response needs. Appendix B in the report lists the agencies of workshop participants.
- **Community-based Workshops:** The project team held three workshops with community-based organizations to ensure that community voices, particularly from vulnerable and underserved populations, informed the project. Nineteen organizations participated in three workshops, offering perspectives on communication barriers, the need for resilience hubs, and challenges posed by extreme weather events. Their input highlighted equity considerations and reinforced the importance of accessible, community-centered emergency planning. Appendix B in the report lists the organizations that participated.
- **Regional Policymakers and Advisory Committees:** The project team engaged the RDPO Policy Board, the RDPO Steering Committee, the Metro Council, the Southwest Washington RTC Board, the Joint Policy Advisory Committee on Transportation (JPACT), the Transportation Policy Alternatives Committee (TPAC), the Regional Technical Advisory committee (RTAC), RDPO emergency management work group, the RDPO public works work group, and county coordinating committees at key milestones throughout the project.

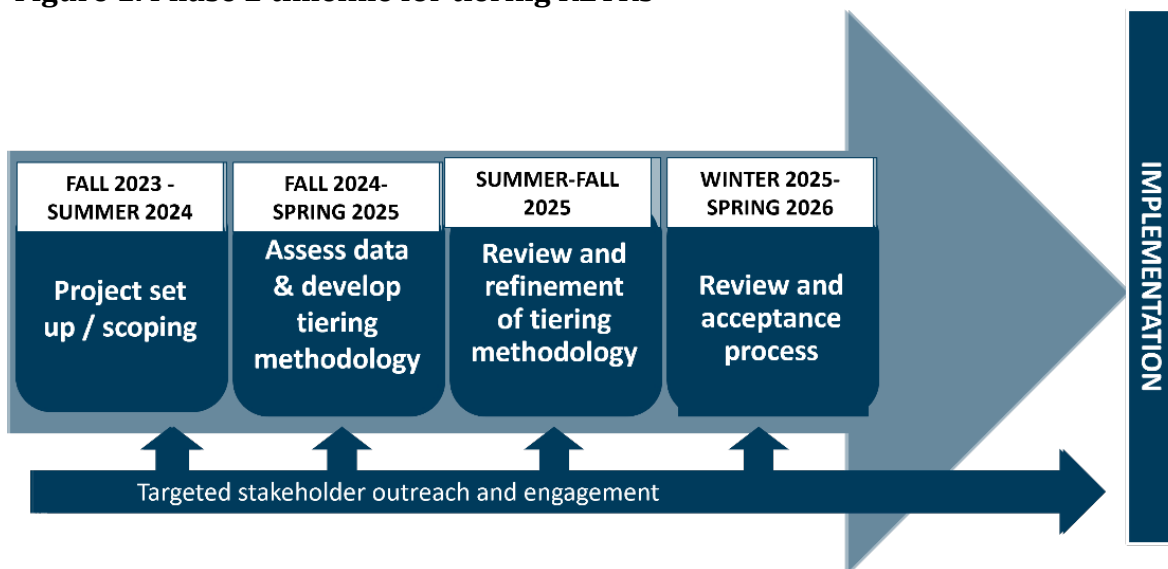
On April 3, 2026 TPAC unanimously recommended that JPACT approve the final report, recommendations and updated maps by consent at the May 21, 2026 JPACT meeting. On March 20, 2026, the Regional Technical Advisory Committee (RTAC) unanimously recommended that the Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council (RTC)

Board endorse the RETR final report at its April 7 meeting. On April 7, the RTC Board endorsed the RETR final report.

Metro Council discussed the resolution and final report on April 16, and expressed support for taking action to approve Resolution No. 25-5564. On May 21, 2026, JPACT will consider action on TPAC's recommendation as part of the JPACT consent agenda. Pending JPACT approval, staff will seek Council approval of this Resolution as part of the Council consent agenda on May 21, 2026.

The overall project timeline is provided in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1. Phase 2 timeline for tiering RETRs



Key Phase 2 Project Outcomes and Deliverables: This phase resulted in:

- **Multi-disciplinary and multi-jurisdictional coordination and collaboration** of partners in the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan area across emergency management, transportation planning, engineering, operations, ports, transit, and public works, hospitals, fire, and law enforcement partners.
- **A tiered RETR network¹** that takes into consideration adequate connectivity to critical infrastructure and essential facilities, incorporates expert feedback provided by partners in the region, and considers equity and access for vulnerable communities.
- **A comprehensive Geographic Information System (GIS) database and an online RETR viewer** to support future planning and operations.

¹ Following TPAC's action to recommend approval of the tiered network, an error in what route was shown as SR 500 in Clark County, WA was identified and subsequently corrected – resulting in a portion of Fourth Plain Blvd (I-205 to NE 162nd) shifting from State Route to Tier 1 RETR, and portions of Padden Pkwy (NE 117th to NE 162nd) and NE 162nd (Padden Pkwy to Fourth Plain Blvd) shifting from Tier 1 RETR to State route.

- **Recommendations for integrating the RETRs into other local, regional, and state planning efforts** and considerations for investment decisions.
- **Additional recommendations for future work²** to support ongoing local, regional, and state efforts to improve regional resilience and emergency preparedness.

Budget Impacts: None at this time. The project is funded with a federal Urban Area Security Initiatives (UASI) grant. There will be future costs associated with implementation of the recommendations. These costs will be shared by local, regional, state and federal partners.

Legal antecedents:

- Resolution No. 21-5160, For the Purpose of Accepting Findings and Recommendations in the Regional Emergency Transportation Routes Update Phase One Report, adopted on April 29, 2021.
- Ordinance No. 23-1496, For the Purpose of Amending the 2018 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) to Comply with Federal and State Law and Amending the Regional Framework Plan, adopted on November 30, 2023.

² Recommendation 2-3 in the final report describes the need to operationalize the RETRs through developing management plans. In order to implement this recommendation, it would be beneficial to update a 2006 Memorandum of Understanding (ODOT No. agreement 21,273) signed by City of Portland, the Port of Portland, Clark County, Clackamas County, Columbia County, Multnomah County, Washington County, and the Oregon and Washington Departments of Transportation that formalized commitments for assessing and reporting the status and condition of identified emergency transportation routes following an earthquake and coordinating activities under emergency conditions in relation to those routes.