

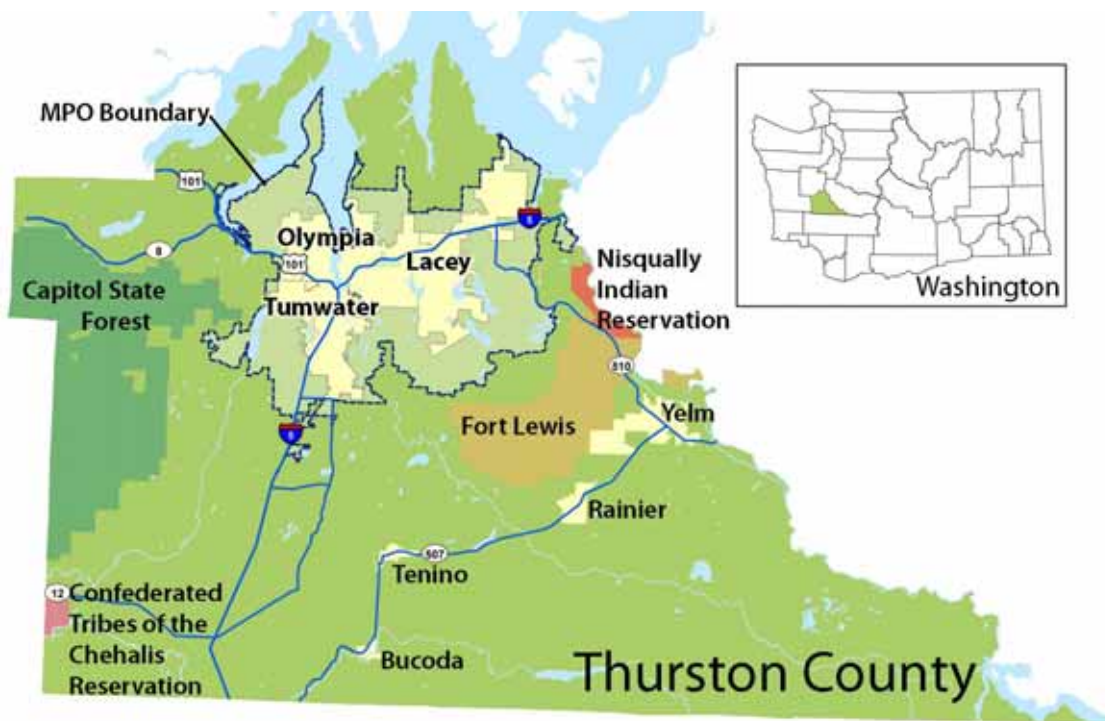
# Thurston County, Washington: Partnership between Tribes and an MPO

## Overview

In Washington State, the coordination between the Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC), the Nisqually Indian Tribe, and the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation provides an example of strong partnership and collaboration between tribes and a metropolitan planning organization (MPO). TRPC is an intergovernmental board comprised of representatives from local government jurisdictions within Thurston County and the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation and the Nisqually Indian Tribe. TRPC serves as both the federally designated MPO and the state-designated regional transportation planning organization (RTPO). The cooperative efforts made between TRPC and these two tribes have resulted in improved visibility of tribal needs in the county, improved regional coordination of projects, more complete data, and an awareness of other common regional transportation needs.

## Background

Located in Western Washington State, Thurston County has a population of more than 224,000 people, and includes the cities of Bucoda, Lacey, Olympia, Rainier, Tenino, Tumwater, and Yelm. Two tribes are located in Thurston County, the Nisqually Indian Tribe and the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation (with reservation boundaries that also cross into neighboring Grays Harbor County).



Map of Thurston County  
(Courtesy of TRPC)

Since the 1850s, the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation, with a population of 691 people, have lived on a reservation within the Chehalis River watershed, which contains important archeological and historic sites scattered throughout the Tribe's aboriginal area. The primary sources of employment on the reservation are government services, and tribal food and entertainment enterprises. Tribal enterprises and community services employ more than 700 people. The Nisqually Indian Tribe, with a population of 599 people, has reservation lands in the northeast part of Thurston County. The Nisqually Indian Tribe provides employment opportunities in two fish hatcheries, an expanded casino and gas station/ convenience store, as well as in government services. The combined employment of the tribes make tribal government the fourth largest employer in the county.

## **Tribal Involvement with the MPO**

### ***Foundation for Involvement***

In 2000, the county's transit agency, Intercity Transit, experienced a major reduction in revenue due the repeal of the State's motor vehicle excise tax. This prompted Intercity Transit to significantly reduce both its service and service boundary, with its new focus being on the more populated and urbanized areas of the county. This left some communities outside the urban areas unserved or with reduced service, which had the potential to impact the Nisqually Reservation and rural areas near the Chehalis Reservation, which had never been served by transit.

Around this time, the Washington State legislature began looking at transportation needs in rural areas of the State. In response to this initiative and the elimination of transit service to the county's rural areas, TRPC began an analysis of Thurston County's rural and specialized transportation needs. As a part of this analysis, TRPC formed a local coalition of jurisdictions, social service and transportation providers, tribes, and other community stakeholders, to explore ways to serve the transit needs of the county's rural areas. Tribal representatives were an important part of this coalition.

At the State level, the Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation provided planning funds for the study because many of the rural and tribal areas of Thurston County fit the agency's income restrictions and seclusion clauses. TRPC then initiated a transit service project to serve the tribes and other rural communities. Through collaboration between the tribes and TRPC, transportation service was successfully funded through roughly equal parts of State rural mobility and Federal Job Access and Reverse Commute sources.

The experience of restoring transportation service in the rural county, along with encouragement from TRPC, laid an important foundation for both tribes to become more actively involved with TRPC. The initial public transportation service analysis greatly contributed to subsequent consultation processes, since the tangible results and project collaboration helped the tribes and TRPC staff form a professional, working relationship.

### ***Participation in the Thurston Regional Planning Council***

The Nisqually Indian Tribe has been a member of the TRPC since 1996, and the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation joined in 2002. TRPC works closely with the two tribes.

Both tribes have engaged in discussions on land use and transportation issues with TRPC.



In addition, as members of TRPC, both tribes attend the council’s monthly meetings, and each has a full vote on the council.

The Chehalis Tribe was very involved in the development of the most recent Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and participated in the policymaker subcommittee that focused closely on the goals and policies and recommendations of the RTP. The Chehalis Tribe also was also involved in the “Vision Reality Disconnect” project that looked at whether growth management policies were working as envisioned. While only about one-third of the Chehalis Reservation lies within Thurston County, the Tribe primarily works with TRPC due to the TRPC’s accessibility and interest in working with the Tribe.

In 2004, the Chehalis representative was elected vice-chair of the TRPC. This led to greater appreciation for tribal transportation needs and sensitivity to tribal concerns. She encouraged TRPC staff who had contact with external agencies to attend training on working with tribes. TRPC now requires key staff members to attend the government-to-government training program offered by Washington State’s Governor’s Office of Indian Affairs, which covers cultural awareness and history.

A Chehalis representative was vice-chair of the TRPC in 2004, and has been very involved in the development of the most recent Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). A representative of the Nisqually tribe sits on the TRPC Transportation Policy Board.

While the Nisqually Indian Tribe had been absent from TRPC monthly council meetings and the Transportation Policy Board for several years, it has become an active participant on the council since about 2002. The Nisqually Indian Tribe transportation planner currently attends up to eight meetings a month at TRPC and represents the Tribe on a range of issues. Over the first ten months in his job, he developed a broadly representative transportation committee on the reservation, and has encouraged tribal councilman William Wells, a member of the Nisqually transportation committee, to officially represent the Tribe at TRPC meetings.

TRPC is currently operating under the auspices of the State’s Centennial accord, which mandates that each state agency must have a procedure to implement effective government-to-government relations. TRPC is also working toward formalizing a government-to-government policy with each tribe. Currently, both tribes only conduct formal consultation with WSDOT, but work on projects with both WSDOT and TRPC.

**Results**

The Nisqually Indian Tribe, the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation, and TRPC have worked to build trust and understand each other’s issues. The willingness of each of the tribes and TRPC to work together has been the primary reason for success in improving relationships among these organizations. These working arrangements have yielded tangible results. Both tribes currently are looking at economic development opportunities outside the gaming industry to help their economies grow in a more balanced fashion. As expanding local communities with unique needs, tribes require access to local and regional services, which contributes to their recognition of the need to participate regionally and locally with adjacent governments.

In addition to the basic planning services that TRPC provides to its members, the council does contract work for members, including the tribes. Tribes contract with TRPC both

directly and through grants that TRPC has received from the State and other sources to conduct specific projects. In 2003, as part of initial planning for their Rural & Tribal Transportation project, TRPC contracted with Thurston County to drive over reservation roads and take digital photos every 30-50 feet. This project helped determine appropriate routes for transportation services and assisted the Nisqually and Chehalis Tribes in updating their road condition inventories. TRPC consulted with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and the Federal Lands Highway Program to determine how to help tribes meet their responsibilities to these two entities. Another example includes the update of the Chehalis Reservation Transportation Plan, which the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation contracted with TRPC to prepare. The Nisqually Tribe recently hired a planner to begin developing its first-ever comprehensive community plan to better facilitate regional and local cooperation. Additionally, the Nisqually Tribe is working with TRPC to write their first long-range transportation plan in 2006, which will also incorporate a trails plan.

Another important area of coordination between the tribes and TRPC relates to mapping and data. In the past, tribal lands may not have been shown on regional maps due to their relatively small size. In recent years, however, the tribes and TRPC have worked to ensure that the reservations are consistently shown on all mapping products produced by TRPC. TRPC's annual statistical report, The Profile, contains a wide range of data on the county, including population, employment, housing, transportation, and environmental information. As a result of increased participation and input from the tribes, the level of data available in The Profile about the tribes has increased substantially.

TRPC also produces a Population and Employment Forecast, which is updated approximately every three years and is used extensively for planning purposes in the region, including transportation planning. As a result of coordinating with the tribes on data issues, the current forecast update will include, for the first time, data from the two reservations. TRPC was able to collect these data because of the active participation of tribal representatives in TRPC's Forecast Stakeholders group. These data also will be used for the first time in updating the region's land use analysis through the Buildable Lands Program.

TRPC has set aside an allocation of their Federal Surface Transportation Program (STP) funds called the Rural Community Support Program (RCSP) for the tribes and smaller rural communities, who will have the opportunity to apply for those funds without competing against the larger jurisdictions with more grant-writing staff resources. Thurston County recently used RCSP funds awarded to the Nisqually Tribe to pave a segment of road on the reservation that was in poor condition, at considerable cost savings to the Tribe. A ground-breaking agreement between the county and the Tribe enabled this cooperative venture between governments.

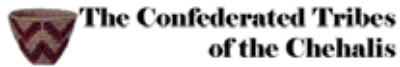


**Nisqually Logo**  
(Courtesy of the Nisqually Indian Tribe)

TRPC has set aside an allocation of their Federal Surface Transportation Program (STP) funds called the Rural Community Support Program (RCSP). This allocation provides opportunities for tribes and smaller rural communities to apply for funding without competing against larger jurisdictions.



One important transportation option for tribal members and others in the surrounding rural communities is TRPC's Rural and Tribal Transportation Program. Because there may be insufficient grant funds to keep this transportation service going, TRPC is working with the Tribe to explore other funding possibilities, such as the consideration of tribal enterprises. For example, the Chehalis Tribe has identified a lack of service to the airport in Portland, Oregon, from their area and is researching methods to supply transportation to the airport. Discussions also are underway to determine how to coordinate the transportation needs and services of the local gaming enterprises. TRPC found that in trying to conduct surveys on transportation services, one-on-one interviews, in some cases, provide more complete information than other survey methods. In addition, face-to-face meetings generally have proved more successful in establishing the tribes' trust.



TRPC's Regional Trails Plan involved convening local agencies and jurisdictions to take a broad approach to countywide trails planning. TRPC assisted the Nisqually Tribe with the examination of their nonmotorized transportation needs and helped to ensure previously allocated grant funding was not rescinded by the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT). Subsequently, in 2005, the Nisqually Pathway was dedicated as part of the trails system, and the Nisqually elders honored WSDOT employees for their cooperative and consistent work with the Tribe.



(left to right) Nisqually Tribe Transportation Planner Jim Longley presents an award to Scott Boutilier, Site Development Technician and WSDOT heavy equipment trainer. Marlene Mercado, Vice Chair, Nisqually Tribal Council.

(Courtesy of the Nisqually Indian Tribe)



Bob Barnes (WSDOT) and volunteers planting along the Nisqually Pathway.

(Courtesy of the Nisqually Indian Tribe)



Fully constructed Nisqually Pathway (completed in November 2005).

(Courtesy of the Nisqually Indian Tribe)



Honorees (Front): Jim Longley (Nisqually Transportation Planner), Rose Sinclair (Pathway worker), Michael Cardwell, Linda Fretts (honored by NIT), Tony Sanchez; (Rear): Ed Winkley (honored by NIT), Bob Barnes (honored by NIT), Joe Cushman, Bruce Hinote, Maui Sanchez, Adam Reynolds.

(Courtesy of the Nisqually Indian Tribe)

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

The administrative burden on tribes of attending and preparing for TRPC meetings can be demanding. In addition, non-tribal agencies and individuals need training to help them better understand tribal jurisdiction and the tribes' relationship to other agencies.

The tribes have found it onerous to deal with bureaucratic processes and their numerous and complex reporting requirements. It also has sometimes been difficult to get on the agendas of TRPC or other RTPOs due to the small size of the tribes; many of their transportation projects are not considered "regionally significant." TRPC's Rural Community Support Program, mentioned above, can help smaller communities that do not have large staff to be able to equitably compete with larger jurisdictions for grant funds.

### **Lessons Learned**

Several lessons have been learned from the process of coordination and information sharing among WSDOT, TRPC, the Nisqually Indian Tribe, and the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation:

- Providing information most effectively to tribal communities and eliciting input from them may require a different approach from that used for other communities. In some cases, one-on-one interviews may provide more complete information than other methods, and face-to-face meetings have generally proved more

successful in establishing trust with tribes. Regular communication is essential to maintaining cooperative relationships.

- All parties involved in tribal coordination should take an active approach to problem solving. Tribal lands are often located along state highways, some of which are very congested, and engagement is key to successful coordination. For example, State Route 510 splits the Nisqually reservation in half, and representatives from the reservation have begun working more closely with WSDOT and others to address speed, signal, and safety issues.
- Tribes should seek to create and design comprehensive community plans that set forth the tribe's economic development goals. Tribes can use these plans to identify transportation project needs, and plan for how the community should develop in the future.
- Tribal involvement in a metropolitan planning organization can yield tangible results and benefits to the tribe in terms of influence on planning studies and projects that directly address tribal transportation needs. Additionally, support from the political strata, such as is represented by TRPC members, can ensure that tribal needs and concerns are heard.

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**Other Resources**

Centennial Accord between the Federally Recognized Indian Tribes in Washington State and the State of Washington: <http://www.goia.wa.gov/Government-to-Government/Government-to-Government.htm>

Washington State Department of Transportation Executive Order on Tribal Consultation: <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/NR/rdonlyres/847C3EC9-3373-41A7-ADBE-AC4D8E3F6ED6/0/ConsultationPolicy.pdf>

Thurston Regional Planning Council, Profile 2005: <http://www.trpc.org/programs/estimates+and+forecasts/demographics/the+profile.htm>

Thurston Regional Planning Council, Population and Employment Forecast: <http://www.trpc.org/programs/estimates+and+forecasts/demographics/population+and+employment+forecast++.htm>