

# Connectivity Policy in Washington State

Paula Swedeen, Ph.D.

Conservation Northwest

Southwest Washington Connectivity Summit

May 22, 2024



# Creating a lasting policy framework for connectivity work in Washington

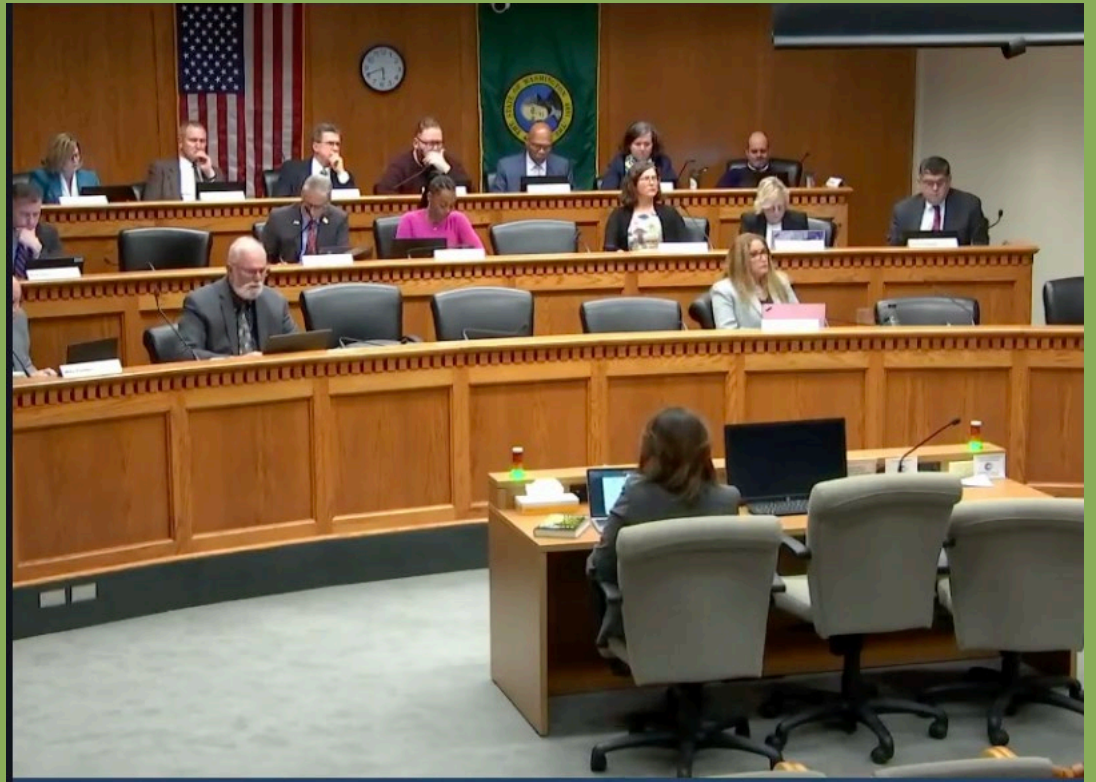
- 2023 Working Links Meeting
  - Participants agreed statewide connectivity legislation was needed in WA
  - Better position the state to compete for federal grants
  - Institutionalize connectivity work at WSDOT and WDFW to allow more consistent staff attention and capacity
  - Long-term funding for crossing structures and habitat protection in linkage zones.



# 2024 Legislation

## SB 6237/HB 2456

- Mandates implementation and periodic updates of the Action Plan
- Mandates high-level coordination among the two agencies and involvement of other agencies and stakeholders, consultation with Tribal governments
- Creates two accounts within the state treasury to fund planning and construction of wildlife crossings and habitat protection/restoration within linkage zones.



# 2024 Legislation

- Passed both Senate and House Transportation Committees
- Over 800 people signed in “pro” in Senate, unanimous vote
- Got some pushback in House, 700 people signed in “con” and no R support in vote
- Bills stalled out in operating fiscal committees



# Challenges this Year

- Transportation budget is \$6 billion in the red
- Ballot initiatives challenge revenue structure of the state:
  - CCA repeal
  - Capital gains tax repeal
- Created huge uncertainty during a short session



# Prospects for 2025

- Gained several new supporters in legislature
- Bi-partisan appeal, esp. in Senate
- New transportation revenue package in 2025
- Initiatives will have been decided
- Long session, more time



Area of southern linkage, proposed crossings over/under I-5