



WHRP

**WISCONSIN HIGHWAY
RESEARCH PROGRAM**

2026-2030 STRATEGIC PLAN

About the Wisconsin Highway Research Program

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) established the Wisconsin Highway Research Program (WHRP) in 1998 in partnership with the University of Wisconsin–Madison (UW–Madison) to discover better ways to design, build and reconstruct the state's highways. WHRP is managed by staff within the department and through an interagency agreement with UW–Madison's College of Engineering.

WHRP is governed by a Steering Committee that is chaired by the WisDOT Research Program Manager. The committee has standing positions to represent WisDOT management, academia, contractors, consultants and the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) with designees from the following:

- WisDOT Bureau of Project Development
- WisDOT Bureau of Structures
- WisDOT Bureau of Technical Services
- WisDOT Division of Transportation System Development (DTSD) senior leadership
- WisDOT regional offices (two-year rotating representative from one of the five regions)
- WisDOT Office of Asset and Performance Management
- American Council of Engineering Companies of Wisconsin
- Wisconsin Asphalt Pavement Association
- Wisconsin Concrete Pavement Association
- Wisconsin Earth Movers Association
- Wisconsin Transportation Builders Association
- Wisconsin academic institution (two-year rotating representative from Marquette University, UW–Madison, UW–Milwaukee and UW–Platteville)
- Other university transportation centers, as approved by the Steering Committee
- FHWA Wisconsin Division

WHRP focuses its research through four standing technical oversight committees (TOCs):

- Flexible Pavements (asphalt)
- Rigid Pavements (concrete)
- Geotechnics
- Structures

Each technical oversight committee is chaired by a WisDOT subject-matter expert. Committee members represent WisDOT business areas, academia, contractors, consultants and FHWA. WHRP assigns a WisDOT project manager and a project oversight committee (POC) to individual projects, and these committees may or may not draw from the standing TOC.

WHRP seeks research ideas, solicits proposals and awards contracts or agreements to researchers on an annual cycle. WHRP projects are typically funded 80% federal State Planning and Research Program Subpart-B (SPR-B) funds and 20% state funds.

WHRP 2026-2030 Strategic Plan

The 2026-2030 Strategic Plan was developed in consultation with the WHRP Steering Committee. A Strategic Plan Workgroup was formed, consisting of WHRP Steering Committee members, research technical support from UW–Madison, and administrative staff from WisDOT’s Research and Library Unit. The Strategic Plan Workgroup identified the **Themes, Goals, and Strategies** that align with the Mission, Vision, and Values of the program to guide the direction of the WHRP.

Mission:

Lead the identification, execution and implementation of applied research to address the current and future needs of Wisconsin’s transportation system.

Vision:

Implement innovative solutions to deliver a safer, more sustainable, efficient and affordable Wisconsin transportation system.

Values:

WHRP embodies WisDOT’s values of Integrity, Diversity, Excellence and Accountability and expands on these through the following:

- **Integrity** – Building trust and confidence in all relationships through transparency, a positive attitude and respect.
- **Diversity** – Creating a collaborative environment between WisDOT, FHWA, universities, the construction industry and consultants through communication and teamwork.
- **Excellence** – Providing quality applied research through innovation and constant improvement.
- **Accountability** – Being individually and collectively responsible for providing quality, cost effective and value-added solutions that are inclusive of all people and opinions, and represent the varied perspectives of our partners and the public.

Theme: Program Administration

Program administration refers to the WisDOT Research and Library (R&L) project management of WHRP.

Outcome: WisDOT R&L will increase the effectiveness of WHRP meetings and ensure oversight committees have the necessary materials to complete their tasks on time.

Goals	Strategies
Goal 1: Have project checklists for each TOC for program and project milestone tracking, results, and implementation support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Streamline administrative processes (forms, final reports, close-out).• Create a centralized location for project POC members and their contact information.
Goal 2: Propose a revised final report review process for WHRP stakeholder review & approval.	Identify ways to streamline the final report review process to ensure optimal use of contracted researcher and POC time.
Goal 3: Conduct a survey to researchers & POC members on preparedness for meetings to show improvement over the course of the 5-year plan.	Improve meeting preparedness through well-defined agendas and other materials, schedule meetings in conjunction with interim reports; allow POC Chair and Lead principal investigator to determine meeting length based on needs.

Theme: Program Communication

The Program Communication theme addresses the processes WHRP Steering Committee, POC, TOC, WisDOT Research and Library, and UW Technical Support use to share information about research activities.

Outcome: WHRP will increase active participation by pursuing opportunities for process improvement and communicating expectations of oversight committee participants.

Goals	Strategies
Goal 1: Develop opportunities to increase engagement and active participation with WHRP participants during the research project.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create a process to prepare POCs on the research project background and context — a structured handoff from the project originators including a pre-workplan meeting for the POC to discuss the research project.• Develop structures and processes to allow potential subject matter experts from peer organizations (e.g., state DOTs) or other WisDOT business areas to be included in the Request for Proposal (RFP) development process with TOCs as allowable by state procurement policies and mitigating potential conflicts of interest with research proposers.• Increase active participation between all levels of WHRP participants to discuss the research projects.
Goal 2: Encourage active POC participation on research projects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure knowledge transfer with new and experienced members participating on an POC.• Define and communicate POC roles and responsibilities prior to research projects beginning.
Goal 3: Create guides and workshop for TOC/POC members to understand the overall goals of WHRP, WHRP planning process, research management and administrative processes.	Support onboarding for WHRP TOC/POC participants.

Theme: Technology Transfer

Technology transfer is defined as process of communicating research findings or new information to facilitate knowledge sharing and innovative practice. Technology transfer includes creating enabling context (e.g. increasing awareness, training materials) to support adoption and implementation and facilitating knowledge transfer for internal and external research results. Technology transfer activities can be bidirectional with external entities.

Outcome: WHRP will have systems in place to share research findings, document technology transfer efforts, and leverage expertise from other research projects.

Goals	Strategies
Goal 1: Strengthen the WHRP research program through technology transfer with external experts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify opportunities for sharing research project outcomes with external experts to discuss important points about research projects.• Increase peer exchange engagement with other state DOTs and national programs.
Goal 2: Increase awareness of WHRP research program through targeted communication and collaboration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advance tech transfer and expand accessibility to WHRP's research and reports by leveraging diverse communication channels including social media.• Broaden WHRP awareness of other WisDOT research programs and pursue cross-over technical opportunities as applicable.• Communicate WHRP projects' value (e.g., benefits and outcomes) to interested stakeholders and practitioners.
Goal 3: Develop methods for TOCs to utilize on-going or similar research projects during research idea development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify internal and external research topical areas that could contribute expertise during idea development.• Define processes and limitations for external contributions.

Theme: Implementation

The Implementation theme addresses how the WHRP supports moving an idea from research into practice. Implementation is the process by which research is applied to the use of products and procedures to create value, increase equity, adopt innovation, and/or increase efficiency in the transportation system.

Outcome: WisDOT will encounter fewer barriers to the implementation of WHRP research products through thoughtful planning during the research cycle.

Goals	Strategies
Goal 1: Identify implementation and technical staff to assist in RFP development, establishment and structure of the research project POC, and creation of initial and final implementation plans.	Identify and engage internal and external experts as needed for implementation plans.
Goal 2: Identify processes to give priority to, and ensure consideration of, projects with tangible implementation goals.	Focus on applied research with innovative outcomes leading to the greatest impact to construction, safety, user access, material life cycle, and/or cost-savings.

Theme: Opportunities for Participant Growth and Program Engagement

Participant growth encompasses creating synergy between different subject matter experts, providing opportunities for professional development, and expanding the participant pool for committees and researchers. Program engagement includes internal and external engagement opportunities for awareness, project implementation, and program participation.

Outcome: WHRP serves as an opportunity for skill development to support advancement and professional growth. WHRP will see an increase in the diversity of participants and institutions involved with WHRP research.

Goals	Strategies
Goal 1: Grow awareness of and participation in WHRP committees and research projects; identify and address barriers to participation through annual review.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explore opportunities to incentivize participation through earning professional development hours (PDH).• Develop a recognition process for participation in WHRP.• Conduct a survey of WHRP participants to better understand the best approaches to WHRP participation.
Goal 2: Present WHRP overview to researchers in each in-state academic institution to expand research collaboration efforts.	Engage with Wisconsin state institutions and promote WHRP participation both internal and external to WisDOT to encourage new researchers and collaborations.
Goal 3: Engage industry associations through conference attendance and targeted communications materials.	Identify conferences to attend for research presentations or program informational sessions. Develop a set of outreach metrics.
Goal 4: Identify opportunities to increase proposals from new institutions and researchers for WHRP projects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify opportunities and new messaging strategies to expand outreach with research institutions.• Create processes for reviewing and updating the RFP distribution list.