

Impact of Homeless Encampments on State Department of Transportation Right of Way

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Abstract

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Homelessness is a severe problem in the United States. Homelessness is severely stigmatized in our society as it is driven largely by systemic and racist attitudes in our country. This is also a considerable issue for state Departments of Transportation (DOTs). Homeless encampments regularly form on state DOT right of way, creating significant safety issues for the travelling public, DOT employees, and the homeless population themselves. Currently, state DOTs typically remove encampments when they are deemed to be too hazardous, cause damage to DOT assets, or block efforts to maintain the roadway. To remedy this issue, state DOTs typically remove these encampments from the right of way working with other local agencies. Studying current state DOT practices, this was defined as the ‘multi-agency approach’. This approach entails state DOT maintenance employees partnering with local human service and law enforcement agencies to aid in removing these camps. By partnering with these local agencies, DOT employees use their expertise in addressing DOT assets which complements the human interaction expertise of the other agencies to make the removal process both as safe and equitable as possible. There is room for improvement in the multi-agency approach, and as such, recommendations were found to improve the response to homelessness on state right of way. These can be applicable to both state DOTs as well as broader decision makers. Homelessness is not an issue that is going to recede in the near future and as such it is everyone’s duty to work to address this pressing issue.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Homelessness is a pervasive issue faced by our society. It is a condition of living that afflicts countless people and takes an immense physical and emotional toll. This is an issue that is everywhere in American society. It is virtually impossible to enter an urban center in this country without being in proximity to at least one person experiencing homelessness. This is an issue that affects every level of our society. It is critical for the health of these individuals experiencing homelessness as well as society as a whole that we work to solve this issue. This is truly a society wide problem, and as such it is the duty of all agencies and groups to address homelessness, including state Departments of Transportation (DOTs).

There is an immense stigma attached to homelessness in America. The homeless have often been looked down upon by more affluent groups as drug addicted and mentally unstable people who are a mere nuisance and have been treated as such. The homeless tend to be pushed to the fringes of society. They live under bridges, in dense urban vegetation, and other places people would not normally go. Our society has deliberately pushed this group into these obscure areas because they are seen as ‘other’ and undesirable. This solution is easier than trying to reintegrate the homeless population into society. In America, until recently we have not truly tried to address the root causes of homelessness on a societal level; there have been groups that have truly tried to advocate for those experiencing homelessness, but these usually do not find major sustained success. More often, the common way of ‘addressing’ the issue was to forcibly remove the homeless from places where they can interact with the general public in an attempt to cut them off from society. This stigma attached to homelessness is also inherently based in racism and classism. People of color are extremely more likely to become homeless than the white population. Additionally, those who live in impoverished neighborhoods are also much more likely to find themselves homeless. This is the result of direct and systemic racism in our society. An example of this kind of discrimination came in the practice of redlining neighborhoods in the 1950’s and 1960’s. This practice involved real estate agencies and banks working together to deny people of color and impoverished people the ability to live in more affluent white neighborhoods, instead relegating these groups to less desirable neighborhoods with significantly less access to amenities and opportunity. This practice was specifically designed to ensure that communities of color could not find the levels of wealth that white communities had and thus perpetuating the legacy of the separation and segregation of communities of color. This is one example of countless policies and actions to disenfranchise these communities which is reflected in measures of social standing like homelessness. Currently, cities and other municipalities are not working to continue these discriminatory policies; in fact, often times they are working vehemently to dismantle the barriers faced by these disenfranchised communities, with varying levels of success. This outcome however is incredibly difficult to achieve. Any issue that is as ingrained in the culture of a nation will take time to shift, on the scale of generations. Homelessness is no different; it has taken many years for our society to reach this point, fighting against the stigma built by years of viewing the homeless as ‘other’. It will take many more years to erase this stigma to a point where the homeless have an equal access to opportunity to those not experiencing homeless.

Of course, this stigma that has been built up by our society that the homeless community is ‘other’ than the rest of society is completely untrue. Anyone can become homeless for any number of reasons. This can include things like divorce, loss of job, eviction, medical bills, personal injury, or anything else that can limit people’s ability to continue their normal lives. It was mentioned before that some groups are more likely to become homeless, which is true, but it is possible for anyone to become homeless. The homelessness stigma claims that homelessness is usually caused by chronic issues that continually cause people to be homeless. Again, this is sometimes the case, but many of the causes of homelessness are one-time major occurrences that push people who are barely balancing on the edge of homelessness off such that they are subject to the self-reinforcing cycle of homelessness. In many cases if the one-time cause of homelessness had been addressed immediately such that the individual never lost their home, they would never experience homelessness (Andrews 2019). This shows how our stigma of homelessness influences how we attempt to address homelessness by pushing us toward incorrect conclusions about the homelessness population. This has also caused significant consternation in the homeless population. It is common for the homeless community to feel as though their voices are not heard and to feel largely ignored. This reinforces the cycle of homelessness because the more a homeless person feels as though society has forsaken them, the less likely they are to seek out some of the resources that are available to help them address this issue (Bernhardt 1995).

This stigma ties directly into the concept of equity with regards to homelessness. Equity in general is a nebulous concept with many different definitions depending on the context of its use. In general, it means to ensure that all people are treated fairly and have an equal level of opportunity. This goes beyond the idea of fairness, or dividing resources equally among all groups and people. Instead, equity advocates ensuring that all people have equal opportunity to live a rich a fulfilling life, which does not always equate to equal sharing of resources. This idea has interesting implications with regards to homelessness. This tells us that our goal for addressing homelessness should not just to be to find homes for all those experiencing homelessness but should also involve removing the systemic barriers and unfounded stigmas in place that are described above and ensuring that all those who are experiencing or at risk to becoming homelessness have equal access to the opportunity to address their personal situation and maintain a fulfilling life by not being forced to become homeless.

If widespread thinking about homelessness is largely incorrect, how do we define homelessness in such a way as to truly capture the breath of the issue? In truth, there is no single correct definition of homelessness; there can always be exceptions. In general, there is a commonly held definition that covers the vast majority of the homeless population. The most commonly used definition in the United States is given by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This group is responsible for allocating federal funds to address homelessness and regulating smaller jurisdictions on different ways to address homelessness. The HUD defines homelessness as an “individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.” There are three basic criteria given to better define this overall statement: “Having primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not meant for human habitation, living in a publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living arrangements, or is exiting an institution where they have resided for 90 days or less and who resided in an emergency shelter or

place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering the institution” (Homelessness Assistance Programs 2020). It is clear from this definition that homelessness is far broader than is commonly thought. While this certainly does include the common idea of the homeless living in tents or ramshackle shelter, there are so many more living situations that also are considered homelessness. These can include living permanently in long term hotels, living in a vehicle, couch surfing, or countless other forms where a person does not have stable living condition. This also again reinforced the idea that only the extremely poor can become homeless is false; those who are wealthier tend to be in some of these less visible forms of homelessness such as living in a vehicle or long-term hotel.

Homelessness across the United States has generally remained the same over recent years. Due to the ingrained nature of this problem in our society, it is very difficult to effect significant sustained success in this area. Homelessness is highly concentrated in urban areas and is positively correlated to density and population. Because of this, the major city centers around the nation tend to be where homelessness is most concentrated. Even though the total population of homeless across the country is not changing significantly, there is more variation locally. In some cities, homelessness is decreasing while in others it is on the rise. These trends are indicative of complex social and economic factors that play a role in determining the rate of homelessness. In short, it is impossible to accurately predict how homelessness will grow and shift in coming years. Correlations can be found between different programs and the rates with which people enter and leave homelessness, but this only tells part of the picture. The state of the economy, the job market, the real estate market, and many other nebulous institutions like these play a major role in determining the rates of homelessness. These also can be predicted, but that does not account for how these forces interact with each other and with the implementation and effectiveness of different programs addressing homelessness. This overall interaction mechanism cannot be quantified, so we must use flawed and incomplete metrics to measure homelessness.

One of the most important sources of data on homelessness is the point in time count implemented across the nation. This is a blitz count that aims to count on a single night in January all of the homeless people in the United states. This is mandated by HUD but is conducted locally through continuum of care groups which operate on scales roughly equivalent to the size of counties. This metric gives a snapshot of the entire homeless population, and since it is conducted on the same day every year this gives it both longitudinal and cross-sectional properties. This blitz count is also accompanied by a more detailed survey to gain more information and insight into the homeless population than a pure count.

Washington is a unique case when looking at homelessness. Seattle and the Puget Sound Region in particular is a hotspot for homelessness in the United States. Seattle has one of the largest populations of homeless in the country, and it is continuing to grow. Additionally, Seattle has a much larger proportion of homeless who are not sheltered by public or private organizations. This makes it a unique place to study homelessness because many of the challenges faced by Seattle and the Puget Sound region are starker than most other places in the country. Additionally, there are many unique methods in place in these areas to address homelessness that are useful for highlighting both successful and non-successful methods in addressing homelessness. One of the

most important aspects that is well highlighted in Washington is how homelessness is concurrently both a local and regional issue. Currently, direct programs interacting with homelessness is almost exclusively done through the local context, either cities or counties. But, the effects of homelessness are felt regionally and have a much wider area of effect than each individual city or municipality that is addressing homelessness. This duality has created significant ambiguity in how homelessness is addressed and how homelessness is affected by local and regional shifts.

Homelessness also inherently affects many agencies that otherwise would not be directly addressing homelessness. One of the most prominent among these are state DOT agencies. These agencies must contend with homelessness on a daily basis. Mostly, DOTs are concerned with homeless individuals living on DOT property who are a threat to either the safety of DOT assets, the travelling public, or themselves through exposure to dangerous living conditions. Mostly DOTs are worried about unsanctioned homeless encampments that form along their right of way. Mostly found along access-controlled highways and freeways, these encampments pose serious hazards to the inhabitants and DOT employees. There is also a concern with homeless people along non-accessed controlled right of way, but this is usually addressed through local municipalities, not state DOTs directly. These encampments produce significant quantities of hazardous waste that can pose serious health concerns. This can include used drug paraphernalia, trash, human waste, and many other hazards. Additionally, these camps come with more exposure to health concerns for the residents through pollution and noise. Beyond safety hazards, they can also limit the access for maintenance employees who are working to ensure the upkeep of the roadway. Furthermore, addressing homeless encampments on DOT property can be extremely costly for state DOTs. These are all issues that state DOTs need to address beyond the fact that they want to help address the equity issue with homelessness in society.

How DOTs implement procedures with regards to equity is different from what other groups who interact with the homeless might do. Overall, the goal is the same for all of these groups; to treat the homeless population with fairness, kindness, and humanity while working to address their needs to elevate themselves out of homelessness. For this report, we will use the following definition of equity for state DOTs: 'To treat the homeless community fairly, humanely, and without stigma while addressing their needs to elevate themselves out of homelessness'. Unfortunately, DOTs do not have the luxury of only addressing the needs of the homeless communities; when interacting with these groups, there are several competing interests. Often, DOTs are forced to displace homeless groups in ways that are not equitable due to these competing needs. This conflict of interests is inevitable but working to reduce this conflict is critical for DOTs to help address the greater issue of homelessness in an equitable way.

The main action that DOTs take to address these encampments is to remove them. It is not the purview of state DOTs to work to address the needs of the homeless; they are more concerned with maintaining state DOT assets. Of course, DOTs do not want to bring any undue harm to the homeless population, they just lack the ability and authority to provide the services that are needed. Currently, state DOTs have largely adopted what can be called the 'multi-agency approach' when addressing homeless encampments along state right of way to solve this issue. This involves working with local agencies that have different types of expertise than state DOTs, most notably

in the fields of human interaction and providing services for the homeless. This approach is fairly effective in addressing the needs of state DOTs and the homeless, but there is significant improvement that can be made. Homeless encampment removals can be both equitable and not equitable for the homeless. Assuming the homeless are treated well by the employees and workers directly interacting with the camps, removing camps from state right of way can be beneficial to the homeless and therefore can be considered equitable. As mentioned above, camps along state right of way pose great health risks, even greater than other camping locations. Additionally, when this is done with the multi-agency approach, they may have greater access to resources provided by local municipalities to address their underlying causes of homelessness. However, this process does have some inequitable consequences as well. Many times, the resources that can be provided by local agencies is not sufficient to reliably remove people from the homelessness cycle. This, coupled with the trauma of being forcibly removed from one's home, makes this process inherently inequitable as well. When these are combined together, it shows that what state DOTs do is neither entirely equitable nor inequitable. The outcomes from these camp removals could be generally positive, or they could be negative. Weighing these competing factors and acting when the most equitable outcomes can be achieved is critical for ensuring that the homeless population is being treated in accordance with the definition of equity given above.

This idea directly leads to the goal of this study; to better understand the current DOT policy regarding homeless encampments along state right of way as well as the policy of other agencies that interact with the DOT to address this pressing issue in a way that balances the safety of DOT employees and the equitable treatment of homeless communities. Understanding these factors that influence how DOTs address homelessness is critical to finding the aspects of this process that can be improved to ensure the most positive outcome for all parties involved: the DOT, the local municipalities, and the homeless community.

Chapter 2: Issues Caused by Homelessness for State DOTs

2.1 Existing Data for Homeless Population

The most pressing issue with homelessness in society as a whole is that it is extremely complex. There are so many facets to this problem they cannot all realistically be understood. Additionally, the reliability of any data collected about the homeless will be inherently flawed because homelessness is an inherently fluid phenomenon. Homelessness exists as a spectrum, not a binary determination, and people can move along that spectrum daily. This makes it nearly impossible to have a complete understanding of homelessness in a population, especially one as large as a city or state. There are however datasets that do a decent job of estimating homelessness that are useful in measuring this phenomenon over time. The most important data for the state of Washington is the blitz homeless counts conducted in various counties throughout the state. This is a single night count that aims to record the total number of people experiencing homelessness in a county on the same day for a year. For this report, since the city of Seattle and King County is the center for homelessness in the Puget Sound Region, we will focus on this county's count. The data and specific issues here can be used as examples to shed light on the some of the overarching issues faced by state DOTs with regards to homelessness. This count is conducted by the county which takes a single night count of the entire homeless population in the county once every year. This data is extremely important in understanding how homelessness changes over time in king county which hosts the majority of homeless people living in the state.

The 2019 count, which was conducted on January 25th of 2019, found there were 11,199 people living without a home in king county. This is an 8 percent drop from the 2018 count which counted a total of 12,112 people. The count also records different subsections of homelessness people are experiencing. The first denomination that is made is if the individuals are sheltered or not. Sheltered individuals are those who on the night of the blitz count were staying in a homeless shelter or a similar facility. In 2019 the percentage of homeless that were sheltered was 53 percent, a jump of 8 percent from 2018. This jump is mostly due to both an expansion of existing homeless shelters in the Seattle and the re-designation of 5 tiny house villages from unsheltered to sheltered. There are also several subcategories for unsheltered individuals that better differentiate their status. These categories include living on the street or outside, living in a tent or unsanctioned camp, living in a sanctioned tent or camp, living in an abandoned building or squatting, and living in a vehicle (Andrews 2019). While addressing all of these types of homelessness are important, only a portion of these affect state DOTs and their right of ways. Almost all homeless who reside in state right of ways fall into the unsanctioned camp or tent category.

As part of this annual count, the county also conducts follow up surveys with some of those experiencing homelessness that were identified in the blitz count. This survey provides valuable insight into more of the reasons of what causes homelessness and other contributing factors. The survey found that 36 percent of respondents had psychiatric or emotional conditions. PTSD was reported in 35 percent of respondents. Drug or alcohol abuse was reported by 32 percent of respondents. Chronic health issues were reported in 27 percent of respondents. 23 percent of respondents reported a physical disability and 23 percent reported an intellectual disability or

memory impairment. 21 percent of respondents reported being in foster care at some point. Also, 41 percent of the respondents of the survey reported that their usual accommodation was somewhere outside which is roughly in line with the blitz count's measure of those residing outside (Andrews 2019). It is also important to note that almost all people who are homeless live in urban or urbanizing areas. In Washington state for example, over 90 percent of documented homeless people live in urban, urbanizing, or suburban areas (Andrews 2019). This makes these areas of particular interest to any agency attempting to address this issue.

Apart from this, there is also significant demographic data that is collected on the homeless population. Following trends that were described before, in King County people of color are much more likely to find themselves homeless than people who are white. In 2019, people who were Black or African American made up 32 percent of the homeless population while only comprising around 6 percent of the county population. People who are Hispanic and Latino comprise 15 percent of the homeless population but only 10 percent of the entire population. Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders make up 1 percent of the total population but comprise three percent of the homeless population. Finally, American Indians and Alaskan Natives make up less than 1 percent of the population and yet comprise 10 percent of the homeless population (Andrews 2019). In all of these populations there is a clear trend showing that these demographic groups are grossly overrepresented in the homeless population compared to the total percentage of population. This is in stark contrast to the final two demographic divisions captured in the survey: White and Asian populations. The Asian population makes up approximately 17 percent of the King County population, yet accounts for only 4 percent of the homeless population. Those who are White make up approximately 60 percent of the King County population, while only comprising 42 percent of the homeless population (Andrews 2019). Both of these demographic subpopulations are vastly underrepresented in homelessness. This shows how race plays a significant role in the probability that one becomes homeless, as people of color are vastly overrepresented.

The survey also collected respondents self-reported reasons for being homeless. This is a critical insight into the reasons and causes of homelessness. The most common self-reported cause of homelessness is a loss of job at 24 percent. The next largest causes that were over 10 percent of the population were alcohol or drug use and eviction at 16 percent and 15 percent respectively. Those reasons below 10 percent include but are not limited to divorce or separation, rent increase, argument with friend or family member who they were staying with, incarceration, and family or domestic violence (Andrews 2019). This information is critical because it allows us to target the most pressing causes of homelessness and attempt to address them directly. There are flaws with this method of determining causes of homelessness. One flaw with this information is that these percentages are mutually exclusive, meaning they can't measure how these terms may interact, as it is possible that these terms could influence each other. For example, the highest reason for homelessness, loss of a job could be caused by any of the other reasons for homelessness: alcohol and drug use or eviction for example. Along with this information, there is also information on other compounding factors that affect individual's homelessness that isn't considered with these statistics. One of the most important factors is chronic homelessness, defined as "an unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition who has either been continuously homeless for a year or more, or has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three

years” (Andrews 2019). This is a very important metric for understanding homelessness because chronic homelessness is highly correlated to drug and alcohol abuse and mental health issues. The survey found that 2,213 individuals in king county experienced chronic homelessness. 24 percent of all homeless people across the nation experience chronic homelessness as well (Andrews 2019). This idea of chronic homelessness points to a systemic issue with how or society addresses this issue, and that there is a significant population that does not have the resources to maintain permanent housing. It shows that the resources that are available are not adequate for a significant portion of the homeless population. This data is of great importance to society. This information allows us to begin to understand all of the complexities of this issue and begin addressing it from all angles in a fair and equitable way for those experiencing homelessness.

There are several documented health risks associated with living without a home. These are separate from the health issues mentioned above in that these are directly caused by being homeless as opposed to contributing to being homeless in the first place. There is a documented increased rate of infectious diseases and chronic medical issues in homeless populations. This can include diseases like pneumonia, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, cardiovascular disease, and obstructive lung disease, to name only a few of the prevalent diseases in the homeless community. The increased exposure to carcinogens also increases the likelihood of cancer in these populations. Ultimately, all of these added risk factors increase the mortality of the homeless population significantly above normal levels (Schanzer 2007). These factors, which are a direct impact of homelessness, are yet another reason why addressing the homelessness issue is imperative for our society.

Understanding the breadth of the issue of homelessness is critical to DOTs being able to address this issue subset on their property and right of way. Even though WSDOT as well as other state DOTs only interact with a small portion of the homeless populations that lives within each state or jurisdiction, understanding all of the intricacies of this complex issue is critical to state DOTs working towards a solution that not only improves the safety of their employees on state right of way but also works towards solving the problem as a whole. One of the key takeaways from the blitz count and survey conducted every year is that homelessness is a self-perpetuating issue. Approximately one quarter of all homeless people experience chronic homelessness, and approximately three quarters of all homeless people have been homeless on more than one occasion. These statistics point to the idea that once someone has become homeless, they are much more likely to become homeless again after finding some sort of temporary housing. This is especially true if the homeless are not properly connected to the support systems that agencies put in place to help them both leave homelessness and create a foundation to remain permanently housed (Andrews 2019). This concept is especially pertinent to state DOTs. Sometimes when a homeless camp is cleared from state right of way, instead of truly helping the individuals address the underlying issues that led to them being homeless in the first place, those displaced from their original camp merely form a new camp, usually again on state right of way (Cowan 2020). All this amounts to is a temporary fix that pushes the problem down the road, both figuratively and literally. While most DOTs, WSDOT included, are moving towards a method of interaction with homeless that tries to mitigate these issues, they are still prevalent and need continued effort to begin reducing this systemic issue.

2.2 Safety Concerns of Homeless Camps on State Right of Way

Beyond the societal issues created by homelessness, there are several safety related issues that homeless can cause when living on or near state right of way. One major threat homeless can cause is the threat of collision with motorists. When living near state highways and other roadways, this greatly increases homeless individuals' exposure to vehicles which in turn increases their exposure to collisions. In some cases, these individuals are pedestrians involved in pedestrian collisions. According to the Active Transportation Annual Safety Report in 2018, there has been a 2 percent increase in the number of pedestrian fatalities and serious injury collisions in the state. 27 percent of these collisions in the state of Washington occurred on WSDOT right of way, with the vast majority of those occurring on main street highways in urban or urbanizing areas. Currently, out of these collisions there is a large overrepresentation of collisions in impoverished communities with higher concentrations of homeless populations. While only 44 percent of census block groups have higher poverty levels than the state average, 59 percent of active transportation collisions occurred in those blocks (Millar 2019). This shows the prevalence of pedestrian collision along non access controlled roadway. These collisions pose a threat to both the homeless and motorists. Another threat of collision for the homeless along state right of ways is vehicles that runoff the road. In this case, a vehicle that loses control can exit the roadway and run through a camp causing severe injuries or death (McCormick 2020). Another potential threat related to the direct interaction with the homeless is potential confrontation when people enter or are near camps. As found in the blitz count and survey, a large proportion of homeless individuals are dealing with either a mental health disorder, drug or alcohol abuse, or both. The homeless can be very defensive of their camps, which can lead to physical altercations between the camps inhabitants and anyone near the camp. While these occurrences are rare, they have happened in the past and should not be overlooked (McCormick 2020).

Apart from the hazards that come with interactions with the homeless individuals themselves, the camps themselves also come with several safety issues that need to be addressed. One general issue with homeless camps is the size: as camps grow larger, so does their risk factor. Larger camps experience an exponential growth of both population and risk, so addressing the camps in a timely manner is critical to maintaining the safety of DOT employees (Cowan 2020). Some of these issues revolve around the waste that is left behind in these camps. This waste can include things like garbage, hazardous waste, human excrement, and used needles or other drug paraphernalia (McCormick 2020)(Cowan 2020). All of these types of waste can be extremely harmful to anyone in the vicinity of these camps, causing disease or similar health issues. Another safety hazard involved with these camps is that often times these camps are booby trapped by the inhabitants in an attempt to keep people out of their camp, both other homeless as well as workers and other people in close proximity to the camp. One commonly used trap is placing used needles in the ground or attaching them to trees or shrubs that have been positioned to stab anyone trying to enter the camp. These traps pose a serious threat to safety because unlike the other types of waste and detritus, these are specifically designed to harm other human beings which makes their danger that much greater. Another threat that these camps pose relates to fire. These camps pose serious fire hazards for several reasons. Open flames for warmth and cooking are a regular occurrence. Combined with close proximity to flammable materials, this causes homeless camps

to be significant fire threats which can cause issues both for the camp residents as well as any structure in close proximity to the camp (McCormick 2020)(Cowan 2020).

Homeless camps can also hold risks based on their location. Often times, the sides of state highways have steep and slippery slopes adjoining the roadway (McCormick 2020). This can create a hazard for anyone attempting to access the camps, both homeless and others. Slipping and falling on these slopes can lead to both injury and more direct interaction with the types of debris and waste mentioned above. Another location where these camps can be problematic is when they are near or built into infrastructure. Homeless activity can cause extra damage to infrastructure when that infrastructure is used as part of a camp. A common example of this is when homeless live under or next to bridges (McCormick 2020). This is one example where homeless can have an adverse impact on infrastructure, but there are many more examples with different pieces of infrastructure where this occurs such as culverts, ventilation buildings, sewers, and many more (McCormick 2020). The damage that can be caused by homeless people living in these areas can be quite costly to the DOT and can require extensive work to repair. Another way that the homeless population can affect state right of way is in the abandonment of vehicles along the road. This does cause some safety issues for motorists, but more importantly it can be costly and a nuisance to remove (McCormick 2020)(Cowan 2020).

2.3 Effect of Encampments for Different Groups

There can be two specific subpopulations of the homeless population that can be defined that are of interest to state DOT agencies that were alluded to above. One is those individuals living in state right of way along access-controlled highways, another being those who live on other state highways. Each of these subpopulations have different characteristics with how they interact with the DOT and DOT property, so there should be different strategies in addressing each subpopulation to obtain the most positive outcome for the homeless and the DOT. Both of these subpopulations would fall into the unsheltered category for homeless and would most likely be categorized as living in a tent or unsanctioned camp.

Of these two groups, currently the subpopulation that does not live on access controlled right of way poses less of an issue to state DOTs than those that do live on access controlled right of way. While this population is still important to address, there are many reasons why state DOTs can have less impact on this subpopulation. The primary reason homeless living on non-access controlled right of way are of less concern to WSDOT and other state DOTs is because most often these populations do not actually fall under state DOT jurisdiction. As mentioned above, the vast majority of homeless live in urban areas, and it is WSDOT policy for state highways inside city limits to be maintained by the city even though the property is WSDOT's (McCormick 2020). This includes the vast majority of non-access controlled right of way in urban areas. This means that all of the hazards that are involved with people and employees working in and around homeless camps are not part of WSDOT's jurisdiction. An example of this kind of arrangement is State Route 99 in Seattle. This road, while owned by WSDOT, is operated and maintained by the City of Seattle Department of Transportation. This makes the interaction with homeless the responsibility of the city and not WSDOT's. The only issue related to homeless WSDOT can have a direct impact on in these kinds of roadways is safety, specifically pedestrian safety. In this case,

this impact is created with overarching planning documents that are used to guide long term changes to these roadways. The most pertinent of these types of plans are the safety plans WSDOT creates for these roadways. As mentioned above, these roadways are where the vast majority of pedestrian collisions occur on state right of way, and these collisions disproportionately affect the homeless. This problem, while important, is not something that WSDOT needs to address directly to deal with homelessness because this aspect of pedestrian safety is already covered in these safety plan documents that originate in other groups in the DOTs not specifically related to homelessness.

Unlike homeless individuals on non-access controlled right of ways, homeless living on access-controlled freeways pose much more of an issue to state DOT agencies and WSDOT. These adverse effects these individuals can have can be divided into three broad categories related to safety: the safety of motorists, the safety of the homeless individuals themselves, and the safety of DOT staff, equipment, and property.

2.3.1 Effect on Motorists

Of the above-mentioned groups, motorists are the least adversely affected. Their exposure really only happens in two ways. The first way motorists interact with homeless on access controlled right of way is when the homeless are pedestrians using the freeway to get from one place to another. While this does pose a threat to motorists, it is not very significant because it is extremely rare for homeless individuals to actually enter live traffic lanes. Most often, they stay on the shoulder. This idea is reflected in the significantly lower traffic collisions on access controlled right of way compared to non-access controlled right of way. The more significant risk to motorists posed by homeless camps is exposure to the waste and debris on the roadside. If a vehicle is, for whatever reason, unable to continue moving and needs to stop in the middle of the roadway, those vehicles will move to the shoulder if possible. On the shoulder, the people in the vehicle may need to get out to inspect their vehicle at which point they could be exposed to debris and waste on the side of the roadway. It is important to acknowledge these risks exist for motorists, but of these three groups, they are by far the least at risk. Additionally, any treatment taken to reduce the risk of the other groups will at the same time reduce the risk for motorists as well. Therefore, moving forward we will only consider the risks and treatment for homeless individuals and DOT employees and property assuming that any treatment made will automatically reduce the risks to motorists.

2.3.2 Effect on Homeless Population

The homeless population living on access controlled right of way have their own unique safety hazards beyond the negative aspects of being homeless that all homeless people experience mentioned above. One major difference these homeless face that differs than the entire homeless population is their exposure to noise and pollution, as being close to freeways has been proven to have several adverse health effects. In a literature review that covered 29 scientific papers, 25 found that the living conditions similar for those living in traditional housing experienced some form of negative health effect (Boothe, 2008). These health effects will only compound for the homeless population living near state right of way who are both more exposed to these roadways and already have higher risk of health issues associated with being homeless. Another risk they

face is with potential run off the road vehicles. If a vehicle were to run off the road into a homeless camp, it could cause many severe injuries or deaths (McCormick 2020). Homeless are also at risk with cleaning equipment being operated on the roadway. There have been instances in the past where a homeless person has concealed themselves in blankets or other items to get shelter from the elements which has been mistaken by drivers of cleaning equipment for debris. In these cases, the homeless person sleeping in these items was run over and killed by the cleaning equipment (McCormick 2020). Another risk faced by the homeless is the location of their camps. As mentioned above, often times camps are located in areas that are purposefully difficult to get to discourage others from accessing the camps. This can cause great risk for the individuals living in those camps because they have to traverse this terrain to access the camp, risking injury in doing so.

2.3.3 Effect on DOTs

The DOT is the last major group that has risks associated with homeless encampments along state right of way. State DOTs have a broader risk than the other groups because they are responsible not only for human safety, but also the safety and maintenance of equipment, infrastructure, and assets. As such, the risk posed to DOTs can broadly be split into three categories: employee safety, equipment safety, and physical property safety.

Of these three categories, employee safety is the most critical. In DOT homeless camp interactions, DOT employees are only utilized in the cleanup of homeless encampments and not the interaction with the homeless individuals in the camps. This mitigates the threat of physical altercations with the camp residents. The biggest threat then comes with exposure to the hazardous waste in the camps, traps set up in the camps by the camp's residents, and any potential difficult terrain around these camps that compounds the issues faced by DOT employees. All of these safety hazards can have a large negative health impact on a DOT employee in close proximity to the homeless camp, but this impact can also be felt by almost every maintenance employee, even those who do not work in the field. This can include employees such as equipment drivers, mechanics, and many others. Even though these people do not directly interact with the camp, they can all still be exposed to the hazards generated by a camp (McCormick 2020). Take, for example, a street sweeping truck. If this truck picks up some hazardous debris and waste from a homeless encampment, every person who needs to work with that machine are now potentially exposed. The mechanics and employees in charge of keeping the machine running and clean are exposed because they have to assume that there is hazardous waste trapped in the mechanisms and collection bins. The drivers of those machines are also affected. They must be more alert to ensure that an incident doesn't happen like the one described above where a street cleaner ran over a concealed homeless individual. If that scenario were to be repeated, it would also cause significant emotional trauma to the individual driving the vehicle, another potential harm. This is one example where many DOT employees can be exposed to the hazards of homeless encampment that do not actually interact with the camps directly. This example also shows the threat this poses to DOT equipment. Cleaning up and interacting with these hazardous wastes can cause malfunctions in the vehicles and equipment that otherwise might not have occurred. These malfunctions can be costly to repair and can leave critical machinery out of service for periods of time.

Apart from the risks to employees and equipment, there is significant risk for infrastructure, hardware, and assets owned by the DOT. As mentioned above, homeless individuals can cause damage to DOT structures and assets. Probably the most common type of structure that is used as shelter is bridges and culverts (McCormick 2020). These types of structures provide natural shelter from the elements, and thus are highly sought after by homeless individuals trying to make a camp. Sometimes, these individuals living under the bridge abutments are directly next to roadways. Homeless camps that use bridges for shelter can cause damage to those structures. One extreme case of this was when a group of homeless excavated a chamber underneath a bridge abutment to create a larger shelter than just their tent that had to be filled in once it was removed (McCormick 2020). While this is on the far extreme of the spectrum for individuals living under bridges, it highlights some of the damages that can occur. Another common form of damage is when people try to affix things to the structure of the bridge, like holding up tents for example. This same phenomenon occurs with other bridge like structures. This includes assets like culverts and drainage pipes that go underneath the highways. Another area where homeless commonly set up camps that affects DOT structures is in air vents and other auxiliary buildings (McCormick 2020). These vents usually take the form of a small structure about six feet high that the homeless use as shelter. These again can suffer damage from habitation. Both of these sites are often locations for successive camps as well due to the natural shelter they provide and the fact that DOTs cannot simply remove them. Similarly, electrical cabinets and similar structure are also sometimes used for shelter. This poses the same problems as other structures like the air vent structures. This type of structure however also has another important problem related to vandalism. It is a fairly common occurrence for people to break into these cabinets and rip out the wiring and controls housed there to sell for scrap. This causes a large amount of monetary damage and hassle for the maintenance staff who have to fix it. While most of the time homeless people are not to blame for these types of vandalisms, they often occur near homeless encampments because of the ease of access afforded by the camps (McCormick 2020). The last major type of asset that homeless people can cause damage to is the landscaping around the roads. Their presence can cause significant damage to foliage in the vicinity of the camps, which has high costs to replace or fix. Homeless encampments can also damage restored areas that could negatively impact the overall environment. The most critical of these for WSDOT are wetland areas, which are protected by the state. WSOT has invested millions of dollars in restoring wetlands on state right of way, but all of this work could be undone by a homeless camp using one of those areas (McCormick 2020). Almost all of DOT assets in the field face some level of risk from homeless encampments, and it is critical to understand how each type of asset and structure can be affected if there is a homeless encampment in proximity.

All of these safety issues faced by WSDOT, as well as other DOTs, show the importance of trying to reduce the impact of homeless on state right of way. This is critical issue faced by state DOTs that is part of a society wide problem. Currently there can be over 100 encampments found on WSDOT right of way at any time, with a new camp forming approximately daily. This value does however fluctuate up and down unpredictably throughout the year (Inventory Homeless Encampment 2020). While state DOTs are by no means the only affected party, it is important that all groups involved work together to mitigate this broad issue. From a DOT perspective, their

top priority is ensuring the safety of their employees and assets. This is a good starting point because ensuring the safety of employees and assets can also help to address the overall issue of homelessness. Additionally, this type of interaction poses a significant cost to state DOTs, so being able to overall reduce the impact of homelessness would be greatly beneficial to state DOTs. It is important as well to ensure that the needs of the homeless themselves are also being met, which can be done simultaneously with decreasing the risk for state DOTs. Additionally, DOTs have to be cognizant of the public perception of their interaction with the homeless. If the public perceives that the DOTs are treating the homeless population inequitably, there could be severe public backlash towards the DOTs that would add an extra layer of complexity to an already complicated issue. Homelessness is a recurring issue for maintenance staff and is one that they have to contend with on a daily basis (McCormick 2020)(Cowan 2020). This level of exposure highlights the importance for DOTs to ensure they are addressing this issue in a safe, efficient, and equitable manner to achieve the best outcome for all parties.

Chapter 3: Analysis of Current Practices of State DOTs Across America

3.1 Multi-Agency Approach

To begin an analysis of the current practices in which DOTs clear homeless encampments, we looked at other states to assess their practices and extrapolate the positive and negative aspects of their policies and best practices. To achieve this goal, WSDOT conducted a survey that contacted all other states through their American Association of State highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Research Advisory Committee staff to gather information on their policies and current practices related to homelessness in state right of way. This survey included 18 states, including Washington, that responded to this survey to report their practices. This was a qualitative survey that asked for states to define the safety hazards caused by homeless encampments along their state right of way cause and what common practices or written policy the states use to mitigate these concerns. In all of the responses, each state can be divided into one of two broad categories; either not having any issue with homelessness or using what we define as the ‘multi-agency approach’ when interacting with homeless encampments.

Currently, the multi-agency approach is used to facilitate one kind of interaction with homeless encampments. These interactions of state DOTs and homeless encampments is synonymous to state DOTs removing homeless encampments. Removal is practically the only action state DOTs do that directly interacts with homeless encampments. The only other activity state DOTs participate in that is driven by homeless encampments is preventative maintenance of their infrastructure and assets, though this does not involve interaction with any camp as it is a preemptive measure. Occasionally, other agencies will interact with homeless encampments on state right of way that is not coupled to a removal effort; however, this is rare and usually is conducted by agencies outside the DOT. Otherwise, state DOTs use the multi-agency approach as a way to safely and equitably remove homeless from state right of way.

The multi-agency approach is a fitting definition for what most states use to address homeless encampments. This means is that state DOTs only play a partial role in addressing homelessness even though the camps exist on the DOT’s property. Instead, state DOTs typically partner with several different agencies who specialize in serving the homeless in ways the DOT cannot. The specific agencies vary from state to state, and even from region to region within each state, but there are some commonalities that all of these partnerships share. In general, each of these partnerships involves three general agency types, state DOTs included. Apart from the DOTs there is almost always a human outreach agency involved and a law enforcement agency involved. Each of these agencies provides an expertise that the DOT does not hold that creates both a safer and more equitable environment for the interacting workers and the homeless themselves.

These separate expertise’s are the main defining point of the multi-agency approach. Each agency’s expertise and goals beyond maintaining the safety and equitable treatment for all involved dictates their role during a homeless camp removal. The human outreach or social service agency’s expertise revolves around interacting with vulnerable individuals, which certainly

includes homeless populations. This is something that both law enforcement agencies and state DOTs are inadequately equipped to do. Their agency goal is to help connect these vulnerable populations to resources to try to help these individuals out of the situation they find themselves in. Law enforcement's specialty is their ability to use the law to maintain public safety. A law enforcement officer's ability to place people under arrest is something that both the state DOTs and human services agencies do not possess. Their goal is to use this ability to maintain the safety of the public in general, but in this case that is subset to the groups interacting with the camps and the camp populations themselves. Finally, the DOT's expertise is with dealing with the physical infrastructure present. They are the only agency equipped to address any infrastructure or assets in proximity to the camp. This includes structures, landscape, fences, and operations equipment, to name a few. Their goal is the maintenance safety of this infrastructure.

Since most states use a similar overarching approach to addressing homelessness in their right of way, there is a fairly common basic procedure for addressing homeless encampments. First, the homeless encampments are identified and it is decided which encampments will be a priority to remove. This step is can either be done exclusively by the DOT, or it can be done with support from local jurisdictions who can lend input into the most pressing camps to attend to. The DOT is most concerned with the safety of the roadway and roadway infrastructure. Local input can come in many different forms. The most common is social services which target the well-being of the camp populations and assess which camps have the most vulnerable individuals. Law enforcement can also add input about the safety of the camps to the general public. Another group that is often consulted is the local fire department which assesses the potential for fires in these camps. These are a few examples of local input a DOT can take, but this is not an exhaustive list. Each DOT can take insight form any local agency that has expertise related to homeless camps in the area, which can vary across and within states. However, the DOTs usually make the final decision because they are the agency whose assets have the potential to be damaged and because they are tasked with maintaining the safety of the roadways to which these camps are in close proximity. The most common form of prioritization in DOTs is a complaint-based system where DOTs react to different camps based upon the complaints they get both form the general public and any local jurisdiction the camp may be in. Once this is done, outreach with the camps begins. This can include several different activities, from posting flyers and notices to conducting walkthroughs with social and case workers to interact directly with the camp community. This step is usually completed by a combination of law enforcement and the particular social services agency is used in the region in question. The social service agency is involved because their entire goal is trying to build connections with the individuals in the homeless community to provide critical resources to them, and law enforcement is involved to mitigate the threat of physical confrontation with the camp residents if some of them turn out to be belligerent. Once the outreach is completed, a final sweep is conducted of the camp just before it is removed to ensure that there are no more people there as the camp is cleared. This is again done by law enforcement and the social services agency because it deals with direct human interaction using the same logic as above. There are other forces that mandate this step. In the Federal Supreme Court case *Martin v. Boise*, it was found that displacing homeless from camps without temporarily rehousing them was illegal because it was considered cruel and unusual punishment. In this case a large part of the sweep is

to ensure that the homeless in the camps have access to this housing in accordance with this finding (Selby 2019). Finally, the camp is removed from the right of way. This is done by the DOT, however there are sometimes law enforcement officers present to ensure that the DOT workers are safe in case a camp resident returns after the sweep. This falls into the DOT domain because they understand the infrastructure's requirements and as property owners are interested in the removal of the camps. After this, any necessary repairs are conducted in the camp's proximity as well as potentially modifying the environment to make the location less desirable for camps in the future. This is not strictly part of the removal procedure but is a common part of interactions with homeless encampments that should not be overlooked. This is again done by the DOT because they are familiar with the infrastructure and as owners are interested in the maintenance of all of their assets.

Aside from the active clearing of camps, most DOTs also participate in preventative maintenance that discourages camps from forming or reforming in areas that currently do not have camps in them. This type of activity can take many forms. The most common form is the modification of the landscape to discourage people from camping. This includes mowing back grass and shrubs, cutting the limbs off of the bottom of trees, and strategically planting vegetation to not allow people to erect tents. This mostly works to discourage camping by eliminating the natural cover this foliage provides. In general, people in homeless camps do not like to be in the line of sight of the roadway, which coupled with the reduction in shelter from the elements make the places along the roadway much less desirable for long term camping. These measures are fairly effective in ensuring that new camps do not form and removed camps do not return. Additionally, DOTs can also create other deterrents to homeless camps. This can include fences, walls, or any other structure to keep people away from the roadway and to make the right of way less desirable to live. This kind of preventative maintenance can be part of or independent from a removal effort. Usually if it is part of a removal effort, it will immediately occur once all the waste from the camp has been removed and will target aspects of the landscape that made this specific camp location desirable in the first place. If this maintenance is not part of a clearing effort, it is usually just more general and simple maintenance such as mowing and light foliage removal that makes all of the areas along a roadway less desirable.

The specific agencies that help the DOT in these multi-agency efforts can vary drastically from location to location. This is because often times the agencies that DOTs work with are local in nature. For law enforcement, it is often the local or county police that are present during a removal. This is also true of the social services agencies that are present; most of the time they are from the city the camp is in. When the camp is not in an incorporated city, county services are usually used. There are also many other agencies that a DOT can partner with, including but not limited to the local fire department, local district or county attorneys, homeless advocacy groups, and local shelters or other services. This local focus is in contrast to the standard way DOT maintenance crews operate. Maintenance areas are often much larger than these other areas, sometimes spanning multiple counties and 50 or more incorporated cities and towns. This complicates how DOT crews operate with different jurisdictions clearing different camps. Since the DOT crews usually take a mostly secondary role in this whole process, only coming in to clear the camp once the residents have been removed, most of the regulations are dictated by the policies of the local

jurisdiction. This can make the removal process complicated for the DOT employees because the policies and goals for each removal can vary from city to city for them, whereas the social services and local law enforcement don't deal with that issue as they only work within their jurisdiction.

Those involved with homeless encampments in state DOTs can generally be split into two categories. This first group includes executives in the organization. Some executives are in charge of setting the overall strategy for addressing the homeless encampments in the state's right of way and for making general guiding decisions about these encampments. This group is most active in the prioritization of choosing which criterion should be used for judging if and when a camp should be removed. The other main group is the maintenance employees who are in contact with the camps themselves. These are mostly those who are conducting the actual removal process who work for a DOT. These employees are mostly active in the removal and preventative maintenance steps of the multi-agency approach, and thus have very different needs and goals than those in the other group. Each of these groups plays a different role in addressing homelessness, and it is important for each group to understand each other for any encampment removals to have the most positive outcome for both the DOT and the camp's residents.

While this is a common blueprint for how most DOTs address homeless camps along their right of way, the actual practices employed by each specific DOT can vary drastically. In each case, they follow the general guidelines above, but how each individual step is completed can differ widely from state to state and region to region. The first place where this procedure can differ from regionally is in how each state prioritizes which camp to address and when. DOTs can make this decision based on a myriad of different information sources, including public complaints, the maintenance needs of surrounding infrastructure, safety of motorists, and many others. By having different criterion for choosing homeless camps to clear, different agencies might clear different types of homeless camps more. For example, one DOT might prioritize clearing camps near structures to ensure constant access for maintenance staff to these structures while another DOT might prioritize clearing camps near ledges or other dangerous topography. In each of these cases, each DOT when faced with a similar spread of camps might remove completely different sets of camps. It is critical for DOTs to have a clear priority of camps they remove that takes into account the equity of the residents of the camps to ensure that the camps are not unduly harming certain groups or the homeless population as a whole.

Additionally, the practices related to the actual removal can vary drastically from DOT to DOT, and even within a DOT in different regions. Each state has different policies, training, and common practices in place that relate to safely removing a homeless camp. Every separate maintenance group that is tasked with some form of homeless removal will do things differently, even if they operate under the same policies as other groups. This is mostly due to different group dynamics that form when individuals work on a team together for long periods of time. Understanding these differences in policy as well as the impacts of applying policy to multiple groups who operate differently from each other is critical to the success of any policy or common practice training that a DOT will conduct.

3.2 Examples of Practices in Different States

Now we will delve into some specific examples of the practices of different state DOTs in applying the multi-agency approach. It is fairly rare for states to not have an issue with homeless encampments at all on their roadway. Only two states from the 17 surveyed reported not having any issue with homeless camps in their right of way. These states in question are New Jersey and Iowa (Freeman 2019). New Jersey, along with New York which didn't respond to the survey, has some of the most robust homeless sheltering policies in the country, reducing the need for homeless to find alternate place to camp such as state right of way. For Iowa, their survey response is unclear about why they do not have a reported issue with homelessness in state right of way.

Apart from those states, only a few others in the survey reported not having DOT workers interact with the camps at all. These states in question are Montana and Kentucky. In these cases, these state DOT contacts the local law enforcement agencies which take full responsibility for the removal. Because these agencies do not take part in any of the removals, they do not have any written policies regarding the actions in and around homeless camps (Freeman 2019). This is a distinct variation on the common multi-agency approach. In this case, the final step of the process, the removal, is not handled by DOT employees. Instead, it is handled by the other agencies, but usually local law enforcement. While this is a major difference in how the multi-agency approach is usually conducted, it still should be considered as a multi-agency effort because the DOT is still working with the local agencies to select and prioritize which camps need to be addressed. This difference in method does have advantages over the baseline approach. Primarily, this method eliminates the risk for DOT workers cleaning the camps. As mentioned above, the biggest risks faced by the DOT employees is when they have to actively participate in clearing the camps because they are exposed to all of the hazardous waste that a camp might contain. If the DOT employees do not need to clean out the camp, then they are not exposed to that waste anymore. Additionally, if it is feasible, it means that only groups that have the ability to house and bring resources to the homeless are working in the camp's proximity, which could have a positive effect for the homeless population. The issue with this alternative method for clearing homeless encampments is that often time local jurisdictions do not have an ability to clean up the camps on their own. Either they lack the proper equipment needed, or the camps are in such proximity to the roadway that DOT workers are required to be on the scene. This means that for most states, while it would drastically reduce the risk for DOT employees, it is infeasible to do because the local agencies can not physically complete all of the work necessary to properly clear the camps. Additionally, if these other law enforcement agencies do have the resources available, this may not be the most equitable solution because the DOT will have less power to ensure that all of the residents of the camp are treated fairly in the removal process.

There are some states as well that do not have a major problem with homeless encampments, but unlike Kentucky and Montana do participate in removal procedures. These states in question are Vermont and Maine. Both of these states use the multi-agency approach when removing homeless encampments from their right of way, but neither of them has a specific policy to address homeless encampment in their right of way. Instead they rely upon a set of basic guidelines and best practices to keep their employees safe as well as the other supporting agencies employees. The

Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) regularly works with the state's Department of Public Service (DPS) to address homeless encampments in their right of way. In these cases, the DPS takes the lead with the outreach with help from the local law enforcement agencies and VTrans will follow up with removal efforts once the homeless population has been moved from the camp (Freeman 2019). The Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT) also participates regularly in homeless removal efforts on their state highways. They again use the general form of the multi-agency approach in attempting to address the homeless encampment on their right of way. Both of these states have found it an effective way to remove the encampments.

Arkansas DOT (ArDOT) also rarely interacts with homeless encampments. Unlike the DOTs of Kansas and Montana, they do on occasion have to clear homeless encampments from the roadway. For this they essentially use the standard multi-agency approach without much variation, utilizing the resources of the Arkansas state patrol, local law enforcement agencies, and even railroad police. These cases are rare however so ArDOT does not have a formal policy with regard to the clearing of homeless encampments. In the survey, they did highlight many of the preventative maintenance measures that they take to mitigate the possibility of homeless camps forming on their state right of way. Most notably there are regular mowing operations to remove underbrush to make the right of way less desirable for homeless encampments to form. There were three maintenance areas that responded to the survey. In each case, each district had slightly different practices for preventative maintenance. In one of the districts, maintenance staff regularly clear several interchanges along highways I-430, I-30, and I-40. They have found that this is an effective measure for discouraging homeless camps from forming as often times when they take these actions, homeless camps do not return to these areas due to the line of sight to the roadway. In this district, they mow these interchanges once every year to ensure that substantial undergrowth does not have a chance to return, because according to the survey response the undergrowth could grow to the point where it would be desirable for homeless encampments again in only a few years. This does not eliminate all locations where homeless camps can occur. It is also noted that this does not deter all of the homeless encampments that form on state right of way, where it is still common for homeless encampments to form under bridges. In this case there is not an easy preventative maintenance measure to deter these camps from forming because the desirable feature is the bridge itself which cannot be removed or made inaccessible (Freeman 2019). Other maintenance districts in ArDOT have other methods for containing the underbrush growth. In many cases ArDOT has attempted to partner with local cities to maintain the underbrush. In this state, often times it is local cities that request underbrush to be cleared along state highways to reduce the likelihood that homeless camps will form on the roadways. ArDOT policy in some situations is that after ArDOT employees clear an area of underbrush it is the responsibility of the local government to maintain that clearing, in this case the cities. This is a matter of both cost and practicality for ArDOT; it is too costly for them to clear and maintain all of the areas where there could be a homeless encampment. In some cases, this policy works well because it allows cities to deter homeless camps from forming and it reduces the cost for ArDOT. In other cases it is less effective. Sometimes the cities do not agree to maintain and mow these areas after they are cleared of underbrush. In these cases, ArDOT does not attempt to clear these areas because it would be too costly and time consuming to maintain all of them, and thus those areas remain more desirable

for homeless camps (Freeman 2019). Even though the strategy of conducting preventative maintenance is not foolproof, it is an effective way to reduce the burden of homeless camp removal from maintenance employees. By reducing the area in which homeless camps are likely to form, the number of interactions there are with DOT employees decreases therefore reducing the risk factors that all DOT employees are exposed to. There are however some equity concerns with conducting preventative maintenance in this way. This does have the effect of further stigmatizing camping by displacing campers. Eliminating the possibility of camping in this way does not acknowledge that sometimes camping is the best alternative at a given point in time for an individual, and as such it should not as a course of action be eliminated. In this case, however there are obvious safety concerns regarding camping along the roadway. In cases where there are these competing concerns, the tradeoff between the needs of the campers and the safety considerations needs to be made such that the greatest net positive outcome is found.

One state's practices that highlight the multi-agency approach well with some variations is Massachusetts. In this state, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MASSDOT) does regularly address homeless encampments in the roadway. In this case, the initial locating of homeless camps is done through gathering complaints. Once a complaint is received by MASSDOT, it is distributed to the applicable maintenance region so that they can address the issue. At this point, before any work is actually done around the camp, MASSDOT sends employees to each camp to take pictures and assess the state of the camp and determine how pressing it is to address each camp. This can be considered part of their prioritization process. In this case, law enforcement is also involved in this step because MASSDOT requires that all employees that enter a homeless encampment are accompanied by a law enforcement officer to ensure their safety. Even though law enforcement is involved in this step, they do not appear to have any input into actually deciding which camps to prioritize. After this step and once it has been decided that a camp will be cleared, the residents of the camp are told when this will occur, so they have time to leave and bring any belongings with them. In this case this step is usually done by law enforcement officers. On the day of the removal, the sweep is conducted by both law enforcement officers and social agency workers to both maintain the safety of all of the workers and to offer resources to any of the individuals that are still in the camps. Then, the camp will be removed from the right of way by MASSDOT funded employees. In MASSDOT's case, they usually use contractors from the hazmat/environment department to conduct the removal. Finally, once the removal is completed, they will complete any preventative maintenance for which funding has been approved to try to make the area less desirable in the future (Freeman 2019). This is an excellent example of how the general multi-agency approach can be modified to suit the need of a particular DOT. In this case, there are two notable features of this process that distinguish MASSDOT's procedures from the standard multi-agency approach. Firstly, their prioritization method of inspecting the camps is an alternative that shows one potential way to assess the priority of a camp. This method could in particular be effective at assessing the needs of the residents of the camp because the information gathering process looks directly at the condition of the camp and can take in information about the living conditions of the camp residents. The other main difference is that most of the outreach with the social services agency does not occur in the days or weeks before the removal effort but during the sweep the day of the removal effort. This

variation holds a tradeoff with following the standard procedure. In this case, since the residents of the camp are being directly displaced, they may be more likely to accept resources such as temporary shelter. However, if the camp residents will not be willing to use these kinds of resources, they might lose out on being able to use resources that help them prepare for the camp to be cleared by building a rapport with social workers who visit the camp over time. In this case with MASSDOT, even though they have this general guideline, there is no formal policy dictating a procedure for clearing homeless encampment along state right of way. Instead they rely on this common practice to guide in the safe and equitable removal of the camps. This is a fairly common theme in regard to state DOT responses to homeless camps.

Another state that utilizes the multi-agency approach is Utah. The Utah DOT (UDOT) regularly removes homeless encampments from their right of way, but like MASSDOT, UDOT does not have a formal policy for addressing homeless encampments in their right of way. Instead, they rely on a set of guidelines and best practices when working with other agencies to address these camps and keep their employees safe. As with most areas, homeless encampments are a growing concern for UDOT, so they have had to increase their removal efforts to attempt to mitigate this issue on state right of way. In this case, they work closely with both local health departments and law enforcement agencies to address this issue. Once the camps are identified and prioritized, they begin by posting signs warning the camp residents of the pending removal in the future as well as flyers that have resources that the residents could utilize if desired. During this time, UDOT staff, law enforcement officers, and county or state health department staff coordinate together to create a plan to address the camp and create a general course of action. The vast majority of the time these plans follow the rest of the general multi-agency plan, but they are helpful for identifying unique situations for each camp that can either be used to enhance the success of a removal process or need to be mitigated to reduce the risk of conducting a removal. The outreach is spearheaded by the county or state health departments, occurring in the days before the posted removal time. During this time the health workers, accompanied by law enforcement officers for safety, distribute information about resources that the camp populations can utilize as well as bags with helpful hygiene and other health supplies to the homeless. On the day of the removal, all three agencies are present: UDOT staff, county or state health officials, and law enforcement officers. In this case, the county and state health officials take the lead in both the removal of people and the clearing of the hazardous waste in the camps. The law enforcement officers are there and only step in if needed to maintain the safety of the people working in the camp. The UDOT workers also only take a secondary role, usually only operating heavy equipment the county health workers are not qualified to operate. In this survey response, there was no mention of any preventative maintenance that took place after the camps were cleared. Additionally, UDOT also funded Hepatitis A shots for all people who participated in the removals to mitigate the risk of contracting that disease (Freeman 2019). This is another example of how the multi-agency approach is implemented in a practical situation. In this case there are two aspects that stand out from the basic procedure. First, during the outreach phase of the removal, the health workers supply basic hygienical supplies to the homeless which, according to this survey, is a unique gesture that can have a major positive impact on the lives of the camp residents. The other major difference from the baseline procedure in this example is the reduced role of the UDOT staff take in the removal

process. In this case, they are only required to operate the heavy machinery during the removals. This eliminates the vast majority of the direct contact with the hazardous waste in these camps for the DOT employees, drastically reducing the risk they face.

A further state that employs the multi-agency policy is South Carolina. The South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) conducts regular operations to remove homeless encampments from vulnerable positions. In this example of the multi-agency approach, SCDOT also does not have a set of policies guiding removal efforts of homeless encampments; instead they rely on best practices and partnering with local agencies to ensure safe and equitable removal practices. In this case, they partner with local law enforcement, city and state Departments of Health, Fire Marshalls, and Environmental Control Agencies to address the camps. In this case, the Fire Marshall is used to assess the camp's risk with fire in the prioritization stage. The Departments of Health and the law enforcement agencies spearhead the outreach with the camps. Finally, SCDOT staff and the environmental control agencies are responsible for the removal of the camps, with law enforcement present to ensure those workers safety. One specific action that the state of South Carolina did take is to amend their state law regarding camping on state right of way. In Section 3 of Act No. 224 of the state legislature, they specified that it was unlawful to camp in state right of way for more than 48-hours and it is unlawful to camp, cook, or create any fire while in a right of way open to vehicular traffic. (Freeman 2019). This example follows the basic procedure of the multi-agency approach very closely, with the only variation coming in the different agencies that are applicable in the context of the state of South Carolina. This example also show how state legislatures can help their DOTs by creating concrete definitions of what constitutes camping in the state right of way.

In the survey responses, the Nevada Department of Transportation (NDOT) highlighted some unique aspects of their homeless encampment removal. They also follow the general multi-agency approach, often partnering with the Nevada Highway Patrol to safely remove any camps that form along their right of way. As with many other states they don't have a guiding policy on homeless camp removal, instead relying on the other agencies expertise and best practices. The only unique difference in NDOT's process for removing homeless camps is in how they prioritize their camps. In this case, Nevada prioritizes clearing camps that are more likely to grow quickly than other camps (Freeman 2019). This is because they recognize that homeless encampments can experience exponential growth in both size and hazard level. This is a unique way to prioritize different camps that does not just rely on a complaint-based assessment method.

Alaska is another state which has its own unique way of addressing homeless encampments on state highways. The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) is the agency tasked with clearing homeless form the state roadways. Alaska is a unique case in general among America because it is such a large state and because of its extremely harsh climate, especially in the north. Because of the size of the state they rely on a complaint-based prioritization method for addressing homeless encampments on their right of way. Once a camp is found, they partner with the local municipality or city to address the homeless encampment using the general multi-agency approach. In the case of this state, they often have success with educating the homeless camp population on the resources available, causing the camp to disperse naturally.

When this does not happen however the camp is cleared following a similar procedure to the other states listed here. Additionally, they do complete several forms of preventative maintenance, including tree limbing, clearing brush, and placing boulders to not allow tents to be erected. As with many of the other state listed here, the DOT&PF does not have a guiding policy regarding homeless camp removal, but as mentioned above, there are many unique factors at play in Alaska due to the state's size, climate and sparse population that affect their common guidelines and best practices. In the north, they must pay extra attention to wooded areas as the homeless prefer these areas due to the shelter form the extreme cold. In other regions as well the DOT&PF will wait to clear the camp until there is space available to rehouse all of the residents that were displaced due to the harsh climate (Freeman 2019). These are some of the unique factors at play in Alaska that may not be applicable to the rest of the country.

One of the most important themes that can be drawn from the previous examples of state's practices in removing homeless encampments from their right of way is that in most cases there are no official policies to guide these activities. There are however states that do have guiding policies that can be examined to understand how this might affect the multi-agency approach and its effectiveness. One such example is in the state of Indiana and the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT). Currently, INDOT is in the process of developing a new set of policies to use in guiding homeless camp removal from a system that relied on best practices as in the examples given above. This is a unique case where we can observe how one state made this transition so that it can be analyzed to see what aspects of the transition worked and which did not. In all likelihood, the actual practices that occur with regard to homeless camp removal will not be drastically different than the practices used before; INDOT used before and will still use a form of the multi-agency approach. As with the examples before, they used a multi-agency approach that relied on their best practices and the expertise of their partner agencies. Currently in the development of their policy, Indiana have highlighted seven stated goals for their policy development that go beyond the best practices they already have in place (Freeman 2019). Each of these goals is as follows:

1. INDOT is not responsible for the removal of individuals in state right of way. This task will fall to the partner law enforcement agency supporting the camp removal.
2. Specific camp types and locations will require a 30 day notice to vacate the proximity of the camps.
3. Certain areas may be eligible to have a no trespassing sign placed to deter people from accessing the state right of way.
4. No one is to handle or touch needles, drugs, burners, weapons, or personal waste. If any of these are found, the camp removal will be considered an active drug investigation where 911 shall be called that will investigate and clean up the hazardous material.
5. The Indiana State Police will be the contact for reporting and removing individuals from camps.
6. INDOT will not work to remove homeless encampments until all individuals are removed from said camp
7. Finally, INDOT will not engage with any individuals.
(Freeman 2019).

This is a robust set of goals for creating a policy around. These goals compliment the actual practices that INDONT employees can follow when removing homeless encampments. This highlights an important step that needs to be taken to move toward a single governing policy for homeless camp removal. INDOT can serve as a valuable example for other states to follow in creating their own safe and equitable policy.

There are also some states that have already created policies and done research into the most effective and equitable way to remove homeless from state right of way. Two states that have policies that responded to the survey are Oregon and California. Both of these states are critical when compared to Washington because they have the most similar rates of homelessness to Washington. The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) has produced several studies in conjunction with several other groups that directly address the issue of camping within state right of way. These studies are not solely focused on ODOT but instead take a generally wider look at the entire social services system in place for the Portland metro area. Of course, not all of this information is pertinent to state DOTs but many of the concepts explored can be extrapolated and used to understand and interact with homeless encampments that are on state right of way.

3.2.1 Practices in Oregon

In general, ODOT also uses the multi-agency method when clearing homeless encampments in state right of ways. ODOT does have one major modification to this general method however in the city of Portland. The City of Portland and ODOT have agreed ODOT will pay the City of Portland approximately 2 million dollars per year to clear homeless encampments along ODOT property. This is a similar policy to what we see in Kentucky and Montana, however in this case it is with the city. This example in Oregon does have many of the same benefits as seen in the other above states; Portland is more equipped to provide necessary resources to the homeless than ODOT, and this eliminates the risks of clearing the camps to ODOT employees. However, there are downsides in this case as well. The concerns for equity are present in the process by which the City of Portland clears homeless encampments. There have been concerns in the past that the city does not have enough resources to ensure that the homeless population they are displacing is being treated equitably (Bernhardt 1995). A partnership similar to the one formed by the City of Portland and ODOT is something that WSDOT could consider with its right of way through the major cities in the region, such as Tacoma, Everett, or Seattle.

Apart from its partnership with Portland, ODOT has policies that set it apart from most other states that completed this survey. ODOT has a set of overarching best practices policies that were completed in the form of outside studies that are used to guide all of its interactions with homeless populations. These documents were included with the survey. The first study was conducted by students at Portland State University, named 'Illegal Homeless Camping in Portland: Field Analysis and Advocacy Planning', that dealt with trying to understand both the underlying issues of homelessness and what camping individuals actually want and need for support. In this study the authors worked directly with homeless camps, shelters, individuals, advocates, and public sector workers involved with homelessness. In particular, one of the camps they visited was located under the Ross Island Bridge, a major thoroughfare in Portland that is owned by ODOT. By having direct interactions with these populations, they were able to better understand what the

most pertinent issues are for these populations that other professionals in the field might not be able to gather from looking in from the outside. From this they came up with several recommendations to "improve the lives of homeless campers in the short term without sacrificing better, longer-term alternatives." (Bernhardt 1995). Some of these recommendations were thought of to be implemented immediately, and some were ideas that could be implemented in the future. There are two important things to note about this study; first, this study is relatively old, as it was conducted in 1995 so some of the specific issues that were highlighted may have been addressed or changed since the study was conducted. Second, this study looks at the entire population of campers as a whole from a planning perspective, of which those living on state right of way is a small portion. This does not mean that this study is not useful, it just means that the findings would need to be modified to fit the context of WSDOT or another DOT. In this vein some of the agreements are specific to camps and locations to Portland, but the ideas are easily transferrable to other cities and areas. The recommendations of this study are an excellent general guideline for any type of agency to begin more equitably interacting with the homeless. A list of generalized recommendations is as follows:

1. Garbage and Waste Clean-up Agreement for Camps: Instead of clearing and removing camps that have excess waste in them, form an agreement with the camps to allow them to remain in place as long as they are not causing any damage to infrastructure, are not a safety concern for the campers or the general public, and are maintaining a standard level of cleanliness for the camp.
2. Strengthen Advocacy Groups: Support advocacy groups that directly interact and take the opinion of the homeless population so that the homeless population can have more of a voice in deciding the course of action regarding their community.
3. Create a Video About Homeless Camps: Create a video to raise awareness of the issues faced by the homeless populations and put a human face to the often-stigmatized image of the homeless population.
4. Legalize Camping: Decriminalize camping and do not clear camps in areas that do not cause damage or safety hazards to show that being homeless is not in and of itself a crime.
5. Increase Communication with Campers: All local agencies should increase their communication with homeless populations to both better understand the underlying issues of homelessness and so that their voices can be heard throughout society, as homelessness is a society-wide issue.
6. Allow Pets and Couples in Homeless Shelters: At the time this report was written, couples and pets were not allowed to share space at homeless shelters which was noted as a major deterrent for people to use those valuable resources, so loosening those restrictions would be beneficial in increasing the utility for many homeless individuals.
7. Create Storage Spaces for Homeless: This would give homeless a safe place to store their belongings, which could reduce the clutter and hazards of camps that are overcrowded with items and people.
8. Increase Campers Access to Social Services: Have local jurisdictions have staff whose purpose is to interact with the homeless community and build rapport to help disseminate helpful resources to those who need them.

9. Education: Educate the public and those whose jobs affect the homeless on the problem to reduce the stigma and increase overall understanding about this societal issue.
10. Include Homeless on Government Committees and Community Groups: This is another way for homeless voices to be heard the will further understanding and ensure that they are receiving the resources they truly want and need.
11. Develop Regional Plans for the Homeless and Affordable Housing: These plans are instrumental in local governments planning to reach their goals with regards to lessening the issue of homelessness which will benefit both the homeless and society as a whole.
(Bernhardt 1995)

These recommendations are used by ODOT to help guide their homeless removal procedures. Some of these recommendations are not readily applicable to organizations like ODOT or WSDOT due to the nature of DOT's stake in the homelessness issue, but many of these recommendations are generally applicable in helping DOTs address homelessness in a wholistic and equitable way.

A more recent study that ODOT uses as part of their guiding documents is a set of several studies that were compiled by Portland State University. These best practices, as with the previous study, relate to more general ideas about homeless interaction than policies to increase employee safety, but they are none the less helpful at increasing the equitability of clearing homeless encampments. This study encompasses three different documents that each helps ODOT in guiding their approach to addressing homelessness. The first is information from a FHWA webinar titled "FHWA Emerging Issue: Strategies for Addressing the Challenges of Transient Populations on Transportation Facilities Webinar" (Tremoulet 2013). This webinar delved into the issues of homeless camps along state right of way from a multi-state perspective. Portland State was one of the presenting groups as their participation in the webinar. The main point of the webinar was to highlight the importance of sharing experiences of interactions with homeless encampments with other affiliated groups that could benefit from learning more about the complex issue. This reiterates the recommendations from the previous article to increase education and awareness of broadness of scope of the issue of homelessness (Tremoulet 2013). The next document included in this study is a case study of a particular highway rest area in northern Oregon, the Baldock Rest Area. This is a large rest area south of Portland with several surface parking lots which regularly house a significant homeless population. When this study was conducted in 2010, there were over 100 people (either chronically homeless or transitionally homeless) living in the Baldock Rest area. This study highlighted many of the same issues that have already been explored in this document that arise with homeless encampments and removal. In this case, they implemented what they called a push-pull method to clear the camp from the rest area, which entailed both incentives for the residents to leave the camp, the pull, and the push of higher enforcement once the camp was removed. This method is in compliment to the multi-agency approach, that was also utilized. In this case it was a combination of ODOT, the Oregon State Patrol, local social services, and the local district attorney that facilitates this removal. With the coordination of all of these groups during the planning and outreach phase, a very positive result occurred, with over 65 percent of the residents finding some form of stable housing (Tremoulet 2013). This example highlights how the multi-agency approach, when implemented well can achieve an extremely high success rate for state DOTs and partner agencies. The final document in this study is a research

proposal titled “Guidebook on Streamlining Delivery and Maintenance of Projects Involving Homeless Populations” (Tremoulet 2013). This document proposes creating a guidebook to address homeless populations on state right of way, and broadly how homeless impact the design, maintenance, and construction of any projects. This work largely builds off the previous two documents included in this study and further highlights the need for inter-agency communication and coordination to address this pressing issue.

All of these documents and studies show how useful it is for a state DOT to have overarching documents guiding its decision making and procedures for addressing homeless encampments on its right of way. This is mostly useful in the prioritization stage of the multi-agency approach as it can help define which camps have the greatest threat to its residents and society as a whole. These documents show why ODOT is one of the leading DOTs when it comes to addressing homelessness on their right of way.

3.2.2 Practices in California

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) also has several policies and training materials for clearing homeless encampments from their right of way. As a foil to the documents provided by ODOT, the Caltrans documents are much more geared toward Caltrans employee safety and operational practices than overarching guiding principles. Both types of documents are critical for the safe and equitable treatment of homeless populations. California, as with most other states, also applies the multi-agency approach to address the homeless encampments along their state roadway. They mirror the basic guidelines closely, utilizing the expertise of their state patrol, local law enforcement, and local social service agencies.

What makes Caltrans unique is the presence and high quality of their training material for their maintenance and construction employees. Their training documents contain several policies that work to increase the equitable treatment of the homeless and increase the safety of their employees. To increase safety, Caltrans requires that all employees enter a camp with at least one law enforcement officer and if applicable their district hazmat and landscape coordinators, as was described in their multi-agency approach. Additionally, they teach their employees to not interact with items that might be potentially hazardous so those with the proper training and equipment can remove them. On top of this, they have a checklist to facilitate a common approach to removing the homeless encampments that mirrors their safety policy guidebook. This checklist includes things like holding a safety meeting before conducting the removal with all of the participating agencies to ensure that all people involved are on the same page. They also require wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Additionally, Caltrans give Hepatitis A and B shots to all employees who are exposed to hazardous materials. To ensure the equitable treatment of the camp residents, employees must post a 72 hour notice to vacate. Work is only to begin once the police forces ensure the camp is clear of homeless individuals and the 72 hour notice is up. Finally, they emphasize awareness of potential hazards so that employees don't accidentally do something that puts them in danger (Homeless Encampment on State Right-of-Way 2019).

This guideline also deals with the equitable treatment of the homeless. It is reiterated several times to treat all homeless individuals that are met with kindness, compassion, and respect. Additionally,

it is Caltrans policy to hold any non-hazardous debris left behind for 90 days for the homeless individuals to claim them. They also push their employees to not make assumptions about the populations they are interacting with and to recognize bias when it occurs (Homeless Encampment on State Right-of-Way 2019).

These types of guidelines are hugely positive for interactions with homeless camps by DOT employees. Not only does it drastically increase the safety and situational awareness of the crew actively cleaning the site, it also works to educate them and tear down biases, stereotypes, and stigmas associated with the homeless. This both increases the equitability with which the homeless are treated and further increases the safety of the maintenance employees by reducing the probability of a negative interaction with a homeless person.

Along with this training document there was also a document on some of the higher-level decision-making policies of Caltrans that were shared with other state DOTs at a teleconference that worked to compile several practices from different states. This document describes some of the other actions taken by Caltrans to mitigate the issues of homelessness. Apart from sections that discuss the actions taken in removing camps that are described above, they also talk about some other projects that are in progress to mitigate the issues of homelessness on state right of way. This project is based on California state senate bill 211 that authorized Caltrans to lease some of its property to create temporary and permanent housing units for the homeless (Takigawa 2019). In this case, these are parcels of land owned by Caltrans that were not currently being used that were being repurposed to address this pressing issue. This is an excellent example of ways state DOTs can utilize unused assets to help address and mitigate the issue of homelessness.

While all of the practices listed above show only a portion of state DOT practices regarding homelessness, some important patterns emerge that directly relate to DOT's effectiveness in addressing homelessness. In almost all of the cases, the state DOTs use some form of the multi-agency approach, with varying levels of success. Even though few of the states have formal written policies related to how they clear homeless encampments, their best practices and partnerships with other agencies usually means their removal procedures are still fairly effective and safe. However, the states that do have written policies still perform above those that don't in terms of both safety and equitable treatment for homeless individuals. This is because a concrete policy gives consistency and repeatability for both local agencies and DOT employees. This allows best practices to be more ingrained in the DOT and with partner agencies and ensures a DOT's ability to exercise the most positive and equitable approach possible.

3.3 Summary of Current State DOT Practices

From all of these examples, it is clear that the multi-agency approach has several advantages. Firstly, it utilizes each participating agency's strengths such that any gaps in expertise can be filled. If DOTs were left to interact with homeless camps on their own, it would be virtually impossible for the maintenance staff to adequately clear and remove a homeless camp with costing significantly more; there are too many factors at play for only one specialized group of people to address. Similarly, being able to act in unison with other agencies reduces the safety risk associated with being in close proximity to the camps. Each field of expertise is good at mitigating

different kinds of risk, so by combining all of these teams the risk mitigation can be multifaceted which will exponentially increase its effectiveness. Again, this is technically possible to do through a single agency, but it would be prohibitively expensive compared to the multi-agency approach. Finally, this method is relatively equitable when it comes to the treatment of the homeless individuals. Since this incorporates agencies that specialize in outreach to homeless individuals, these agencies can work to try to connect these homeless people to resources that they otherwise might not be connected to.

Along with these positives however come several negative aspects of the multi-agency approach. One negative aspect of the approach is that it requires a great deal of inter-agency communication. This makes any removal efforts that much more difficult to plan and prepare for as compared to doing it through a single agency. Another issue with this method is that it still emphasizes the removal of homeless people from state right of way first and helping the homeless second. This idea was highlighted in the report *Illegal Homeless Camping in Portland: Field Analysis and Advocacy Planning*. The basic premise that was found was that in general in our society, the prevailing feeling is that homelessness is an issue that can be shunted to the side and ignored until it spilled into the rest of society. While this is not entirely the case with the multi-agency approach, that theme is still present in the removal of camps without guaranteeing permanent housing for the camp residents. Another issue with this method is that there are still several safety hazards that employees are subjected to. Even though there are biohazard experts there to deal with the most hazardous wastes, the chance of exposure is still non-trivial for individuals clearing the camps. Additionally, this does not mitigate the secondary employees who can be exposed to waste, like mechanics and equipment operators. Finally, this method makes it very difficult to create a truly comprehensive overarching policy on homeless camp removal because there is so much variation state to state, region to region, and even removal to removal. There can be two removals of the same camp at different time that are drastically different based on the context of the camp at each time, so it is incredibly difficult to create policies that can cover all scenarios and remain flexible enough to address each situation with awareness and nuance.

Despite these noted issues with the multi-agency approach, this is still the best approach that has currently been used by state DOTs. Of all of the possible ways to clear a camp, it is relatively the safest, least costly and most equitable. Additionally, most of the negatives that were identified for this approach will not be able to be present and unable to be improved no matter the approach due to the variation and human nature of homeless camp interaction.

There are also many ways that all states can improve their practices with regards to homeless camp removal from state right of way. Firstly, these examples showed that creating a concrete policy with regards to both overarching guiding principles for when and where to remove homeless camps as well as the procedural aspects of actually conducting a camp sweep. This is something that not many states have but could fairly easily implement to increase consistency for all involved to increase equity and safety. Additionally, understanding the context of each state and region, including topography, how many camps are present, what kinds of residents are in the camps, and other identifying data will also help to better define what features are most important for DOTs to address and which features of a homeless camp are non-detrimental.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Current Practices in Washington State

4.1 WSDOT Policies

As with most every other state DOT, WSDOT uses the multi-agency approach to address homelessness in its right of way. This has proven to be an effective way for state DOTs to equitably address homelessness while maintaining the safety of its employees. Furthermore, like the states of Oregon and California, WSDOT does have concrete policies and procedures for addressing homeless encampments along its right of way.

WSDOT procedure begins with the identification and recording of homeless encampments on WSDOT property. Many sources are used to identify new homeless encampments that form. The two main sources of information are through employee reporting and public complaints. All of this information is stored in a database that tracks all issues related to the maintenance of WSDOT's roadways, called the Highway Activity Tracking System (HATS) (Inventory Homeless Encampment 2020). HATS is used to track all ongoing maintenance issues on WSDOT roadways, one of which is the presence of homeless encampments.

This data is incredibly useful for understanding the issue of homeless camps on WSDOT right of way. It can give insight into both the current status of WSDOT roadways as well as the historical trends of homelessness throughout time. This is both useful for creating overarching policy framework and for planning operations for interaction with the homeless camps. There is significant information that can be drawn from HATS. Currently, there can be 100 or more camps found on WSDOT right of way, though this number can fluctuate significantly. HATS hold information on all camps reported to WSDOT dating back to 2015 with just over 1700 encampments recorded from then until March 2020. In the State, the vast majority of camps form along the I-5 corridor. Naturally, I-5 has the most camps at roughly 40 percent of all camps. The other notable highways that have significant number of camps are I-90 which has Around 8 percent of camps in the state. The majority of these camps are found in the Puget Sound region, stretching from Thurston county in the south to Snohomish County in the north which reinforces the idea that most camps are formed in more densely populated urban areas. From this data, it is shown that a new camp forms on average once a day (Inventory Homeless Encampment 2020). This is an incredibly rapid pace for camps to form and shows how pressing it is that WSDOT continue to address this issue.

All of the information stored in the HATS database is critical for WSDOT to prioritize which camps are to be addressed. As we can see from HATS, the vast majority of homeless encampments occur in the Puget Sound area, mostly along the I-5 corridor. Generally speaking, the highest concentration of camps is around downtown Seattle, decreasing as you move farther away from there with the general exception of the urban centers of Tacoma and Everett where the number of camps increases again. This plays a key role in WSDOTs prioritization and clearing of homeless encampments throughout the region.

WSDOT has a general procedure with how it addresses homeless encampments in state right of way. This procedure falls into the multi-agency approach and is similar in many ways to other

states. In general, WSDOT partners with two other types of local agencies to help in addressing homeless camps in a safe and equitable way. The first is local law enforcement and the second is local human services agencies. In Washington, it is relatively rare for WSDOT to partner with the Washington State Patrol (WSP) to work to remove homeless encampments. The only time WSP is involved is in immediate emergency situations where they need to respond rapidly; in almost every situation where the interaction with a homeless encampment is planned, WSDOT works with the local law enforcement of the area, be it city or county police. For human services, again WSDOT looks to partner locally. Sometimes, these human services are run independent of law enforcement and other times they are housed within the law enforcement department. In general, the higher the population of the jurisdiction which WSDOT is working with, the more likely that the human services agency will be its own entity.

The first step in WSDOT's multi-agency approach is the prioritization of camps that need to be cleared. For this step, there are two main distinctions that can be made for how camps are prioritized. In the most general case, this determination is made by WSDOT, who consults with various other groups to have input in areas WSDOT does not have expertise. This can include law enforcement, human services or advocacy groups, and fire officials. In this case, all of these opinions are considered, but the final determination is made by WSDOT. Alternatively, the final decision to act on different homeless encampments sometimes does not rest with WSDOT. These are specific cases where WSDOT purposefully partners with local jurisdictions, usually large cities, to have more competing voices on how homeless encampments are removed. The two most important examples of these types of agreements are with Seattle and Tacoma. In this case, the general idea is the same, where the same types of groups all share their expertise about the camps, however the final decision is made through a consensus as opposed to WSDOT making the final determination. As mentioned above, these large cities are where the vast majority of homeless encampments are found, so the vast majority of the time this procedure is in place.

Each of these cases has a different implication for the equity of addressing these camps. The case where the decision is made by consensus is inherently more equitable because more competing voices whose goals differ have a direct impact on the decisions moving forward. However, in the other case, there is often not an agency that has the resources and ability to assist in making these decisions in the same way. Most cities and counties do not have the resources at their disposal like the cities of Seattle and Tacoma, so the level of input is not as great. Additionally, camps are much less common in these smaller areas so there is less pressure to address multiple camps at the same time. Thus, as long as WSDOT takes an equitable approach in determining which camps to clear and when, the final determination will still be equitable.

Once a camp has been chosen to be removed, outreach with the camp is conducted to ensure that the residents have access to any available resources they can use if wanted to help them address the underlying issues that caused them to be homeless. Additionally, this serves to warn the residents that the camp will be removed in the near future so they can leave and remove any belongings they want to prior to the removal date. This is also to be supplemented with posted notices giving the same information as mandated in the WSDOT safety manual (Safety Procedures and Guidelines Manual M 75-01 2018). This is done largely independently of WSDOT, excepting

the posting of warning messages. In other cases that is WSDOT is required to help, it is almost always to provide support for traffic control to ensure the outreach workers are safe when working near the roadway. Since this is largely independent, WSDOT relies heavily on local agencies to shoulder this burden. This can have more positive results in some areas than others. Again, the distinction is usually made by size of jurisdiction. In general, smaller cities and counties will have smaller homeless populations proportionally, and thus have less resources devoted to this area. With less resources comes inherently less equitable treatment for homeless encampments, but that is also mitigated by homeless encampments being much less frequent in these areas. In either case, it is imperative that WSDOT be communicating with those jurisdictions. This is highlighted in an attached document to the WSDOT safety manual. This document talks about the importance of communication both within WSDOT and to other agencies that are involved in helping remove camps from the right of way (Safety Procedures and Guidelines Manual M 75-01 2018). This highlights the importance of ensuring that all of these groups are working together and communicating in positive ways to ensure the most positive outcome for both the safety of workers in the camp and the equitable treatment for those who lived in the camp.

On the day of the camp removal, the basic procedure is very similar to that of other state DOTs. Initially, the camp is swept by law enforcement to remove any individuals who are still present in the camp. Then, WSDOT's employees can begin clearing the camp and removing all hazards and debris. All of this activity is governed by the WSDOT safety manual. The WSDOT Safety Manual has an entire chapter dedicated to the practices of WSDOT employees in and around homeless encampments. There are two versions of this document, one from 2008 and one that is up to date with the current safety manual. These documents lay out step by step the basic procedure for clearing these camps from the roadway in a safe manner by DOT employees. As was noted above, all of the hazards faced by DOT employees involve exposure to hazardous materials and debris left behind in the homeless camp, as all of the individuals should be swept from the camp prior to work commencing.

This document begins by highlighting its purpose, scope, references, and definitions used throughout the document. After this introduction, it describes the responsibilities of all involved individuals in WSDOT, from executives to maintenance employees. In this list of tasks, the executives, senior, and middle management are in charge of ensuring that all operations regarding homeless camp removal is being completed to a satisfactory degree and full funding is procured for the completion of said goal. The next important group is the supervisors of those clearing the camps. Their goal is to provide oversight for the employees conducting the camp removal and provide them with support where necessary. This includes any safety training and any intervention in field operations. The third group that holds responsibilities for camp clearing and removal are the employees tasked with this work. Their main role in maintaining safety while clearing these camps is to remain aware and look for hazards as the work is being conducted, and immediately cease work and report any potential hazard if there is suspected to be one. Additionally, the policy mandates the use of a 'buddy system', and employees are responsible for keeping track of their buddy at all times. Finally, there is the WSDOT safety Organizers who have a responsibility in maintaining a safe work environment for those clearing homeless encampments. They are tasked with providing technical support for all employee training and ensuring that all employees are

equipped to comply with the safety requirements of clearing the camps. They are also required to conduct field visits to ensure that the safety procedures are being followed (Safety Procedures and Guidelines Manual M 75-01 2018). These clear definitions of roles for all levels of the organization is helpful for those clearing the homeless encampments along WSDOT right of way because it ensures that everyone involved has a clear understanding of everyone else's role. Also, it ensures that people who are not directly interaction with the camps themselves are aware of the issues presented by the camps. This is especially pertinent for the upper management who's daily routine might not be affected by the camps. In this case, this document ensures their awareness of the issues being faced and it ensures a certain level of accountability for all those involved in these activities, even those who do not take an active role in camp removals.

The following sections in this document pertain to the actual practices of working in these camps during an active removal. The first section highlights an important aspect of the multi-agency process, that often WSDOT employees will be working in jurisdictions that have different governing regulations around homelessness and homeless camps (Safety Procedures and Guidelines Manual M 75-01 2018). Acknowledging this is the case and that Employees need to be aware of any changes to the operating procedure based on location is critical for ensuring that all employees are on the same page to maintain a safe work environment. After this comes the guidelines for all actions that are to be taken in the camps. A list of all guidelines for the camps is given below:

- Notify and/or request law enforcement if needed.
- Follow posting requirements.
- Supervisor/Crew Lead will conduct an encampment assessment to identify potential hazards and/or safety concerns.
- Supervisor/Crew Lead will notify the local jurisdiction or Department of Ecology for removal and transport of suspected hazardous materials.
- Verify area is clear of occupants.
- Communicate site assessment results to the crew through a tail gate/safety briefing and/or a Pre-Activity Safety Plan.
- Collapse unoccupied tents and shelters using mechanical means if possible.
- Never reach your hands into bags/clothing/blankets.
- Never open containers (including bags, boxes, totes, etc.) with your hands because they may contain contaminants or sharps that could cause injury.
- Never handle sharps/needles without proper PPE.
- Collect observable sharps/needles using mechanical methods such as Pickers and Nabbers if possible.
- Place sharps/needles into an approved sharps container.
- Do not handle human waste. Let the waste air dry or use outside means for removal (pump truck for large quantities).
- Use hand tools (shovel/rake) to gather debris and materials.
- Use mechanical means to load debris into a dump truck.

- Dispose of sharps, general waste and debris in accordance with local jurisdiction requirements.
- Small quantities of typical household chemicals such as batteries, paints, propane tanks, tires etc., should be disposed in accordance with local jurisdiction requirements.
- Work in pairs and use the buddy system.
(Safety Procedures and Guidelines Manual M 75-01 2018)

What this list shows is a well thought out general procedure for employees to follow during homeless camp removal. All of these tasks are set forth in such a way as to increase safety to the highest level possible. Most notably, most of these guidelines are designed to mitigate exposure to the hazardous waste that is left behind. Of particular importance is the repeated emphasis of using tools, both mechanical and manual, to ensure that the waste is kept as far away from the employee as possible and therefore mitigate as much as possible the exposure of that material (Cowan 2020). This process of removal is a necessary step to take for WSDOT as it is unsafe to leave debris and hazardous waste behind after a site is removed. If some of it were to be left behind, it could expose many people to hazards they otherwise would have avoided, including other WSDOT staff working in the area later, motorists who needed to pull to the side of the road to use the shoulder, and other homeless individuals who might repopulate the area. That being said, this process is inherently not equitable when viewed on its own. An inherent part of this process is the disposal of property of the individuals of the camp which they place some value on. This can include items such as tents, blankets, and other items. This inequity is generally mitigated by some of the other activities taken with the homeless camps. If the residents take advantage of the outreach and resources provided to them, they have the opportunity to not rely on the materials that the cleanup is disposing of, thus lowering their value. For example, if a camp resident takes the opportunity to get in touch with a long term temporary housing program, then that person's tent that was removed becomes much less valuable to them to the point where they would not care if it were removed. This type of situation is not always the case. Often times, camp residents refuse the services provided by the outreach teams, and the inequity of the destruction of their property is not mitigated. Another way this can be mitigated is with the storage of salvageable personal property. This procedure is described in the following paragraph. This method does allow some of this property that has value for the camp residents to be recovered by them, but there are flaws with this method that are described below. In this case, the disposal of these items is a necessary safety procedure, but it should be acknowledged that this practice does come with inherent inequity.

Another aspect of camp removal that is detailed in this chapter of the Safety Manual is the removal and storage of personal property. Personal property is defined as anything that might be of value to the persons who lived in the camp. This policy mandates that any personal property that is not hazardous shall be removed and stored by WSDOT so the owner can claim it. The list given in these guidelines includes radios, audio visual equipment, sleeping bags, tents, stoves, cooking utensils, lanterns, flashlights, bed rolls, tarps, foam, canvas mats, pillows, blankets, medication, personal papers, photographs, books, luggage, storage containers, backpacks, clothing, towels, shoes, toiletries, cosmetics, clocks, watches and glasses. It designates that all of these items are to be stored for at least 60 days for the residents to come and claim the items, as well as posting at

the site of the camp that these items have been stored and how to retrieve them (Safety Procedures and Guidelines Manual M 75-01 2018). This policy could have a significant positive benefit for those who lived in the camps. While many of these types of items do not seem valuable to those of us who have not been homeless, these items can have tremendous value for those who are. By salvaging those items, it not only benefits the campers by allowing them to reclaim items that they deem valuable, but it also can build trust with the homeless community at large by showing that they are not marginalized and that they like they belong. There is also a flaw with this methodology. Often times, the items described above are deemed too hazardous to salvage. This is especially true of the cloth-based items. This is because with these types of items to attempt to salvage them would violate many of the safety rules given previously in the document. The main reason behind this is because often it is impossible to definitively tell if these cloth items which are in a pile on the ground do not have sharp hazards like needles or broken glass in them. In this case, it is against the regulation to handle those items as they could expose a worker to potential harm, and thus they need to be treated as hazardous. This leads to large quantities of valuable items that otherwise would have been salvaged being removed. This can have the opposite effect as that stated above where this actually breaks down trust between the campers and WSDOT. In this case, if the camper sees that WSDOT tried to salvage items from the camp, but did not salvage their items because they were deemed too hazardous it would be incredibly frustrating, especially if the camper knew there were no actual hazards present even though WSDOT had no way to verify it. Additionally, by removing these items and storing them at a new location, it puts an extra burden on the campers who then have to find a way to travel to wherever the items are stored to retrieve them.

Apart from the actual activity of clearing the camp, there are also other general guidelines for maintaining employee safety. One such section is about the required and optional PPE that is available for use. Required items include a hard hat, eye protection, safety boots, and high visibility clothing. Optional items include face shields, goggles, hearing protection, respiratory protection, rubber boots, puncture resistant gloves, and coveralls (Safety Procedures and Guidelines Manual M 75-01 2018). Another section highlights what employees should do when they are not actively clearing a camp, but who find themselves exposed to a camp's leftover debris during their regular duties. In this case, those employees are to contact law enforcement if there are other individuals present. Otherwise, after conducting a safety assessment they are to clear whatever debris is left using standard tools like brooms, shovels, and standard PPE. There is also a section that define the types of disinfectants that should be used to ensure all equipment has the lowest likelihood of transmitting contaminants after its use. On top of this it is mandated that no eating, drinking, smoking, or applying anything to permeable membrane is to occur in potentially contaminated work areas. Finally, there is also a section that informs employees that any employee that works in one of these areas is entitled to a hepatitis B vaccination to reduce the risk of contracting that disease (Safety Procedures and Guidelines Manual M 75-01 2018).

Apart from the actual removal procedures that WSDOT conducts, there are also procedures for preventative maintenance to make an area less desirable for camps to reform once they have been cleared. This same kind of maintenance can also be done where there is no camp to make that area less desirable. This kind of preventative maintenance can take many forms. This can include

limbing trees, cutting back grass or other shrubs, placing items like boulders in potential camping sites, and erecting fencing or other barriers to constrain access to campsites. These are just the most common forms of preventative maintenance that WSDOT undertakes; there are many other things WSDOT can do that reduces the desirability of a camping location. In all of these cases, the different treatments are context sensitive and will depend on the topography, vegetation, and location of the sight that is being mitigated. This type of activity has many implications for the equitable treatment of the homeless. On one hand, it is discouraging people from living in some of the more dangerous and hazardous camping locations thus improving the homeless encampments overall safety. On the other hand, this is also effectively criminalizing camping. By conducting preventative maintenance WSDOT is declaring that they do not want camping along their right of way and are actively eliminating any possibility of that occurring. Both of these do not justify either completing or not completing preventative maintenance. Instead, it implies that these justifications need to be weighted, and that preventative maintenance should only occur where the increase in safety for all involved more than outweighs the negatives of preventing the campers from living there in the first place.

4.2 Partner Agencies

While the above guidelines are used in most general cases for homeless camp removal, there are situations where this plan is supplemented through partnerships with local agencies. This mostly happens in the largest cities in the region and can add complexity and effectiveness. These partners include the cities of Seattle, Tacoma, Edgewood, Fife, Olympia, and Tumwater, as well as Pierce County, although there are many more not listed here. All of these relationships allow a much higher quality of service for those individuals within the camp and it gives WSDOT employees more resources to address these camps more safely. We will now discuss the differences with some of the most important partners.

4.2.1 City of Seattle

Seattle has the highest concentration of homeless encampments anywhere in the state. This is also true of the concentrations of homeless encampments on WSDOT right of way. Because of this, Seattle has one of the best developed social outreach departments in the state in the form of the Human Services Department (HSD). One of the main tasks of the HSD is to spearhead all of the efforts for the city to address homelessness, specifically the outreach and social services aspect of these efforts. In Seattle, WSDOT partners with the City for all of their camp interaction activities. This is done through the City of Seattle HSD (McCormick 2020). This department of the city serves as the main point of contact for WSDOT for all matters pertaining to homelessness within city limits. This is the most important agency WSDOT partners within the multi-agency approach to ensure the equitable treatment of the homeless camp populations, which highlights a specific area in Washington where WSDOT deviates from their most general recognized approach.

WSDOT also partners with other agencies as well in the multi-agency approach within Seattle. The next most important agency that WSDOT partners with is the City of Seattle Police Department (SPD). The partnership of WSDOT and the Seattle Police Department is enhanced through the partnership with Seattle HSD and the SPD. These agencies have a long history of

coordinating and working together to find equitable outcomes for addressing homelessness throughout Seattle (Johnson 2019). This longstanding partnership is of great benefit to WSDOT because this puts significantly less administrative burden on WSDOT to coordinate these parties together as they already have a highly functional relationship. Apart from SPD, WSDOT also partners with city fire services and the Fire Marshall (McCormick 2020). These groups are mostly utilized to assess the fire threat of different homeless encampments near the roadway. They play a much less significant role than the other two departments in addressing camps along WSDOT right of way.

WSDOT's well defined partnership with Seattle defines the entire scope of WSDOT's multi-agency approach for addressing homeless encampments along its right of way. The first step of this process is the prioritization of camps to determine which most urgently need to be removed for the safety of WSDOT infrastructure and the travelling public as a whole. The HSD and SPD partnership, along with city fire officials, all take an equal role with WSDOT in making this determination. There are many factors this group of agencies considers when making this determination. This includes issues such as "traffic hazards to both drivers and campers, precarious locations, fire danger, violent crime, public health conditions, trash accumulation, environmental damage, chronic vandalism or theft of WSDOT property, chronic vandalism or theft at neighboring properties, and dangerous conditions within the camps" (McCormick 2020). It is fairly clear that the differing expertise of each of these groups can lend extra insight into various categories. For example, WSDOT would have the most experience assessing the dangers to motorists along their roadways, as well as the topographical and environmental considerations in the surrounding environs of the different camps. They also will have more awareness of the vandalism, damage, and theft of WSDOT property. On the other hand, the HSD will have greater insight into ideas related to the condition of the camp, public health issues, and health issues for the campers. SPD meanwhile has more experience dealing with the some of the other crimes and criminal activity that can occur because of these camps. Finally, the fire services have unique insight into the fire dangers a camp might pose. All of these insights weighted together will provide a much more complete picture of the state of individual camps than each of these groups assessing camps individually. This gives a more wholistic approach to assessing the threat of homeless camps in state right of way than an individual assessment by WSDOT, which results in a much more ethical determination of which camps pose the most frisk and should have higher priority in being removed.

Once this is completed, the outreach phase of the multi-agency approach begins. This stage again benefits from the close partnership between Seattle HSD and WSDOT, and in turn Seattle HSD and SPD. All of the outreach and communication with the camp residents is done by both the Seattle HSD and SPD. This partnership again is critical in ensuring the fair and equitable treatment of the camp residents. Since the Seattle HSD has so much experience working with the homeless population in Seattle, they know the best practice approaches and have the necessary staff and resources to support those homeless camp residents who desire help. This also benefits WSDOT because in almost all cases, the Seattle HSD and SPD can act independently of WSDOT to contact these communities so WSDOT does not need to use resources in this outreach process.

Seattle HSD has a work plan for conducting outreach to homeless camps much like WSDOT has a procedure for removing camps. This is the plan that is used throughout the city to clear homeless encampments, not just on WSDOT property. As with WSDOT's plan, the first step in clearing homeless encampments throughout Seattle is the identification of these camps. In Seattle, several laws were enacted that give different property-owning city organizations the ability to remove campers from their property if they are endangering city employees or the public. These groups include the Seattle Parks and Recreation Department, Seattle Public Utilities, the Seattle Department of Transportation, Seattle City Light, the Department of Finance and Administrative Services, the Department of Neighborhoods, the Office of Housing, and the Seattle Center (Multi-Departmental Administrative Rules 2017). This is very convenient for WSDOT in this case because the Seattle HSD is already accustomed to working with outside groups to aid in camp removal in another example of the multi-agency approach with the other city agencies which makes it fairly simple for WSDOT to be another partner agency and not something entirely new for the HSD. There are two specific laws that give these groups the ability to clear these encampments: MDAR 17-01 and FAS 17-01. MDAR 17-01 stipulates what constitutes a camp that is eligible to be cleared. In short, this is any area where it is clear the residents intend to stay in the area overnight, and the camp either violates posted signs about opening and closing hours or there is a threat or disruption to the public (Multi-Departmental Administrative Rules 2017). FAS 17-01 dictates when and how a homeless encampment will be removed. After stating the goal of creating a document to achieve the goal of the previous sentence, FAS 17-01 begins by giving a procedure for removing camps that pose an immediate hazard or obstruction of daily life for the public. In this case, no prior notice is required to be given to the camp residents before removal. Once on site, if possible, a verbal request for removal can be given. If this is not possible, then clearing of the hazard or obstruction can begin immediately, following the basic guidelines for removal and storage as given in the rest of the document (Removal of Unauthorized Encampments from Property in City Jurisdiction 2017).

Once a camp has been identified, its removal should be prioritized with other encampments throughout the city. In this case FAS 17-01 dictates that it is the responsibility of each department to prioritize which encampments to clear that are on their property. Each department is also responsible for reporting all found encampments to the City of Seattle Finance and Administrative Services Department (FAS), which oversees this entire process. All of this information is stored in the Seattle Encampment Response Information System (SERIS). The following criterion are used to weigh the priority of each camp, which do not have a particular order: objective hazards such as moving vehicles and steep slopes, criminal activity beyond illegal substance abuse, quantities of garbage and waste, other active health hazards to camp residents or surrounding community, difficulty in access for emergency services, imminent work scheduled at the site where the camp would be an obstruction, damage to the natural environment in critical areas, and the camps proximity to uses of special concern such as schools or elderly facilities (Removal of Unauthorized Encampments from Property in City Jurisdiction 2017). All of these criteria are useful in thinking about the actual impact each encampment might have on the community. In this sense, this is a positive step for the equitable treatment of homeless camps because it attempts to define camps that will have significant negative impact on a surrounding community, and thus

potentially not disturb a camp that does not have a significant negative impact. Additionally, it is important to note that this guideline does not criminalize substance abuse issues, even if they are technically illegal. This is another positive step for the equitable treatment of the homeless because it shows that the city is committed to helping these individuals address their issues as opposed to simply displacing them for an issues that compounds on homelessness like substance abuse.

In the next section of FAS 17-01, guidelines are given for the posting of notice that the camp is going to be removed. A notice for removal will have several elements that will inform the camp residents of coming actions to be taken with the camp. A notice will tell the residents when the initial notice was posted, what day the removal take place, what time range on the given removal date will be used, where any found personal property will be stored, and how to access and retrieve that property. Additionally, if any of the camp residents are present, then oral notice shall be given as well. The notice is to be posted no fewer than 72 hours before a removal is to occur, and no longer than 7 days before the removal is to occur. Along with this, the time frame given for when the camp can be removed on the posted day cannot exceed four hours in length. If these criteria are not met, any agency conducting a removal must repost this message properly before conducting any removal activities. Additionally, the notice is required to be posted in both English and Spanish, as well as any other language the city deems would “further the purpose of the notice”. Also included in this section is a stipulation that for large encampments that need more than a single day’s worth of work, only a single notice is required as long as the clearing crew begins within the given time frame every day (Removal of Unauthorized Encampments from Property in City Jurisdiction 2017). In general, posting notices can have a positive effect for residents. It does give prior warning for residents and does not require the residents to be present during the day to be contacted directly by workers. Additionally, this notice does have several resources that the homeless can utilize to address some of their underlying issues causing their homelessness. The downside of posting these notices is that it is inherently impersonal. This does nothing to build trust with the homeless community, as to many these postings feel like no more than an eviction notice.

Once notice has been posted, the city is required to find alternate housing for all residents of the camp, as per the ruling of the federal supreme court in *Martin v. Boise*. This alternative shelter can take several forms, including housing programs, shelter programs, and authorized encampments or no-barrier encampments. These housing alternatives are to be available starting on the date the encampment removal begins throughout the duration of the removal process. All of these alternatives are to be maintained by the City of Seattle, which can modify these alternatives day to day to ensure there is always at least one option available for all residents of the camps. Additionally, it is noted that if the residents of the camp are excluded from all of the available temporary housing alternatives the city is not required to find further alternatives (Removal of Unauthorized Encampments from Property in City Jurisdiction 2017). This policy employed by the City of Seattle has both positive and negative implications for the equitable treatment of homeless camp residents. On one hand, providing alternative housing can certainly be beneficial for individuals. More than just providing shelter, often times these new places to temporarily live have a plethora of resources available to help individuals leave homelessness and find a steady living situation. On the other hand, if residents are unable or unwilling to accept

these resources that will benefit them in the long run, this can have the exact opposite effect. The main problem with this type of rehousing option is that it does not build a rapport and trust with the homeless individual. Instead, it can feel to the homeless person as though they were simply put into a system that is not effective at giving them the help they need where they will be spit out when the given time is finished.

After the notice has been posted, outreach with the camp can begin. Outreach personnel are to visit each camp at least once after the notice of removal has been posted. They are also required to be present during any camp removal activities to assist those still present in the camps while the removal activities are ongoing and may leave only when all residents have refused any services they can provide. Additionally, they will need to return to a site if any resident requests services before the encampment removal process is completed (Removal of Unauthorized Encampments from Property in City Jurisdiction 2017). During this procedure, they utilize a common Site Journal Document to record the characteristics of each campsite (Site Journal 2017). This ensures that there is a consistent procedure for interaction with the camps and a consistent way to record any information gathered from these visits.

The types of services that are provided are through the Seattle HSD. One major category of service provided by the HSD is support services. These are generally more temporary services such as day and night shelters, where homeless can come to get temporary relief and to be connected to more permanent resources. They also have homeless prevention programs which help people who are in imminent threat of becoming homeless avoid that outcome through financial support and case work. Finally, the HSD also provides longer term support to the homeless. This can take many forms and includes projects like rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing to provide long term stable housing for those who experienced unstable housing conditions before (Johnson 2019). This outreach is the most critical activity that the city conducts to ensure that the homeless residents are being treated fairly and equitably. This is the most effective way for the city to build trust within the homeless community. By meeting them face to face and person to person, it can humanize the situation both for the workers of the city and the homeless individuals. It is important to note that the 72 hours required by the posting notice is nowhere enough time to truly build a relationship between the residents and city workers; that kind of relationship requires much more time, which is why the Seattle HSD is continually attempting to contact these vulnerable populations to ensure that their needs are being met.

When taking all of these outreach factors together, a more accurate measure of equity can be determined. When coupled with the ongoing outreaching efforts the city is making, the outreach effects of the homeless encampment removal are theoretically equitable. Ideally this multifaceted effort would connect the residents to the resources they need and through the trust built up over time with the other outreaching activities they would feel secure enough to utilize these resources. Of course, the ideal is almost never truly met, and this case is no exception. The success of this method as a whole relies on each individual piece, and each piece is not flawless. If even one of these pieces is not given the resources and thought required to be effective, the entire system is severely hamstrung in achieving its goals of equitable treatment of those experiencing homelessness.

The next section dictates the actual clearing procedures for the city agencies. This section is supplemented by each individual agency's safety guidelines to ensure that workers remain safe at all times. As with WSDOT cleanup procedure, the city employees are to remove any trash, debris, hazardous material, or other similar items to be disposed of remotely. Additionally, parallel to WSDOT's policy, items deemed personal property shall be separated from the trash and debris such that it can be stored and reclaimed by the camp residents who it belonged to (Removal of Unauthorized Encampments from Property in City Jurisdiction 2017). Storage and reclamation of these items is described later in this document. The same logic applies for the equitability of this process as with the procedure in the WSDOT guidelines. The clearing of waste and hazardous materials from the camp is necessary for the safety of workers and the public but is not always equitable. This procedure can be mitigated by the success of the outreach groups, but this success is not guaranteed, so there is an inherent inequality that needs to be acknowledged.

Once the camp removal is complete, another notice must be posted informing the camp residents of the cleanup as well as other critical information. Chief among this is information on where personal items are stored and how to collect them. Additionally, this also must contain information for how to contact outreach personnel to help find shelter alternatives for the camps residents (Removal of Unauthorized Encampments from Property in City Jurisdiction 2017). This, much like the original notices, can have a positive impact on the camp residents. It has pertinent information both about their salvaged personal belongings and about other resources they can utilize. This also has the same drawbacks as those notices in that they are inherently impersonal and does not support building trust with those individuals who did not utilize resources available to them.

Also similar to WSDOT policy, the City of Seattle collects all possible personal belongings of individuals and stores them to be retrieved by the camp residents if they choose. The City of Seattle uses a similar criterion to WSDOT for determining what is personal property that could have value for the camp residents and what Seattle employees should not take due to potential hazards. These items shall be stored by the City of Seattle in an area commonly used by the city for storing personal property. Additionally, all of these locations shall be accessible by public transportation. As mentioned above, any property that was removed from a camp site shall have a notice posted at the camp site informing the resident of the camp what property has been salvaged, where it is being stored, and how to retrieve it. All items shall be logged by the city, and they shall be stored for at least 70 days, at which point if they are not claimed they can be donated or discarded at the city's discretion (Removal of Unauthorized Encampments from Property in City Jurisdiction 2017). This again is similar in equity implication to WSDOT's policy. This policy does give an avenue for items of value to be recovered by the camp residents. There are also inherent flaws with this system as any item deemed hazardous should not be salvaged, even if it has value for the camp residents. In this case, safety is more important than the return of all personal items which is an inherent inequity that needs to be acknowledged.

Once this property is stored these guidelines also give a procedure for how an individual can claim such property. The primary point of contact for this is the City of Seattle Customer Services Bureau. This group has access to the log of all items recovered from a homeless encampment

removal and can help an individual find where an item is stored. To retrieve the item, an individual does not need to present an ID, but they do need to be able to describe the item to prove the item was theirs. Once this is done, the individual can travel to the location where the property is stored and recover it. Alternatively, they can also request the item be delivered within one business day to any location within Seattle assuming it is safe and suitable for vehicle delivery. All of this shall be done at no cost to the individual who requests their property back (Removal of Unauthorized Encampments from Property in City Jurisdiction 2017). This method of returning the property to individuals does have some positive results for the homeless campers. There are relatively few hoops for a person to jump through to retrieve the property that they find valuable. There is also no additional or administrative cost to retrieving these items, and do not rely on identification which a homeless person might not have. There are flaws with this system, however. This does put a significant burden on vulnerable homeless individuals who have to travel and communicate to retrieve items that were already theirs. Even though all of the locations are mandated to be located near public transportation, even bus fare can be a burden for these individuals. This add inherent inequity as adding more burden to already overburdened individuals will not support the societal goal of reducing homelessness.

Finally, there is a section on procedures to create what the city calls an ‘emphasis area’. An emphasis area is an area in which a homeless encampment is removed that the city deems important to increase enforcement to discourage another camp from forming immediately. To become an emphasis area, there first must be a camp that is removed from the area and it must be signed as an emphasis area. Emphasis areas receive special treatments from the city in regard to discouraging further homeless encampments. An emphasis area shall be inspected by a city employee at least once per day, and additional preventative measures can be taken such as installing fencing. Additionally, any material found in the area may be removed without further notice following the guidelines set forth earlier in the document. Signage shall be posted around the area informing people of such removal activities as well as the procedures for the storage and recovery of personal property as it is defined earlier in the guidelines. Additionally, there shall be no more than 10 emphasis areas at any one time in the city (Removal of Unauthorized Encampments from Property in City Jurisdiction 2017). This kind of activity is akin to some of the preventative maintenance work that WSDOT conducts on state right of way. Various agencies within Seattle also do conduct more traditional preventative maintenance as well. This kind of work however is critical in deterring new camps from forming in areas that previously housed a camp. As with most policies related to homeless camp removal, there are pros and cons associated with this procedure. One positive is that it can be an effective way to mitigate the possibility of new camps forming in areas that are hazardous to camp residents that would need to be re-cleared relatively quickly. This has a positive equity effect by not exposing residents to rapid and repeated clearing efforts. Additionally, this can discourage residents from camping in the most dangerous and disruptive locations. Negatively though, this does effectively criminalize camping to a degree. By taking these actions, the city is declaring that camping is not desirable, and while this is true even for camp residents, often they feel as though they have no other option. This, much like the equity issues with camp clearing, relates back to the effectiveness of the outreach activities; if the outreach activities can effectively help the majority of the residents achieve their goals of moving

toward a stable living situation, then the negative equity implications of this practice are mitigated. Overall, there is no clear answer whether this activity is equitable or not. The pros and cons of this type of activity need to be weighed on a case by case basis.

This policy for the city of Seattle overall has some major benefits, but also has flaw that cannot be overlooked. Theoretically, if every step went according to plan and the camp residents utilized the resources available, this would overall be an equitable process that effectively addresses the needs of the homeless while maintaining the safety for City of Seattle employees and the public at large. The problem is that perfect execution is never possible. Firstly, if all of the homeless individuals were to seek help and use all of the resources available, the city would not have the means to support all of these people in achieving their goals. Many of the people who fall into this category need some form of subsidized housing, and right now the city, county, and state do not have the resources to house all of the homeless. Additionally, things like rehab and job connection programs take money, and currently there is not enough money to fund all of the necessary programs that outreach employees connect the homeless individuals to. Another major issue is that it is a common occurrence for homeless individuals to not take advantage of resources that are available. There are many causes for this, but the overarching way to describe this is there is not enough trust within the homeless community that the city, county, or state is listening to the homeless' needs and working to solve their issues. This again comes down to a matter of resources and finance; there is not enough money to properly connect with all of the homeless population to ensure their voice is heard and their specific issues can be addressed.

On the bright side of this issue, the city is genuinely making an effort to address this issue. The fact that all of the different procedures and departments described above exist show that there is some level of dedication to address this issue. Given the resources at the city's disposal, the policies they have enacted do address some of the most pressing issues related to homelessness. This is shown by the fact that Seattle has a relatively low rate of chronic homelessness compared to the national average (Andrews 2019). The ultimate determination of how effective a homelessness mitigation plan is how resources are distributed and how the needs of the homeless are being balanced with other external pressures. As was mentioned previously, homelessness is highly stigmatized in this country, and historically the policy regarding homelessness has been to ignore their needs and remove them from the public eye. In this case the City of Seattle has struck a reasonable balance given the resources available and the pressures coming from different areas. The city's outreach and mitigation programs, while far from perfect, do provide for many of the needs of the homeless. There is however always room for improvement. Until there are no homeless persons with all those who become homeless being immediately rehoused, the ideal situation will never be achieved.

The policy for the City of Seattle plays a critical role in determining WSDOT's policy and action for addressing homelessness along state right of way. Primarily, in Seattle, since WSDOT partners with the City of Seattle, they are beholden by the regulations put forth in FAS 17-01. Beyond this however, WSDOT has purposefully utilized these city guidelines in creating its own homeless encampment removal procedures. By ensuring these two guidelines mesh well together, it creates the best connection between these two entities as they work together to solve these extremely

pertinent issues. This is why it is critical for state DOTs to thoroughly understand local jurisdiction's regulations with regards to homeless encampments.

To support the city of Seattle in removing all of the homeless encampments along state right of way, the Northwest Maintenance Region of WSDOT has created its own dedicated crew to clearing homeless encampments. This crew works mostly within the Seattle city limits and has an ongoing partnership with the City of Seattle, Seattle HSD, and SPD. The planned overlap in policy from WSDOT and the City of Seattle greatly increases the effectiveness of this group, as well as any other WSDOT groups that participate in activities to clear homeless encampments. This highlights the important idea that state DOTs should regularly communicate with any local agencies they partner with regularly to address homelessness to create policies that build off each other to minimize conflicts when these groups inevitably need to work together.

4.2.2 City of Tacoma

Another city that works closely with WSDOT to address homeless encampments on WSDOT right of way is the city of Tacoma. Tacoma, as with Seattle, has one of the most successful homeless outreach programs in the state. Much like Seattle, Tacoma has several departments that coordinate together to address the issue of homelessness in the city. Currently, the city is in an ongoing state of public health emergency. This declaration, which has been amended several times, will be in effect until 95 percent of unsheltered homeless from the Pierce County point in time count have access to shelter for three consecutive years (Homelessness Services - City of Tacoma 2020). This declaration has both functional and ideological benefits for addressing the issue of homelessness. Functionally, it reduces some of the otherwise necessary bureaucratic steps to apply funding and implement projects to provide shelter for individuals in need. Ideologically, it is publicly showing that the city views this as one of the most pressing issues currently being faced, and that it requires bold and immediate action. This is in stark contrast to the historical thinking of homelessness where the root causes of this issue were rarely addressed. Additionally, by treating this as a public health issue, this humanizes the stressors being put on the homeless population and shows this is not an issue that can just be shunted to the side.

Like Seattle, Tacoma offers many services that address the needs of the homeless in that city. One of the primary resources the City provides is its network of shelters. These shelters can take many forms. The City of Tacoma also provides several traditional shelter programs. Tacoma operates four year-round shelters that have the capacity to house 312 adults and 163 families a day. This capacity however is nowhere near adequate, as the shelters need to reject over 100 adults and 100 families each day who are forced to find alternative sleeping arrangements (Homelessness Services - City of Tacoma 2020). This shows how there are not enough resources available now to provide all of the services required by the homeless population, as this is a common issue in almost every city in the US.

Another form of shelter provided by the city is what is deemed "City Authorized Emergency Shelter Sites" (Homelessness Services - City of Tacoma 2020). These sites are city designated camp sites where people can go to temporarily set up shelter and have access to basic amenities such as power, running water, garbage, and bathroom facilities. These sites are designed to be

low-barrier sites such that it is simple for homeless people to access the resources needed. These sites do not require background checks to be used, and they allow for pets and couples to remain together (Homelessness Services - City of Tacoma 2020). One particular site of this type that has had a good deal of success is the “Stability Site”. This site is a general site where the City of Tacoma’s outreach teams and encampment engagement teams directly refer people they interact with. This site also is a low barrier site and allows for the same basic amenities as the other authorized city sites. This system has proven to be successful, with a 39 percent of its participants transitioning to long term housing programs (Homelessness Services - City of Tacoma 2020). Overall, these sites are an effective way to reach some of the homeless community and build trust with them. It was noted in one of the reports by Portland State that one of the biggest barriers to most shelter systems is that they force couples and pets to separate which causes many individuals to not utilize these resources (Bernhardt 1995). By providing an option where this is not a conflict, a greater percentage of the homeless population can be reached and thus connected to valuable resources. Apart from the larger scale sites listed above, Tacoma has several Emergency Micro-Shelters (TEMS). The TEMS camp contains 22 of these shelters that were created in response to health and safety concerns from growing encampments in People’s Park, a public park near downtown Tacoma. This camp also has the same types of basic amenities as are provided by the Authorized Emergency Shelter Sites (Homelessness Services - City of Tacoma 2020). These shelters were made possible by the declaration of a state of emergency by the city to provide rapid funding for this project. As with the other sites, these shelters provide an excellent opportunity to build rapport with the homeless community and to provide them with services to address their short and long term needs and reduce the stress on the traditional shelter network.

Tacoma also allows for different organizations to sponsor temporary shelter where homeless individuals can camp legally for a time. Most often the organizations that fund this are religious and nonprofit organizations. These camps need to be permitted by the city which ensures that the organizations have solid plans to meet the safety, health, and basic needs of the potential camp residents (Homelessness Services - City of Tacoma 2020). This is another way for the city to reduce the burden on the traditional shelter system which is grossly over capacity.

Apart from direct services, Tacoma also participates in long term planning programs to help guide its policies moving into the future. One main way they do this is in conjunction with Pierce County and the city of Lakewood through a program called Continuum of Care (CoC). This organization provides an oversight committee that guides the creation, maintenance, and implementation of the plan to end homelessness in the county and cities (Continuum of Care). This is an excellent way for Tacoma to ensure that it is addressing the issue of homelessness regionally as well as locally by interfacing with neighboring cities and the county.

Understanding the extent of the services provided by a city is critical to determining how the remainder of its services operate. This in turn affects how these operations interact outside organizations like WSDOT. This is especially true in Tacoma’s case. The City of Tacoma, like the City of Seattle, is partnered with WSDOT to help address homeless encampments along WSDOT right of way (Cowan 2020). Tacoma does this with their standard encampment outreach group. This group is called the Homeless Outreach Team (HOT). The HOT is comprised of four

city of Tacoma police officers, two Neighborhood and Community Services staff, and one Designated Crisis Responder. This group is fully dedicated to contacting and communicating with homeless encampments throughout the city. They play an integral role in all of the City of Tacoma homeless camp clearing activities. Initially, after a camp is identified but before a course of action is determined, the HOT will contact the camp to communicate with its neighbors and assess the potential threats and issues to the camp residents and the public (Homelessness Services - City of Tacoma 2020). With this contact, not only does it provide accurate information about the camp, but it also begins to build rapport and trust with the camp residents, and gives them longer to attempt to connect these individuals with the various resources provided by the city. If the camp is deemed hazardous enough to remove, then the city uses a similar approach to that of Seattle. First, a 72 hour notice will be posted with pertinent information about the cleanup procedure and the resources that are available for the camp residents, including temporary shelter information. On the date of the removal, the camp will be swept by the City of Tacoma Police, while outreach staff are present to interact with any present camp residents. Then, the removal is conducted by either a designated contractor of the City of Tacoma or Tacoma City Services. As in Seattle, during the removal process, the city will attempt to salvage and store any personal property of the camp so that the camp residents can retrieve any of these items. Then, after the camp is cleared, the city may complete some preventative maintenance, which the city calls site reclamation. This is a process where the city conducts some of the standard preventative maintenance described above to discourage a camp from reforming (Homelessness Services - City of Tacoma 2020). This process is essentially the same as Seattle's, so the safety procedure is not detailed. Similarly, the positives and negatives of using this method to clear homeless encampments are not explored again as they are essentially the same as the City of Seattle.

What is unique about the City of Tacoma's homeless encampment policy is how it interacts with WSDOT for homeless encampments along state right of way and how this affects the multi-agency approach. In this case, the City of Tacoma compiles all of the complaints and reports of camps on any public land. This includes WSDOT property, and as such, they conduct all of the prioritization of camps. They do inform WSDOT of the camp however and of the process and plan. During this period, all of the outreach is done by the HOT teams by their standard method. The difference to standard city of Tacoma policy happens during the cleanup. In this case, instead of the city employees or contractors conducting the work, the removal work is done by WSDOT staff (Homelessness Services - City of Tacoma 2020)(Cowan 2020). This is done following the WSDOT homeless camp removal policies detailed above. This partnership has been highly successful for both Tacoma and WSDOT. As in Seattle, this allows the outreach team, in this case the HOT, to use its expertise and resources that WSDOT does not have to better support the homeless encampment residents. This is of great benefit to WSDOT because it does not have to work on its own to address these particular issues; instead WSDOT can focus on the transportation issues that it faces and allow other agencies to better address the other pressing issues of homelessness. This partnership has been so successful that like the Northwest Maintenance Region, the Olympic Maintenance Region that covers Tacoma is receiving joint funding with the City of Tacoma to get funding to address the issue of homelessness together. WSDOT will use that money to fund two full-time staff dedicated to addressing homelessness (Cowan 2020). This

is an excellent step for WSDOT to take as it will allow the department to have a more consistent connection with Tacoma and therefore be better equipped to effectively and equitably address homeless encampments as they are created along WSDOT right of way.

4.2.3 City of Olympia and Thurston County

Apart from the cities of Seattle and Tacoma, WSDOT also partners with a multitude of other jurisdictions across the state to address homelessness. While these two cities hold the vast majority of the homeless encampments in the state, this does not diminish the importance of addressing homelessness across the Puget Sound region and state. These other jurisdictions that WSDOT works with have many differences to those of Seattle and Tacoma. In general, they all tend to be much smaller than those large cities. Accordingly, the resources they have at their disposal are significantly lower as well. How these cities interact with homelessness in general and how WSDOT interacts with these jurisdictions in addressing homelessness then must also shift with the changes in resources.

One city that highlights this phenomenon is the city of Olympia. Olympia, being much smaller than both Seattle and Tacoma, has to take a very different approach to addressing the issue of homelessness within its borders. Olympia has a significant homeless population, with 800 total homeless persons being counted in the 2019 point in time count. Of this population, 394 were found to be living in unsheltered conditions throughout the city. In this case, Thurston County, in which Olympia resides, is responsible for all of the long-term planning related to homelessness. The city then is responsible for providing the required resources and programs to achieve the goals set forth in the county plans (Homelessness in Downtown 2017). This however is not as simple a process as it is in Seattle and Tacoma. The city acknowledges that “the city lacks the regional policy authority and financial resources to address the issue in a significant way” (Homelessness in Downtown 2017). This is in sharp contrast to Seattle and Tacoma where the cities have enough funding and political power to undertake the programs cited above. This lack of funding ability affects all groups involved in addressing homelessness in Olympia, including WSDOT.

Thurston county is significantly less dense than Pierce or King county, with most of the land being some form of rural land. As such, several cities in the county partnered with Olympia have opted to take a different approach to solving homelessness. This approach relies on the pooling of resources to better address the issues present and better utilize the financial and political resources available. This idea is encompassed in the Thurston County 5-year Homeless Housing Plan. There are three key takeaways from this document that are being used to guide the application of resources to address this issue. First and foremost, the main course of action is to continue expanding and creating resources for the homeless to utilize to address their situation (Harris 2019). This is ultimately what will directly affect the homeless population in a positive way and acknowledging that is important to moving forward. That being said, this does not solve the issue of lack of funding and support from outside areas to implement or enhance resources for the homeless which is still a major issue for this county. The next two items center around creating deeper connections with surrounding municipalities to enhance the network of resources for the homeless through connections in the community. This takes two main forms, one being standardization of best practices of these different municipalities and the other being synchronizing

local homeless policy to create a single regional policy (Harris 2019). Both of these ideas, though distinct, serve the same general goal; to expand response to homelessness to a regional level to utilize the benefits of scale. The general idea is to have the whole be greater than the sum of the parts.

There are many ways for this goal of regionalizing the response to homelessness can be realized. First though, there needs to be communication between the different jurisdictions, cities, and municipalities to ensure that all affected parties are aware and supportive of these measures. In this case, they utilized several documents to achieve this goal. The primary document for this is an interlocal agreement that created the Thurston County Regional Health and Human Services Council. This document was signed by 7 cities and towns within Thurston County, as well as the county itself. These cities include Olympia, Lacey, Tumwater, Yelm, Tenino, Rainier, and Bucoda (Urban Cities Ad Hoc Committee on Homelessness & Housing 2018). This council is responsible for allocating a pool of resources from all of these different cities to address the Human Service needs of these communities.

Apart from this council, Thurston county is also responsible for creating the Thurston County Homeless Crisis Response System. This is a system made with input from all of the above municipalities as well as other county wide organizations that work to address the issue of homelessness. This serves as a critical central document that all resources in the county can use as an overarching guideline to complete their individual goals surrounding homelessness. This document mostly revolves around ensuring that all of the planning for each agency in Thurston County is adequately addressing the needs of the homeless population they are serving (Menser 2019). Both of these documents clearly show how this county is adopting the strategy of addressing the issue of homelessness from a regional perspective and not a local one.

Finally, Thurston County has partnered with the nonprofit organization United Way of Thurston County. This organization was created through a memorandum of understanding between the Thurston County Regional Health and Human Services Council and the United Way of Thurston County. This memorandum of understanding is aimed at creating a “Community Investment Partnership” (Urban Cities Ad Hoc Committee on Homelessness & Housing 2018). This partnership aims to combining the resources of the council with the resources of the non-profit, which holds many resources that help address homelessness (United Way of Thurston County 2020). Later, the cities of Olympia, Lacey, and Tumwater also joined this memorandum of understanding (United Way of Thurston County 2020). This again shows the dedication of the county and local cities to elevate this pressing issue to a regional level.

This brings us back to Olympia, which is part of this larger organization to address homelessness in all of Thurston County. Olympia has by far the largest concentration of homeless population and homeless resources in Thurston County. Of the 41 documented resource providers throughout the county, 22 of them reside within downtown Olympia with another 4 within close proximity (Urban Cities Ad Hoc Committee on Homelessness & Housing 2018). This means that Olympia is much more burdened with the issue of homelessness than other cities in this county. As such, they have developed their own response plan to address their issue of homelessness. This is used in conjunction with the Thurston County Homeless Crisis Response System. Both of these

documents are used to guide the overall approach that is taken to fighting homelessness in Olympia (Menser 2019). The Olympia Homeless Response plan is designed to supplement the Thurston County Homeless Crisis Response System. The Olympia Homeless Response plan is a synthesized planning document that aims to define different aspects of the response to homelessness and rely that information for use in actual implementation. This document is split into three sections: streamlining and enhancing rapid response, expanding affordable housing options and homeless prevention, and increasing public health and safety. All of these categories have several strategies that further each main goal (Homelessness Response Plan - Strategies and Potential Implementation 2019). These strategies can then be used by individual resources to better define and execute a plan to address homelessness in Olympia

Additionally, the City of Olympia does have more funding streams than just with the Thurston County Regional Health and Human Services Council. One major source of funding is the Olympia Home Fund. This is a fund of \$16 million designated to fund affordable housing and other long-term housing programs to address the issue of homelessness (Olympia Home Fund Administrative and Financial Plan 2017). 65 percent of that money goes towards new construction of shelter and affordable housing, with the remaining 35 percent supporting operations (Homelessness - City of Olympia 2020). This is a critical source of funding that every city with a significant homeless population has, including Seattle, Tacoma, Bellingham, Vancouver, and Everett. This represents the bulk of their long-term housing funding.

Olympia also has many short-term shelter programs in place in the city. One such program is their 24/7 shelter and secure storage locations. There are currently 3 24/7 shelter locations in Olympia (Homelessness - City of Olympia 2020). These serve the same function as the shelters in the other cities described above and come with the same issues. Beyond the shelters are the secure storage facilities for the homeless. These take the form of two storage containers in which the homeless can store their personal belongings, which will be open to access twice a day every day (Homelessness - City of Olympia 2020). This is an excellent step to increasing the usability of homeless shelters. One major deterrent for homeless people to use nightly shelters is they have nowhere to store their belongings in that shelter, and thus choose to remain outside so as to not lose their belongings (Bernhardt 1995). This is a great step forwards because now those people who might otherwise have refused services for this reason can now securely store their belongings and spend nights in the shelter.

Another critical resource available in Olympia is the mitigation sites they have created recently. These mitigation sites are temporary camping locations where individuals can get access to basic sanitation and other services (Homelessness - City of Olympia 2020). These camps are essentially the same as the authorized emergency shelter sites in Tacoma; they are a simple option to slightly increase the living conditions of the homeless and increase their contact with important resources. Also, like Tacoma, Olympia operates a tiny homes village, called the Plum Street Tiny Home Village (Homelessness - City of Olympia 2020). This again serves the same purpose as in other cities to provide amenities, shelter, and resources to those who need them.

The final resource the city provides is in conjunction with some of the churches and other religious organizations around the city. This is done through the city and faith community pilot partnership.

This program allows for faith organizations and non-profits to set up transitional housing and shelters on their property to serve the homeless. So far, there have been three sites set up which has created approximately 20 new shelter beds (Homelessness - City of Olympia 2020). This project is a great way to both begin to solve the issue of homelessness and engage the community and increase understanding about this issue and about the homeless population in general.

The main outreach service for the City of Olympia is their Crisis Response and Peer Navigators units. These unit specializes in contacting homeless individuals living on the street and assisting with their needs. The Crisis Response unit is a collaboration between the Olympia Police Department and Recovery Innovations International. This groups goal is to provide any form of services the city can provide (Homelessness - City of Olympia 2020). The Peer Navigators are a special group of outreach staff whose goal is to connect with those who most persistently have contact with the Olympia Police Department. These employees are specially trained to deliver mental health and substance abuse support for these most vulnerable individuals (Homelessness - City of Olympia 2020).

The Crisis Response unit is the group that most commonly interacts with WSDOT when clearing homeless encampments along WSDOT right of way using the multi-agency approach. This group provides the outreach and law enforcement aspect for clearing camps on the freeway. The general approach is much the same for both WSDOT and the outreach team as it is in other cities, so we will not repeat the same details.

The difference here is in the outcome after the removal. In general, getting a positive outcome as frequently as in the larger cities like Tacoma and Seattle is much more challenging in small municipalities like Olympia. Currently, their shelter system and mitigation camp are even more overburdened by percentage than the larger cities, even though the homeless population is significantly smaller (Cowan 2020). It was mentioned before how Olympia simply does not have the resources at its disposal like larger cities. Moving to a regional model as Thurston County is doing is a good step to address this issue, but these changes have all happened in the last 5 years, which is not enough time to see significant changes to the patters of homelessness. This phenomenon is generally true as well; almost all smaller cities are less equipped to address homelessness than larger municipalities.

This has an innate effect on WSDOT because WSDOT is largely beholden to the ability of local agencies to provide support in outreach and services. In the cases of Seattle and Tacoma, this works quite well because they both have a robust system for addressing the needs of the homeless. In other cases, however, this is not as effective, as with Olympia. Since Olympia's system is less robust, the activities of WSDOT clearing camps do not actually address the underlying issue. This merely displaces the homeless camp from one location where it can reform just as easily in another location. This only treats the symptoms of homelessness and not the root causes. To truly address this issue, the camp residents need to receive support to be rehoused in stable living conditions such that they do not become homeless in the near future and just create a new camp.

Herein lies the inherent dilemma of a state DOT addressing homelessness; by relying on the services of other groups to ensure the treatments solve the root issues WSDOT does not have full

agency over the outcome of its homeless encampment clearing program on its roads. This is certainly not an ideal situation for state DOTs to be in, as they want to be able to solve these issues in the most efficient way possible. This means that in general, there are two ways to improve this process for state DOTs: either by giving them agency in the total outcome of homeless camp removal or by ensuring that all local agencies can adequately address the root causes of homelessness. As has been discussed before, the success of the multi-agency approach comes down to the fact it is much more resource efficient than having WSDOT gain full agency in clearing and rehousing homeless camp residents. It is possible for WSDOT to fund outreach staff and pay for the camp residents housing, but it would be prohibitively more expensive than utilizing local agencies that already address homeless populations and have available resources. This then leaves one general path forward, to improve the ability for local municipalities to address the root causes of homelessness in each community.

4.3 Local Regional Duality

All of these examples lead to another avenue of thinking around this whole topic. As we can see, homelessness is not a contained issue; homeless encampments are everywhere. In Washington, they exist all the way from the Canadian border to Vancouver, and from Seattle to Spokane. This highlights that homelessness is at some level inherently regional. This idea is held in stark contrast to the methods used by our cities and counties at addressing this issue, as their solutions each only affect their specific jurisdiction. It is important to note that homelessness is still a local issue too; homeless encampments are where they are; the residents do not just decide to move to a new city or county on a whim. This implies that our current system of addressing homelessness is designed to address the local aspects of homelessness but not the regional aspects.

In actuality, some progress has been made recently in increasing the regional scope of addressing homelessness. It has already been mentioned that Thurston County is combining the local measures to address regional homelessness by creating the Thurston County Homeless Crisis Response System (Menser 2019). Other actions have also been taken in Washington to bring the issue of homelessness to a more regional scale. In December of 2019, Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan and King County Executive Dow Constantine signed an interlocal agreement that created a King County regional Homelessness Authority. This was approved by the Metropolitan King County Council, Regional Policy Committee, and the Seattle City Council. This organization was created to have a central governing body oversee policy, funding, and services for the homeless throughout King County, which has the highest rate of homelessness in the state. This will have the same general effect as the Thurston County Homeless Crisis Response System (Seattle and King County Create New Unified Regional Homelessness Authority: Evidence-Based, Accountable, and Equitable - King County 2019). Essentially, this will centralize the funding of all homelessness projects and ensure that all cities and municipalities throughout the county have a cohesive and coordinated approach to addressing homelessness. Like in the case with the Thurston County Homeless Crisis Response System and Olympia, cities like Seattle will still oversee their own programs for homelessness, the only difference being that funding will come from a centralized location which will also provide coordination and oversight. Additionally, this governing body

will provide general policy directions to ensure that all municipalities are tackling this issue as a cohesive force as opposed to individually.

This new emphasis on regionality affects how WSDOT can interact with local agencies. WSDOT as an organization is inherently regional as it spans the entire state, yet its maintenance operations have much more of a local aspect to them, as each individual maintenance operation usually only covers a small area. In between these two scales are the maintenance regions, which fit more closely to the scale of counties. These inherent size differences lead to a natural method for WSDOT to fit itself into the bigger societal picture for addressing homelessness. In terms of general guiding policy, WSDOT should remain closer to the regional scale, as in the example of Thurston or King County. General guiding policy in this case is the overarching policy that mostly relates to long term planning and camp removal prioritization. This will ensure that the higher-level policy of WSDOT best aligns with the most jurisdictions as their planning will also naturally follow the regional trends. Conversely, the actual operations of camp removal need to remain highly local. This is because each individual camp, and therefore camp removal, is a local issue. This will ensure that a WSDOT clearing team can mesh well with whichever local agencies they work with, which is imperative for the safety of WSDOT employees and increasing the equitability of homeless encampment removals. Overall understanding and fitting into this dichotomy will bring the most success for WSDOT because it will allow them to best mesh with the overarching goals of a region and the local municipalities at the same time which will lead to the greatest level of safety, equity, and long term success of homeless camp removal operations.

4.4 Federal Laws and Regulations

There are greater governing policies that have caused the response to homelessness to be set up as it is. All of the work described above that is being done at the local and regional level is also affected by decisions at higher levels of organization. This is true at both the state and federal level. Federally there are several organizations that have a direct impact on how homeless encampment removal policy and homeless support resources are used on a daily basis. The most important organization at the federal level the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This is the agency through which most federal funds are allocated for addressing homelessness. They run several programs that both directly support homeless assistance programs and give funding to states to distribute (Homelessness Assistance Programs 2020).

One of the programs that is directly relevant to many of the homeless response programs for the cities and counties described above is the Title V of the McKinney-Vento Homelessness Assistance Act. This program allows for non-profit organizations, local, and state governments to lease federal property to assist those experiencing homelessness (Homelessness Assistance Programs 2020). This act also mainly provides resources to support youths experiencing homelessness maintain their school experience. This includes funding sources for school agencies to utilize to support homeless students and rules mandating that a child must have access to the same public school (Foley 2002).

Another program that HUD supports is the CoC program. This program is designed to in general support community wide goals of addressing homelessness. It does so by providing funding for state governments, local governments, and nonprofit organizations to rapidly address the needs of their communities with regards to homelessness (Homelessness Assistance Programs 2020). This is an active program in the state of Washington. Every county in the Puget sound region has an active CoC program. As was described earlier, this is a critical program that is helping Pierce County move their homelessness response programs to a more regional level (Continuum of Care). This highlights how in general the CoC is best utilized to address this issue from a wider community-based approach as opposed to a local government-based approach.

The HUD is also responsible for mandating all of the point in time counts that have been highlighted throughout this paper. These counts are conducted by each county through the CoC once per year and are aimed at recording data over time so that trends of homelessness can be analyzed. Additionally, it gives a standard baseline level of data for all counties to work with (Homelessness Assistance Programs 2020). Having this set of data is critical for many reasons. First, it gives counties and their local cities information on exactly how big of a homeless population there is. Without this information, these groups could not properly create plans and programs to solve the issue of homelessness. Additionally, this allows for trends to be found in how homelessness changes over time. This allows for these municipalities to look to the future to see how the population of homeless might change and grow in the future. This will also show which services might not be adequate to address the needs of the homeless population in the future, and thus show where these municipalities need to improve to maintain or improve their current level of service.

These are three important examples of programs from a federal level, although there are several more. These programs serve two main purposes. The first, which is highlighted above, is to provide sources of funding for different groups to utilize. The second is to provide unifying policy guidelines for the entire country. Finally, the third is to ensure there is a common data collection method that accurately captures data across the nation. This is done primarily through mandating that all groups that receive federal funds, either directly or indirectly, have a homelessness plan that adequately shows how these resources will be used (Foley 2002). It is important to note that WSDOT does not receive any federal money to address homelessness, and so does not need to produce one of these plans. However, essentially every jurisdiction WSDOT works with in its homeless camp removal procedures under the multi-agency approach does need to complete some form of a formal strategy plan to address homelessness which does have a major impact on WSDOT's operations policies.

Another federal agency that has an innate impact on WSDOT's Policies is the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). The WSDOT guidelines for homeless encampment removal explicitly cite OSHA as one of its guiding resources (Safety Procedures and Guidelines Manual M 75-01 2018). OSHA in general is in charge of ensuring that all workers have a safe working environment where harm is mitigated. In this particular case, the guidelines use OSHA standard 1910.120 which covers operations near hazardous waste (1910.120 - Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response 2013). This has direct implications for homeless encampment cleanup

as these camps often have hazardous waste present. This regulation ensures that there is a consistent approach to ensuring employee safety. This is especially pertinent for state DOTs like WSDOT, as they need to ensure that all of their employees are able to maintain a safe working environment.

These federal regulations explain many of the similarities between different state DOT homeless response policies, procedures, and best practices that utilize the multi-agency approach. Since essentially all outreach agencies are required to create plans to address homelessness and have the same federal funding available, the programs they create are all somewhat similar (Homelessness Assistance Programs 2020). There certainly are differences in context, scope, and implementation of these different resources across the country, but the most basic structures of these programs are very similar. Additionally, all of these state DOTs must adhere to the same safety rules put forth by OSHA as the main federal workplace safety organization (1910.120 - Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response 2013). This adds similarity to any state DOT's procedure, even if they do not have specific written policy for addressing homeless encampments. These similarities can be seen through the different states that were surveyed, and the fact that virtually all of them use a form of the multi-agency approach where the state employees only participate in the removal of camps and preventative maintenance.

4.5 State Laws and Regulations

Aside from federal and local regulations, WSDOT homeless camp removal policy is also affected by state laws and regulations regarding homelessness. The Revised Code of Washington (RCW) has several sections dedicated to the administration and funding of homeless support programs, specifically chapters 43.185, 43.185A, 43.185B, and 43.185C (Title 43 RCW: STATE GOVERNMENT—EXECUTIVE). These four sections serve as the main statewide governing law for allocating state funds and dictating the requirements for these resources. The first section, 43.185, defines how Washington shall go about creating housing assistance programs. This includes highlighting the issues causing and caused by homelessness. Most importantly, this legal codes allows the creation of the Washington Housing Trust Fund, which allows for the state to create and maintain a fund solely for the purposes of providing housing and addressing homelessness (Title 43 RCW: STATE GOVERNMENT—EXECUTIVE). The second section, 43.185A, specifically addresses issues of affordable housing. This creates the administrative processes that allow for funds from the Washington Housing Trust Fund to be put towards projects that create affordable housing (Title 43 RCW: STATE GOVERNMENT—EXECUTIVE). Section 43.185B sets forth the idea that in order to adequately address the issue of homelessness a unified policy is needed to ensure that all local governments are acting towards the same goals. This mandates that all organizations that receive state funding are required to create plans that describe how any funding they receive fits into the greater structure of policy for the state (Title 43 RCW: STATE GOVERNMENT—EXECUTIVE). This section also works in conjunction with the mandate from the McKinney-Vento Homelessness Assistance Act that requires all groups who receive federal funding to create plan documents as well. Finally, section 43.185C describes how funds from the Washington Housing Trust Fund can be used for homeless housing programs. This is similar to section 43.185A in scope but covers a much wider breadth as there are many different

types of programs that are applicable. This section also requires the creation of local homeless housing plans for any group that receives funding (Title 43 RCW: STATE GOVERNMENT—EXECUTIVE).

As with the funding programs created by HUD, these programs do not directly affect WSDOT because WSDOT does not receive funding for any of these types of programs. However, this does have a significant indirect impact on WSDOT because of its impact on the partners of WSDOT in the multi-agency approach. Almost every local government that has homeless support programs receives some form of state funding, and thus must abide by these state regulations. As with the federal requirements, this does add some continuity for organizations like WSDOT that address the issue of homelessness across many jurisdictions. It also allows WSDOT to tailor its homeless encampment clearing policies to ensure that it follows all state regulations and therefore is compatible with any local jurisdictions procedures.

Similar to federal safety regulations, Washington also has several workplace safety regulations that mirror OSHA. These are managed by the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries (Washington State Department of Labor and Industries 2020). WSDOT references these guidelines in its homeless encampment removal procedure as well (Safety Procedures and Guidelines Manual M 75-01 2018). This adds another set of protections for DOT workers to ensure they remain safe while working.

4.6 Implications for WSDOT and other state DOTs

All of the regulations and policies from these different jurisdictions are weaved together to create a complicated set of constraints that WSDOT must follow to meet the requirements given by law and the needs of the homeless and the public. Understanding of how all of these groups interact then is a critical step towards realizing this goal. A flowchart has been created that shows all of the connections between these various groups.

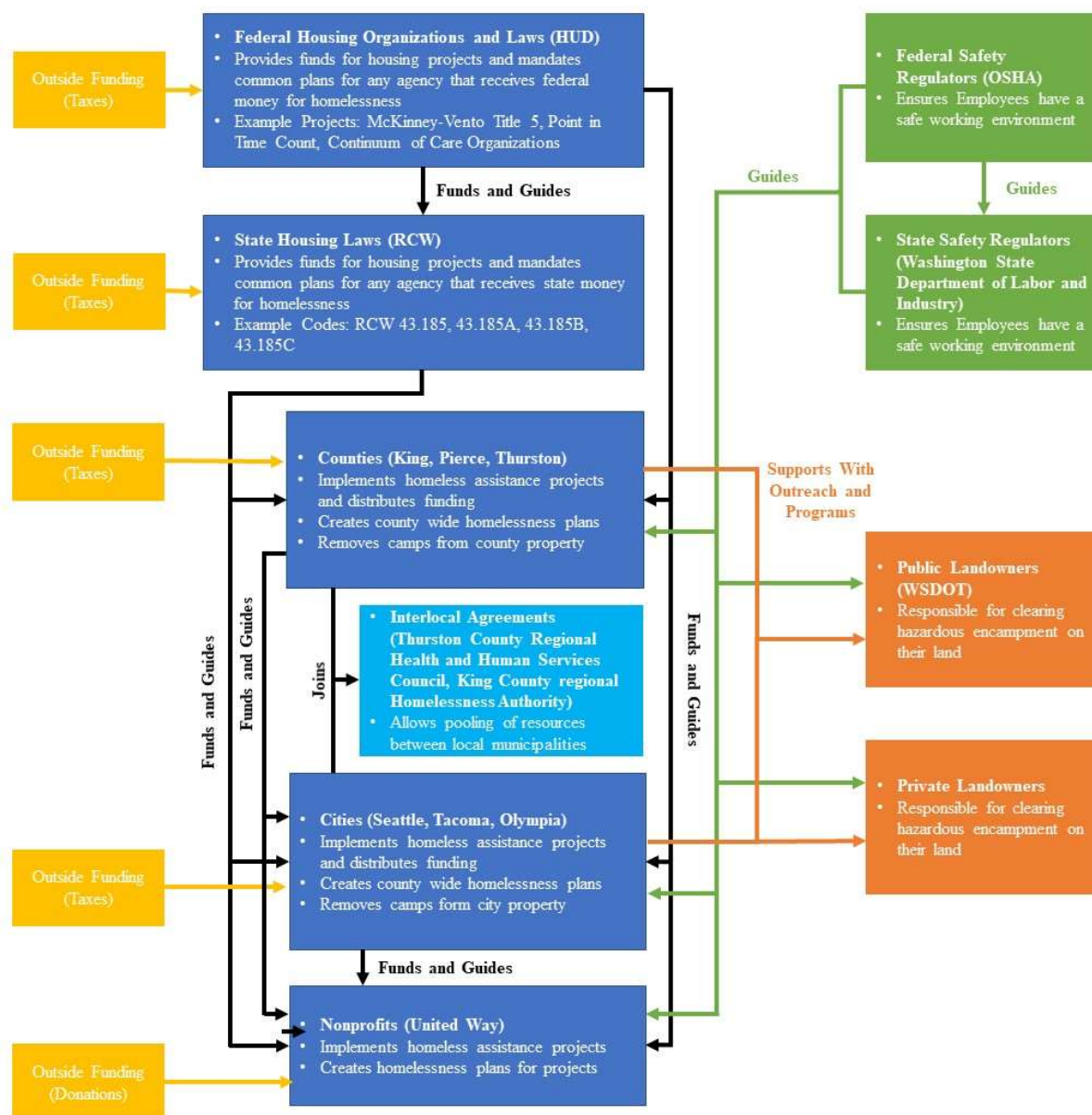


Figure 4.1: Flowchart Representing Hierarchy of Agencies Addressing Homelessness

This flow chart shows us where WSDOT fits into this puzzle. As a public landowner, they are not under the direct influence of the federal or state government agencies that address homelessness. The only federal and state regulations that WSDOT is beholden to is the safety regulations for their employees. However, they still need to receive support locally from the counties and cities in the multi-agency approach. These groups are funded by federal and state sources and therefore need to follow their guidelines. This indirect connection does still affect WSDOT and how it constructs its policies and procedures.

This flow chart also highlights the inherent conflict between regional and local organizations for WSDOT. Currently, WSDOT is only supported by cities or counties in its removal efforts. On its

own, this is logical because you would not have a city or county outreach crew working outside their jurisdiction. However, in the planning portion of homeless camp removal, WSDOT is not connected. Most of this activity is done regionally (county size or larger) which is then supplemented by local planning at the city level. WSDOT as an organization is inherently regional and inter-regional as it spans the whole state yet does not have a direct connection to this long-term planning process for addressing homelessness.

As was found in the analysis of state DOT's current practices section, the multi-agency approach does have advantages for WSDOT. By creating a policy that dictates how WSDOT employees remove encampments in accordance with federal and state work safety guidelines, this ensures that a high level of safety is simple to maintain for employees. This high level of safety is also reached by compounding this safety benefit of concrete policy with the added expertise of the supporting agencies. By having local experts in outreach and law enforcement, this shifts that burden away from WSDOT employees. Additionally, this partnership drastically reduces the cost for WSDOT. If WSDOT had to fully fund outreach and police services for its removal operations, the cost of conducting these operations would skyrocket.

Apart from the positives in safety and cost, this is also generally the most equitable option for removing homeless encampments. While this system is far from perfect for addressing the needs of the homeless campers, by using the multi-agency approach, the camp residents are exposed to many more resources than they otherwise would be if the camps were only removed. The outreach component of this approach is critical in this regard, as it emphasizes face to face interactions with outreach staff and the camp residents. This builds rapport and trust with the residents and thus makes them much more likely to access resources and find a positive outcome to their situation.

There are some issues that exist with WSDOT's multi-agency approach. The biggest issue with this approach is that it requires a great deal of inter-agency communication for it to be successful. Having longstanding relationships with different partner local agencies helps to relieve this pressure, but this can only help so much. If proper communication does not occur this drastically reduces the safety of WSDOT employees and lessens the likelihood that the camp residents can connect with resources that they can use, which is a loss for all involved. This communication issue is also compounded by the local-regional duality of the issue of homelessness. It has been mentioned several times above how this issue affects WSDOT because WSDOT has to simultaneously span both the local and regional aspects of this issue where other agencies do not have to do this as much. This makes it more difficult for WSDOT to ensure that it can maintain the best outcome for all parties.

As was found with the analysis of state practices, the multi-agency approach is still the best way for WSDOT to address homelessness along its right of way. In general, this was found to be the safest option and to provide the best outcome for the homeless camp residents. Naturally, there are flaws with this method that can still be addressed. For these issues to be addressed, we need to look to the future to see how homelessness might shift in the coming years.

Chapter 5: Future Trends of Homelessness

Understanding how homelessness will change in the near future is critical to ensuring that the response is adequate to address all necessary facets of this issue. Predicting this shift is not an exact science, as there are many variables that influence the overall issue of homelessness. The rate of homelessness is inherently volatile, so there is no perfect way to make a prediction in the shift of homelessness year to year.

5.1 Nationwide Trends in Homelessness

Across the United States homelessness remains a critical issue for a large portion of our population. Currently there are over 500,000 homeless people on any given night in the US. Officially, this number has been decreasing over the past several years. From 2007 to 2018, homelessness has been reduced from just over 600,000 people per night, a reduction of 15 percent (The-State-of-Homelessness-in-America 2019). This reduction however is not indicative of an actual reduction in overall homelessness. Instead, most of this reduction can be attributed to the resignation of different types of housing programs. Currently, living in temporary shelter is one of the groups being considered homeless, however rapid rehousing projects are not. In recent years, rapid rehousing projects have become more widely used and as a result the more traditional temporary shelters are on the decline. The trend of shifting to rapid rehousing then explains the dip in counted homelessness when in actuality the number of people who are vulnerable to being homeless has remained essentially constant (The-State-of-Homelessness-in-America 2019). This shows that current efforts are not adequate in reducing homelessness, and that homelessness will be a pressing issue moving into the future.

On a national scale, homelessness varies greatly between different regions of the country. Homelessness is highly concentrated on both the west coast and the northeast of the country. The states and districts with the highest rates of homelessness are the District of Columbia, New York, Hawaii, Oregon, and California. These four states and the District of Columbia contain over 45 percent of the total homeless population of the country while only having 20 percent of the overall population. Within each state the rate of homelessness can vary greatly as well. There are four cities which have a rate of homelessness at significantly higher rates: Washington DC, Boston, New York, and San Francisco. Of the two regions of the northeast and the west coast, there are major differences in the makeup of their homeless populations. Generally speaking, the northeast has a much higher rate of sheltering homeless than on the west coast. Overall, 65 percent of the homeless population is sheltered, with 35 percent remaining unsheltered. 4 out of 5 of the cities with the highest rate of sheltered homeless are in the northeast, concentrated in the largest metropolitan areas of New York, Boston, Washington DC and Baltimore. Conversely, the vast majority of unsheltered homeless live on the west coast. California has by far the highest rate of unsheltered homeless, accounting for 47 percent of the total unsheltered population. In fact, four out of the five cities with the highest rate of unsheltered population are in California. The fifth city is Seattle (The-State-of-Homelessness-in-America 2019). This highlights many of the differences with the issue of homelessness in different regions of the country. Logically, this

means that different regions need to adopt unique strategies to address the issue of homelessness in the context of each region.

According to *The State of Homelessness in America*, there are four main reasons that homelessness continues to be a pertinent issue. These factors are growing housing prices, more hospitable weather, shelter quality and access, and individual factors (*The-State-of-Homelessness-in-America 2019*). Housing price is perhaps the most obvious of these four drivers for homelessness. The harder it is to afford a home, the more likely one is to become homeless (*The-State-of-Homelessness-in-America 2019*). As a predictor for homelessness, housing prices are likely not going to change on the scale of the country. This is not always true for local areas though. Seattle is a prime example of this. Recently, housing prices have skyrocketed with the most recent tech boom associated with Amazon and the other big tech companies with major presence in the region. This has certainly led to more homelessness in the Seattle area (Andrews 2019). Understanding the local housing market and the predictions for how that will change therefore is critical for understanding the trend of homelessness in a particular region. As mentioned before, on the national scale there is likely not going to be a monumental shift of housing prices, and thus homelessness will likely not change drastically. The only exception to this is if a major economic recession occurs on a scale of the 2008 recession. This would most certainly lower housing prices, but this would not have the same effect on homelessness, as significant loss of jobs would ensure the homelessness population remains the same or grows.

The next factor of the hospitability of climate is the most constant of all these forces over time. This idea declares that there are more likely to be homeless in areas of warmer climate. Intuitively, this mostly correlates to higher unsheltered populations as opposed to sheltered, as this group is the one directly affected by the elements (*The-State-of-Homelessness-in-America 2019*). This is one of the reasons why California has by far the highest population of unsheltered homeless; it has a high number of dense urban areas and generally has a warm, mild climate. As mentioned before, the climate of a region is the most stable of all of these factors; the change in climate over the time scale of around 20 years will be negligible. Therefore, this will not likely increase or decrease the amount of homelessness on a national or regional scale. This rule however is not always accurate. There are states where the predicted level of homelessness is lower than the actual level of homelessness and visa-versa. In Florida for example, the warm weather predicts there would be a greater homeless population than there is. On the other side, Washington and Oregon has a much higher rates than the climate predicts (*The-State-of-Homelessness-in-America 2019*). This is however one area where there could be drastic changes on the extremely long scale. With the phenomenon of global warming occurring, in the next 50 to 100 years the climate could shift drastically which could have a major impact on the homeless population. This is however generally outside the appropriate time frame for planning to address homelessness so for the sake of this report it is negligible.

The next factor that influences rates of homelessness is the quality and availability of temporary shelter. Generally, as shelter quality and availability increase, so too does the amount of homelessness in a community (*The-State-of-Homelessness-in-America 2019*). In contrast to a city's climate, this factor increases the number of sheltered homeless. There are many reasons for

this phenomenon. Firstly, as shelter quality and availability grow, it will draw in more of the unsheltered homeless population to the shelters. This in and of itself does not increase homeless population, but because homeless counts at shelters are much more accurate and less likely to miss individuals a higher homeless population will be reported. Additionally, this also has the potential to bring people who otherwise would not be homeless into the temporary shelters, increasing the homeless population. While this may seem counter intuitive and counterproductive, it can actually be a more positive step socially. Essentially, the groups that enter these shelters are people who could have just barely scraped by without the resources the shelter provided but chose not to. This can be very positive because it allows these individuals time to utilize resources at the shelter that they otherwise would not be able to use if they spent all their effort retaining traditional housing. Additionally, this situation caters more toward extremely vulnerable people, such as victims of abuse and families with small children (The-State-of-Homelessness-in-America 2019). Giving these people a safe place to live temporarily will increase the counted homeless population, but overall will be a positive step in their lives as compared to remaining in a potentially damaging situation while remaining in housing. This, like housing prices, is a local factor in determining homelessness. Overall, the availability and quality of shelter across the country is not going to change significantly in the near future, so there will likely be no net change in the level of homelessness due to this. Locally however, this can play a significant role. An example of this is the city of Washington DC. This city has a law that requires all homeless in the city it have access to a certain level of temporary shelter. It is no coincidence that this city has one of the highest rates of homelessness, and also one of the highest rates of shelter for the homeless. Similar laws are also in effect in other major northeastern cities like New York and Boston (The-State-of-Homelessness-in-America 2019). This shows how this factor is largely a local issue and homelessness can change due to an increase in the number of shelters in a region.

The final issue that was noted to influence the rate of homelessness was the prevalence of what are deemed ‘individual factors’ in a community. This essentially means anything that an individual might do that increases the likelihood they will become homeless. This includes drug and alcohol abuse, untreated mental health issues, and other similar personal health concerns (The-State-of-Homelessness-in-America 2019). These issues have a clear correlation with being homeless for individuals. Accordingly, the overall statistics for these issues in a region also predict the overall level of homelessness. This again is a regional issue and is not likely to change on the scope of the whole country. Understanding the regional levels of these characteristics is critical for understanding how homelessness might change in the future.

All of the factors listed above are important for understanding how homelessness might change over time. In general, on a national scale these factors are not changing quickly enough to have a noticeable effect on homelessness year to year. Therefore, if there are no significant changes to how we address homelessness, this problem will not recede naturally. However, we are at the beginning of a very uncertain time for the country and world. With the prevalence of COVID-19, there are many potential changes that could occur in the next few years that could greatly affect the rate of homelessness across the nation. If this pushes our country into a major economic recession on a scale of the 2008 recession, there could be large and unpredictable changes in the amount of homelessness. The 2008 recession caused a higher level of homelessness in the years

following the recession, but the aftereffects were uneven and propagated many years after the initial market crash. Even five or more years after 2008, spikes in homelessness were attributed to the effects of the recession (Kahachi 2017). There are many convoluted causes for this. Initially, job loss and financial hardship pushed people into homelessness who otherwise would not have. Beyond this, the crash of the housing market specifically had major ramifications in increasing homelessness. After this crash, the amount of investment being put into housing was drastically reduced, which resulted in the highest level of empty homes and rental units since the 1950's. Additionally, the reduction of revenue at the federal and state level made it necessary for agencies to slash their budgets for addressing homelessness, and the weakness of financial institutions made it extremely difficult to borrow money to fund these resources (Kahachi 2017). All of these factors played out over the course of years, and as such the ramifications were still being felt even when the economy was beginning to recover. Something similar could occur with COVID-19, however it is impossible to tell exactly what mechanisms in this potential economic recession might cause homelessness. The nature of this situation is inherently different from that of 2008, and as such it is untrue to say the economy will behave in the same way. This level of uncertainty though is stretched out over a long-time scale, from 10 to 20 years. It is more feasible to investigate how homelessness might change in the next five years in local areas even with the uncertainty of COVID-19.

4.2 Local Trends in Homelessness in the Puget Sound Region

What these four above factors can tell us is how a particular region might change over time due to more local fluctuations in these factors. Taking the Puget Sound region as an example, many of these factors are at play with the changes of homelessness. As mentioned before, the drastic increase in housing prices has increased the rate of homelessness and will likely continue to increase the rate of homelessness in the future. Additionally, it was mentioned above that Washington is unique in that its rate of homelessness is much higher than its climate would predict. For the availability and quality of shelter, the Puget Sound region is also attempting to improve by creating interlocal agreements that theoretically will be able to give better services to the homeless without increasing spending. This could have the effect of increasing demand on these services more than just drawing from the population of unsheltered homeless. Finally, mental health issues and drug use appear to be on the decline in the Puget Sound region in recent years. While there was a significant spike in the first half of the 2010, it appears as though the levels of drug use and mental health issues are receding (The-State-of-Homelessness-in-America 2019)(Andrews 2019). All of these factors interact with each other and play a role in determining the rate of homelessness. To better understand the level of these and other factors, we will look more closely at king county to understand how these factors interact at a more local level.

In King County in recent years, homelessness is on the rise. In previous years, homelessness has steadily risen at a rate of around 4 percent per year. In 2019 however, this trend changed, with homelessness dropping by 8 percent (Andrews 2019). There are many reasons why this might have occurred. Ideally, this would be a sign of the growing effectiveness of the services provided in King County, but this also could just be a completely random fluctuation. Looking in more detail will bring insight into more of the potential causes for this shift.

We can also look at how the rate of sheltering homeless in Seattle changes over time. In the past several years, this rate has fluctuated around approximately 50 percent of the homeless population. The highest rate of sheltered homeless in this time frame is 53 percent, and the lowest is 48 percent. These fluctuations are caused by many different factors (Andrews 2019). One important factor is changes in designation of what is and is not considered sheltered. In 2019 the tiny house villages located in Seattle were re-designated from sanctioned camps to a type of temporary shelter. This shifted a large number of people that fell in the designation ‘unsheltered’ to sheltered, without actually changing their living situation. Additionally, this metric changes with the number of shelter beds available. Recently, the city of Seattle has added capacity to its shelter system which increases the percentage of homeless that are sheltered (Andrews 2019). In the near future, around the next five years, the percentage of sheltered to unsheltered will likely not vary that much and remain fluctuating around 50 percent.

Within the category of both unsheltered and sheltered individuals, there is fluctuations in the state of overall living arrangements. For sheltered individuals, there has been an increasing emphasis on emergency shelter and a reduction in transitional housing. Emergency shelter has been increasing around 2 percent each year and transitional housing has been decreasing by approximately 2 percent each year (Andrews 2019). This is in line with the national trends regarding sheltered homelessness given above; local agencies are moving away from transitional housing and replacing that service with rapid rehousing services. The rapid rehousing services tend to be better than the transitional housing services as it does not require as much time working through the homeless system, reducing trauma for the affected individuals. These rehousing services do not give its users a designation of homeless, thus the decrease in recorded homelessness in temporary rehousing. Along with this shift is an increase in the shelter capacity to address homelessness from the other side of by giving people who are already on the street temporary places to live when needed. Increasing the availability of service for these vulnerable populations has great benefits that complement the rapid rehousing services. Ideally, the increase in service availability and effectiveness will reduce homelessness; the only issue is on what time frame. These services could have a fairly immediate effect with noticeable changes to the total homeless population in the near future. This would result in the percentage of homeless population decrease that was observed in 2019 to continue, but perhaps at a more modest rate. Alternatively, it could take several years for the effects to be felt, in which case homelessness would presumably resume its climb at around 4 percent per year for the next several years.

Unsheltered homeless divisions have also been in flux. There are several categories of unsheltered homelessness: living on the street or outside, living in a tent or unsanctioned encampment, living in a sanctioned encampment or safe haven, living in an abandoned building or squatting, and living in a vehicle. Overall, if the amount of people living on the street, in sanctioned encampments, and squatting has effectively remained the same over the past several years. What has shifted in the past years is people living in cars and unsanctioned camps. These seem to fluctuate somewhat randomly, with a median of approximately 25 percent of the total homeless population living in vehicles and approximately 10 percent living in unsanctioned encampments (Andrews 2019). In recent years these two have changes conversely relative to each other, but this is not always the case. This does however represent a shift within the unsheltered population which seems to be

moving slightly from vehicles to tents and camps as the main method of living. Overall, this will not have a major effect on the total population of the homeless, but this shift does have several ramifications for the makeup of the unsheltered homeless population and therefore the population that could affect state DOTs.

Apart from the changing living conditions of the homeless, many demographics are shifting in the homeless population in King County. Demographics are always shifting slightly as some people can enter into and out of homelessness fairly rapidly. But there are greater trends in the demographics of homelessness that are useful for both supporting the community currently and predicting how the community might change in the future. Age is one of the simplest demographics to understand. In King County, recently there has been a push to address homelessness more thoroughly in youth and young adult populations. Because of this homelessness in the age range below 25 has had significant decrease. Youth under 18 constituted 4 percent of the population in 2017, in 2019 they constitute only 1 percent of the homeless population. Those between the ages of 18 and 24 also have decreased from 23 percent to 18 percent of the total population over the same time frame. This percentage has been absorbed into the broad age group of 25 to 50 years of age. This group in total has grown from 52 percent of the total population of homeless to 62 percent of the total population. The other group, those over 50 years has remained even at 15 percent for people aged 51 to 60 and 6 percent for those older than 60. There is however significant fluctuation within the broad age range of 25 to 50. In the King County Point in Time Survey, this group was split into 3 categories: 25 to 30 years, 31 to 40 years, and 41 to 50 years. Within each of these groups, there is no discernable pattern as to how these groups are growing or shrinking (Andrews 2019). This does make some sense as this is the group which experiences the most turnover in terms of new people entering homelessness and people leaving homelessness. But, knowing how the general age group of 25 to 50 years is growing and people below the age of 25 is shrinking is critical for understanding how homelessness will change in the future. This also partially explains the increase in prevalence of unsanctioned camps in recent years described above. The middle age group of the three is much more likely to be found in a camp than the youngest age groups, which could explain some of the increases in unsanctioned camps.

Another shifting demographic is the gender split of the homeless population. Historically, the majority of the homeless population has been male. This is beginning to change, however. In 2017, the percentage of the homeless population that was male was 62 percent while in 2019 that percentage had fallen to 56. With this change has come an increase in other gender designations. The King County Point in Time Survey lists four gender options: male, female, transgender, and gender nonconforming. Besides males, all of the other groups are on the rise. In the time frame of 2017 to 2019, the percent of the population that was female rose from 35 to 40 percent. Additionally, the percent of the population that is transgender rose from 1 to 2 percent and those that are gender nonconforming rose from 1 to 3 percent (Andrews 2019). This change in gender demographics is critical for understanding what kinds of services are needed to serve the population. Increasing the services available for women is critical. Additionally, it is important to ensure that all services are sensitive to transgender and non-binary gender identity, as even

though they are still an overall small percentage of the homeless population, the number of people who are transgender and gender nonconforming has more than doubled.

The demographic split of sexual orientation is also changing from historical norms for the homeless population. This used to be, and still is to an extent, dominated by those who identify as straight. This does constitute the vast majority of the homeless population, though it is on the decline. In 2017, 82 percent of the population identified as straight while in 2019 77 percent of the population identified this way. This reduction in percentage is matched with slight increases in all of the other sexual orientation options given in the survey. These include identifying as gay/lesbian, bisexual, queer, questioning, pansexual, or other. All of these identifications have either increased slightly by about a percent of the population or have remained essentially even (Andrews 2019). As with the changes of gender identification, this information is critical to ensuring that services provided are able to address the needs for all of these groups. Creating services that can help engage with the entire breadth of the community is critical for achieving the most positive outcomes for the homeless community.

Another critical demographic measure that can be used to measure the changes in homelessness is the ethnic makeup of the homeless population. There have been some minor fluctuations in the ethnic makeup of the homeless population in King County, but there have been no major trends up or down for a particular ethnic group. The percent of the homeless population that is white has remained fairly steady around 45 percent. The percent of the homeless population that is black or African American is approximately 28 percent. Those of Hispanic or Latino origin make up around 15 percent of the homeless population. American Indian or Alaskan Natives make up around 6 percent of the homeless population. The percent of the homeless population that is of Asian descent is approximately 3 percent. Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders make up around 3 percent of the total homeless population. Apart from this count, there are also those who identify as being from multiple races, which makes up approximately 14 percent of the population (Andrews 2019). These values do fluctuate from year to year and do not remain stable, but there is no discernible pattern of any group increasing or decreasing. What is most critical to draw from these trends is how these percentages of the population compare to the greater population percentages. Some of these population percentages for the homeless are well below the total percentage for King County, and some are significantly higher. The two populations that are underrepresented in homelessness is those who are Caucasian and Asian. These populations have an overall representation of 60 percent and 17 percent of King County, respectively. Their homeless population percentages of around 45 percent and 3 percent are significantly lower than the overall population percentage. The other groups are extremely overrepresented in homelessness. People who are Black and African American make up only 6 percent of the population of King County, and yet make up approximately 28 percent of the homeless population. Native Americans and Alaskan Natives consist of less than 1 percent of the population and yet represent 6 percent of the homeless population. Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders make up only 1 percent of the Population of King county yet are 3 percent of the homeless population. Those who are Hispanic or Latino make up 10 percent of the overall King County Population yet are 15 percent of the homeless population. Additionally, those who identify as multiple races are only 6 percent of the general population but 14 percent of the homeless population (Andrews

2019). These statistics show the systemic racism that is in place in our society, as people of color are significantly more likely to become homeless than people of Caucasian or Asian descent. This is a critical trend to follow because addressing racial equality in homelessness is paramount to finding solutions due to the lopsided nature of homelessness currently with regards to race.

Another demographic shift that has a direct correlation to the total amount of homelessness is the personal disorders experienced by the homeless population. This can broadly be divided into drug use issue and mental health issues. Approximately 64 percent of the homeless population in King County is living with one or more of these conditions. In general, the prevalence of most conditions is receding, with some exceptions. The most prevalent issue is psychiatric or emotional conditions. This is decreasing in the homeless community. In 2017, 45 percent of the population reported having these issues, while in 2019 36 percent reported having these issues. The next most prevalent issue is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The prevalence of this issue has remained mostly constant, around 35 percent of the homeless population. Drug and alcohol abuse is also on the decline in the homeless population, as 36 percent of the population had this issue in 2017 while 32 percent had this issue in 2019. Additionally, chronic health issues are lowering as well. In 2017, 30 percent of the homeless population had chronic health problems while in 2019 only 27 percent had chronic health problems. Similarly, those with physical disabilities have been decreasing, with 26 percent of the population being recorded with this issue in 2017 but only 23 percent being recorded in 2019. Another personal issue that is noted in the Point in Time Survey is intellectual disabilities and memory impairment. This issue was prevalent in 13 percent of the population in 2019. There is no data before 2019 as that was the first year that type of data was collected. Finally, there is some issues that are rising in the homeless population. The percentage of the population with traumatic brain injuries is increasing, with 11 percent having one in 2018 but 12 percent having one in 2019. Additionally, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS is increasing in the homeless community. The population of homeless with HIV/AIDS increased from 3 to 4 percent between 2017 and 2019 (Andrews 2019). Generally, the decrease in the most prevalent personal disorders is positive for the homeless community. As mentioned above, this does generally correlate to lower rates of homelessness overall which is a net positive for the homeless community.

Another changing demographic in homelessness is the number of families experiencing homelessness. This group has been steadily declining over the past several years. This is true for both sheltered and unsheltered families. Sheltered families has decreased from 2,752 in 2017 to 2,388 in 2019. Unsheltered families also decreased from 81 percent in 2017 to 63 percent in 2019. This is equivalent to a 7 percent decrease per year (Andrews 2019). Both of these decreases have implications for the overall demographics of homelessness in King County. Firstly, this does partially explain the reduction in youth experiencing homelessness. The percentages listed above do include youth that are homeless in families, so part of that reduction is due to a reduction in total families experiencing homelessness. Additionally, this also partially explains the reduction in homeless staying in vehicles; unsheltered families almost always are living out of vehicles as opposed to the other methods listed above. This again partially explains the reduction of homeless in vehicles. Overall, understanding how the number of homeless families is changing is critical to determining the strategy for delivering service to these groups.

Another group that could require special programming is homeless veterans. This group historically has had a significant presence in homelessness. In recent years, this group has been steadily declining. From 2017 to 2018, the population of homeless veterans reduced 31 percent, and from 2018 to 2019 the population reduced 10 percent. The vast majority of the veteran population experiencing homelessness is male at over 75 percent. Additionally, homeless veterans have a much higher rate of experiencing PTSD (Andrews 2019). This is another group that requires special programs and attention to address their issues that cause homelessness that services need to consider when addressing the overall homeless population. However, the size of this group is reducing, signifying that the services in place are fairly effective in addressing the needs of homeless veterans.

Another important subgroup in addressing homelessness is the chronically homeless. This group is the most likely to remain homeless for long periods of time. In recent years this group has seen major fluctuations in its overall population. In 2017, the total number of chronically homeless was 2,773. In 2018, this population grew by 28 percent to 3,552. In 2019, the population dropped by 38 percent to 2,213 people. One of the major reasons for the significant drop in 2019 is the increase in shelter percentage for this group. Historically, chronically homeless do not utilize shelters as much as the general homeless population. However, in 2019 the percent of the population that utilized shelters essentially doubled, which partially explains the major drop in the chronic homeless population. This population also tends to have much higher rates of health conditions that exacerbate homelessness. This includes drug and alcohol abuse, psychiatric and emotional conditions, PTSD, chronic health problems, physical disabilities, traumatic brain injuries, intellectual disabilities or memory impairment, and HIV/AIDS. This group also has a higher level of utilization of supplementary services for the homeless, such as free meals, bus passes, hygiene services, emergency shelter, and day services (Andrews 2019). These differences highlight some of the extra considerations that this subpopulation needs to address the issues causing their homelessness to attempt to bring down this important part of the population.

All of the above changes to different groups can bring important insights into the greater trends of the homeless population in King County. In general, we can use this information for two purposes: understanding how the total population of homelessness will grow and understanding which subpopulations need to be better served. The latter of these two is simpler to discern because it mostly involves the present condition of different groups of the homeless. In King County, there are several groups that could be better served by the services provided in the county. Firstly, people of color are disproportionately homeless. This is a symptom of systemic racism in our society, and these groups clearly need to be better supported both to get out of homelessness but also to stop becoming homeless in the first place. Tracking the changes in this kind of demographics is critical to ensuring that this community is being served fairly. Additionally, there are specific groups that require special services. Among these are families, veterans, and chronically homeless. In King County, in general the number of homeless in these categories is falling, which bodes well for the overall total of homelessness. In short, if the services of a region are doing well at serving these especially vulnerable populations, then they are likely also doing an adequate job at serving the rest of the homeless population.

4.3 Predicting Changes to the Homeless Population in the Future

Predicting how the homeless population will change over time is much more difficult. This is because all of the different factors that influence homelessness interact with each other and compound the overall issue. In King County this is certainly true. In recent years before 2018, homelessness rose 4 percent each year for several years, but in 2019 there was a sharp unexpected decline of 8 percent. There are many factors that influenced this decrease, but it is impossible to tell if these same factors will hold true for following years. In general, it appears that King County is beginning to see success in addressing their homelessness issue with this 8 percent decrease. As was mentioned before, some of the critical populations of homeless are in decline which indicates that King County has implemented effective services to address homelessness. Additionally, new services that have been implemented recently within the past several years are beginning to mature and reach their full potential of serving the homeless which also contributes to the overall decrease of homelessness (Andrews 2019). But this does not mean that that these trends will continue or that that observation is accurate. The rate of homelessness is an inherently volatile number. To the extent it can be measured, the number can fluctuate drastically without any noticeable changes in the environment or society. There is too much uncertainty in the future to definitively say the King County has turned a corner and the homeless population will continue to decrease. Even without the looming threat of COVID-19 and a potential recession, there is no accurate way to tell if this reduction in homelessness is going to continue.

Looking at King County was one example of how the different demographics in a region might be changing with regards to homelessness. Not all areas however will behave in exactly the same way. This is certainly true of Washington State and the Puget sound region. Different areas in the Puget sound region may have different trends with regards to homelessness. One example of such differences is with Thurston County. As has been examined previously, this county has different issues with regards to homelessness. While the total homeless population is nowhere near as large as King County, there are significantly less resources available to provide services to the homeless population. As with King County, Thurston County also experiences some of the same trends that were found. In general, they saw some increases in homelessness for the years before 2019 with a decline in 2019. This trend however is much less linear than in King County, which points to the idea that homelessness is much less volatile in smaller and rural communities (Schlecht 2019). Additionally, they also saw a similar reduction in some of the special cases groups as shown above, including veterans, families, and the chronically homeless. Again, though this did not perfectly match the trends shown in King County.

What this information tells us is that the rate of homelessness is inherently volatile, at least to the extent to which it can be measured. This directly relates to the nature of homelessness, where people can bounce in and out of homelessness unexpectedly. Because of this, we cannot draw many conclusions about how homelessness will change in the Puget Sound region. What we can say is that homelessness is not likely to have any monumental shifts in the near future. By this, we mean that homelessness is not likely to change more than 10 percent up or down in any given year, and there will likely be no significant trend on short time scales of up to five years. This tells us that in general, as was found on a countrywide level, homelessness is not going to be solved in

the next several years. This will take significant effort over a long-time frame of twenty or more years to see significant lasting changes to the homeless population.

This information gives insight into how state DOTs should address this issue moving into the future. As was said before in Washington camps form on state right of way at an average rate of approximately one per day. The main takeaway from this trend information is that in general, it will take a long time period for there to be significant measurable changes. Each DOT though should examine the information of homelessness data for its local region to ensure that they are aware of the recent trends in the issue as well because that does offer some limited predictability to the future. That means that DOTs like WSDOT need to ensure that they are prepared to continue to tackle this issue at the same rate or higher into the foreseeable future. It is extremely unlikely that homelessness will continue to decline at an 8 percent rate in King County like it has in 2019. That number will certainly fluctuate and as such WSDOT should be prepared to address a reasonable scenario. In all likelihood this would be anticipating that over the long term timeframe of multiple years the average rate of camp formation will remain roughly the same and thus any response from the DOT should at the very least maintain the current level, although ideally there could be improvements to the policies and procedures of the DOT to ensure the most positive outcome for both the DOT and the homeless themselves.

Chapter 6: Recommendations for state DOTs

As we have seen, the interaction of federal, state, local, and DOT policies make a complicated environment to address homelessness. The multi-agency approach used by DOTs is generally fairly effective at addressing homelessness in a safe and equitable way, however there are still many ways this method can be improved. Homelessness is continuing to grow in this country, so it is imperative that these improvements are made so that this critical issue can be curbed and reduced. There are many ways to facilitate this goal of reducing homelessness. There are three main actions that can be implemented that complement the current policies of state DOTs while improving their practices and outcomes. These three main objectives are conducting further analysis on existing policies to address homelessness, forming a broad committee whose goal is to address homelessness on a regional scale, and creating a strategic plan for state DOTs to address homelessness.

6.1 Recommendation 1: Further Analysis of Existing Homelessness Policies

The first of these overarching tasks is to further analyze the policies of federal laws, local laws DOT regulations, and local partner regulations. As has been mentioned before, state DOTs already at least have robust safety best practices for addressing homeless encampments. But, the safety of DOT employees can be improved when removing homeless encampments. This improvement can come with better communication and meshing with other agencies that the DOT partners within the multi-agency approach. This involves better understanding of their policies to ensure that DOT policy does not contradict the local regulations. For WSDOT, this could take the form of any of the agencies that they work with, such as the City of Seattle. That is just one example, but this can be applied to the hundreds of jurisdictions that WSDOT works in. There are many ways that WSDOT can facilitate a better connection with the jurisdictions they work in. This is important because in this example WSDOT only has a formal partnership with a subset of these communities they interact with to address homeless encampments. One way is to facilitate joint training sessions between WSDOT and the local agency so that employees can be more familiar with each group's practices. Additionally, this can add insight into the different purposes of each group's role in the multi-agency approach. Beyond this, any program that facilitates the sharing of knowledge between the employees of these different agencies will help to build the understanding of these groups. This will go a long way to increasing the safety of these groups as employees will better understand each group's methods and be better able to anticipate their actions and tailor their approach accordingly. Additionally, this can increase the equity aspects of camp removal, especially on the DOT side. If DOT employees understand the reasoning and procedures behind the human services group of the multi-agency approach, they will be better able to serve the homeless community by interacting with the camps in a more positive way.

Similarly, it is important for state DOTs to communicate with partner agencies on issues of policy as well. This follows the same logic as the above recommendation but applied to a broader scale. This kind of activity includes sharing procedures broadly throughout each organization so that all those that are secondarily involved in homeless encampment removal (those not directly clearing encampments) can have a better understanding of partner agencies policies. This is a method of

sharing experience that is incredibly valuable in ensuring that agencies are on the same page when addressing homeless encampments. This is already somewhat in place at WSDOT. In the city of Seattle, for example, WSDOT regularly communicates with city agencies when prioritizing encampments. This requires constant communication between these agencies which effectively serve as channels for sharing experience and ensuring that policies and practices mesh together. Even though WSDOT does this on a regular basis, it is not done in all jurisdictions and can be improved and expanded. The suggestion then is to create a method by which WSDOT can interface with all of the jurisdictions it works with to hold higher level discussions on policy and procedure. It would be fairly simple to combine this with the process of sharing camp removal practices with these agencies as suggested above. This way it is possible to get even more use from these inter agency communications. Both of these practices will help to address the safety and equity of homeless encampment removal.

6.2 Recommendation 2: Form Group to Address Regional Issues of Homelessness

The second task that can be done to enhance the ability for our society to address homelessness is to form a committee to address the regional aspects of homelessness so as to compliment the local plans and resources that are already in place. This kind of high-level discussion is critical to ensuring that all groups involved in the multi-agency approach are working cohesively towards the same goal. But, currently, most of these agencies that state DOTs work with are very localized, usually cities or counties. There is only so much state DOTs can do to foster communication when they rely on each individual group which might not have exactly the same values as other groups in a region. This again highlights the local regional duality issue with homelessness; many of the existing programs are locally based while there are significant regional forces at play. The best way to solve this issue is to combine these two competing viewpoints and allow them to intermingle with each other such that the local aspects of this issue can see how they fit into a larger regional context. State DOTs are in a unique position to facilitate this kind of coordination. Since they touch all of the smaller agencies that directly address homelessness, they are in a poised to bridge these local agencies together to create a regional network aimed at addressing homelessness. To do this, state DOTs should help to create regional coalitions surrounding major metropolitan areas to address homelessness. This kind of action will need to be done in partnership with several other groups. Most notably, the largest cities and counties will be critical. Their support is necessary because they have the most expertise in addressing homelessness, but they also tend to be on the forefront of this issue in these areas. Along with these larger cities, smaller jurisdictions should be encouraged to join. These groups who are also dedicated to reducing homelessness but who do not have the resources of the larger cities are just as important for addressing this issue on a regional scale. Often it is these groups who can benefit the most from these kinds of partnerships and thus should be included to ensure that their issues are not left unsolved.

Creating this kind of coalition can drastically change the landscape of addressing homelessness for the better. This is a case where the whole combination of these jurisdictions is more than the sum of its parts. This will have positive benefits for both state DOTs and the local jurisdictions.

By getting a platform to connect local agencies in a more wholistic way, local jurisdictions can better serve their homeless populations with the resources and services they already have available. State DOTs also will benefit by having each jurisdiction they work with have a better response to homelessness which will eventually lead to a smaller homeless population and less encampments along state right of way. This idea of creating a regional coalition to address homelessness is very applicable for WSDOT. This idea has the potential to have great benefit for both WSDOT and its partner agencies. This type of organization would likely be on the scale of the Puget sound region or the I-5 corridor. Both of these areas encompass the cities that were studied earlier in this article. In this case, WSDOT would want to partner with the bigger players in the region when it comes to addressing homelessness. This likely includes cities like Seattle and Tacoma as well as the most densely populated counties like King County. Additionally, they could include other regional planning bodies such as the Puget Sound Regional Council, the metropolitan planning organization for the Seattle area. They should also include smaller jurisdictions like Olympia and Thurston county into this agreement. These types of municipalities are where the majority of the benefits will come from in addressing homelessness. It has been shown that of the three cities detailed in this report, Olympia is currently struggling the most in addressing their homelessness issue. By gaining the support of larger cities like Seattle and Tacoma, they will better be able to address the issue of homelessness in their city. This type of coalition will have a direct positive impact on WSDOT as well because it will allow these cities to better serve the homeless population in their jurisdiction which will lead to less camps forming on state right of way. It is important to note that this does not mean that WSDOT or another state DOT has to organize all of the details about this type of coalition. In fact, this does not play into the strength of a state DOT. Instead, the coalition should be spearheaded by the largest cities and counties with whom the state DOT is partnering. These municipalities will be more involved with the implementation of the coalition projects and policies, while state DOTs like WSDOT will take a secondary role offering connections between municipalities that do not usually have a strong connection. This will play to the strengths of both the municipalities who have more expertise in addressing homelessness and state DOTs who have a more regional view than these local groups, resulting in the most effective partnership possible.

Apart from giving regional structure to the issue of homelessness, this committee can go a long way towards increasing the awareness of decision makers to the issues of homelessness. One novel way that is especially effective at increasing individuals' awareness of homeless encampments is going through a homeless immersion. This is an experience where individuals can work with a homeless advocacy group to spend time in and around the homeless community. This can involve activities like visiting homeless encampments, working and communicating with homeless individuals at shelters and other services, as well as many other activities that expose people to the daily lives of the homeless. While it would be untrue and unfair to say that this experience can show someone what it is truly like to be homeless, it has the potential to change people's perspective when it comes to the struggles of being homeless and the stigma attached to the homeless. This is something that was proposed in the document "Illegal Homeless Camping in Portland: Field Analysis and Advocacy Planning" (Bernhardt 1995). This is one of the starkest ways for people to increase their awareness of the issues of homelessness as was suggested in the

paragraph above. This requires the individual to be directly in the center of the issue and to experience firsthand the impact of homelessness and the other issues that homelessness causes. The group that would most benefit from this kind of experience is the decision makers in government who ultimately are responsible for the allocation of funding. By showing this group the true issues and conditions of homelessness, they will also be able to better empathize with the camp residents. This will make it much more likely for these people to give the funds required to truly make a difference in this pressing issue. This is directly given in the advocacy planning document above (Bernhardt 1995). This shows the great importance of increasing the awareness and understanding of homelessness, and immersions are the best way to achieve that.

Similar to this thinking, the homeless should also play a more direct role in deciding how funding and resources should be allocated. Currently, the homeless population is largely left out when it comes to making decisions about how to address the issue of homelessness. Involving the homeless population in these decisions would have major benefits both to the effectiveness of any decisions or services created, and it would greatly increase the likelihood that these services are used to their full extent. It has been mentioned before that the homeless tend to be untrusting of various government groups and the decisions and programs they made. According to “Illegal Homeless Camping in Portland: Field Analysis and Advocacy Planning”, one of the main reasons this happens is because the homeless feel as though their voice is not being heard by the rest of society when these policies and resources are created. Involving the homeless population in these discussions will ensure that their voice is heard which will increase the trust built with the systems put in place to help. Additionally, this will ensure those making such decisions are actually addressing the issues in a way that the homeless will find helpful. Often the people making these important decisions are effectively working from an ivory tower; the policies and programs created are designed to address what they think the homeless need, not what they actually want. Having the homeless’ voice heard and incorporated will mitigate this issue because they can inform the types of programs and policies they want, which may be different than what the policy makers think is needed (Bernhardt 1995). This again is something that should be done by any group interacting with the homeless. This includes cities, counties, local governments, states, and many others. State DOTs also fall into this category as they regularly interact with homeless encampments. There have been cases where this has been done in the past, most of the time for various types of government, whether state, regional, or local. In most cases, this is done through homeless advocacy nonprofit organizations. These organizations essentially interface with the homeless community then advocate on their behalf. They also work with homeless to prepare them to speak to legislative bodies relevant to homelessness (Bernhardt 1995). This type of work is again applicable to all groups that interact with homelessness. The most important group to hear this point of view is legislative bodies, as they are responsible for the funding of the resources the homeless will actually use. All legislative bodies that involve homelessness should interact with homeless advocacy groups to ensure that proposed laws equitably address the issues causing homelessness in a way that will actually benefit the homeless themselves. This is also something that state DOTs can improve on as well. Currently, WSDOT does not interact with homeless advocacy groups outside of the context of lawsuits. To continue to improve the equity of WSDOT homeless policy, working with these groups is critical. These groups will be able to accurately

convey the needs of the homeless communities and will be able to ensure that their voices are heard in WSDOT regarding pertinent matters. Beyond this, it would also be beneficial to staff a position whose goal is to interact and communicate with homeless campers along state right of way. This also will help to share the voices and opinions of those homeless that are affected by WSDOT policies, but more importantly open channels of communication build trust with the homeless community which will greatly help increase the safety and equity of homeless camp removals. If this staff is able to connect with camps long before they are removed, then the homeless in those camps are much more likely to be willing to utilize the resources available to them if their camp is removed (Bernhardt 1995).

This leads to another idea that will have great effect on state DOTs and societies efforts to address homelessness. The best way to solve the issue of homelessness as a society is to increase the funding available for resources and programs to help the homeless. This is ultimately what is required to solve this issue. In many cases, the programs we have in place are relatively effective at addressing the issues of homelessness. In some cases, programs can have up to a 70 percent success rate in retaining housing for those who enter the programs. This was seen in several case studies, including the one on the Baldock Rest Area. This case had a 65 percent retention rate in permanent housing (Tremoulet 2013). The problem is that there is not enough funding for this scale of projects to be conducted for the entire homeless population. In most cases, projects do not have such a high level of retention. This is mostly because there are not enough monetary resources available to achieve the potential of the service, not because of another inherent flaw in the service. If enough funding and support were provided to all of the human services across the nation to have an average success rate in permanent housing retention of around 70 percent, homelessness would be a fraction of the issue it is now. Further, if programs designed to prevent homelessness in populations that are in danger of becoming homeless were also funded, that would decrease the total number of new persons needing assistance each year. While it is virtually impossible to ensure that no one is ever homeless, this level of support can lead to a level of 'net zero homelessness'. This is a state where the rate at which people become homeless is the same as the rate with which homeless people find permanent housing and there are no chronically homeless individuals. With proper levels of funding, this is achievable. Several countries have effectively reached a net zero homelessness population by providing proper resources. One of the most notable of these is Finland. Finland has adopted what they call a 'housing first' approach. This effectively means that the Finnish government must provide housing to anyone who needs it regardless of circumstances. They also provide many other services to help address the underlying issues causing someone to be homeless. Currently, Finland has a homeless population of around 6,000, roughly half the homeless population in King County alone. Of this population, virtually all of them have some form of housing. This is approximately 0.1 percent of the total population for the country, nearly half the total population percentage of the US. This was also achieved after a period where the homeless population of Finland was approximately 4 times as large than it is now, showing that drastic improvement possible (Finland). This shows that it is possible to achieve a net zero homelessness population and the retention rates seen above show that it is not a matter of how to create effective resources, but how to adequately fund these resources. Of course, doing this is much easier said than done. In the United States, we simply lack the political ability

to provide the level of funding required to achieve a result comparable to that of countries like Finland. Even though reaching that level of success is not possible now, striving to provide as much funding as possible is the best way to move the issue closer to the net zero case. This then is a call for legislators who control where funding is used to put more of an emphasis on addressing homelessness. This is not something that state DOTs are directly responsible for, but this will have a great effect on DOTs with regards to homeless encampments along their right of way. Essentially, the better these services are at reaching out to homeless individuals and finding them long term housing solutions, the less likely camps are to form on state right of way. Ultimately, less encampments on the roadway is better for state DOTs because that means less money needs to be spent removing them and there are less hazards for employees and assets that need to be managed. To work towards this goal, DOTs like WSDOT should advocate for state and local legislatures to provide more funding to address these root causes of homelessness with the goal to prevent the need for camps to form on state right of way in the first place.

6.3 Recommendation 3: Create a Strategic Homelessness Plan

This last recommendation is critical for state DOTs. This recommendation is designed to allow state DOTs to state and organize how they can attempt to implement all of the above ideas in a cohesive way. This recommendation is for state DOTs to create a strategic homelessness plan. This will be a document that looks at the issue of homelessness holistically from a state DOT perspective. The idea of planning documents is not new for state DOTs. It is common practice to create detailed plans regarding many subjects pertinent to DOTs, including different modes of transportation, transportation safety, and active mobility. Homelessness is something that should be added to this list. It is clear the homelessness has a major effect on DOTs, and as such DOTs should ensure that they are prepared to address this issue on a long time scale. The best way to do this is to create a plan document which can have lengths of up to 20 years. This document will be critical in ensuring that all of the work DOTs do to address homelessness is completed in a structured, ordered, and logical way to ensure the greatest effectiveness of any changes. As has been mentioned before, planning documents are a necessity for most other organizations that work to address homelessness. Whether a requirement to receive federal or state funds or to ensure the group has a structure moving into the future, plans are common in municipalities and organizations that provide social services. This is not true for state DOTs, which are not mandated to create homelessness plans since they do not receive federal or state funds to address the issue. These local plans can be of great benefit to state DOTs as a template when creating their own plans. When creating these plans, DOTs should focus more on the long-term issues and solutions with homelessness, not the daily procedures addressing homelessness. Additionally, a plan should contain information not just on actual policy changes, but on the overall goals of an organization with regard to a particular issue. This is something that most state DOTs lack in an official sense. None of the state DOTs analyzed in this report, WSDOT included, have explicitly stated their goals for addressing homelessness in the future. Having a well-defined goal is critical to the success of any plan as it will require that any project or solution suggested have a connection to that goal which can show how it will address the overall issue.

Aside from the goal-oriented section of a plan, there can also be discussion of concrete changes to be made to better the practices of state DOTs. All of the following policy and action suggestions are appropriate long-term ideas to be put into a plan. Each recommendation, if implemented, would have a positive impact on the issue of homelessness both for society and for state DOTs. Of course, each plan and implementation of these recommendations would need to be tailored to fit the existing goals and context of each state DOT, which is expected. For WSDOT and other DOTs there are many resources they can use to help facilitate creating a plan. There are many regional examples of plans that have been created. One that will be highlighted here is the King County Plan. This plan's general structure covers many of the same topics that would be covered in a state DOT plan. After a brief introduction, the plan begins by describing the vision of King County in reducing homelessness. They list three main goals, to make homelessness a rare occurrence, to make homelessness a brief and one-time occurrence, and to engage the community to address homelessness. Then, they highlight some of the facts of homelessness to better describe the issue. Finally, they list strategies to address homelessness through the goals highlighted above (All-Home-Strategic-Plan 2015). This is one example of how a plan to address homelessness is created in Washington. There are many other ways for this to be done. Other local examples should be sought out to ensure that a state DOT homelessness plan meshes with the goals of other organizations in a state to ensure that a plan is as effective as possible in coordinating locally to address the major issues of homelessness. This step can also be done in conjunction with the first overarching step of better analyzing the current practices of a state DOT's region.

Of the potential implementable policies, first and foremost it is important to understand the scope and breadth of the issue of homelessness along state right of way. The best way to do this is through the collection of hard data. Any state DOT should create a database or create a new section in an existing database to track homeless encampments as they form and are removed along state right of way. This will allow any new camps that are created to be easily tracked by the DOT. In the multi-agency approach, this most affects the identification and prioritization stage. Having this data available is good for supplementing the anecdotal data that comes from citizen reports and other channels. Ideally, this information is coupled with a site analysis for the camp so as to determine the threat level to the roadway, DOT assets, and DOT employees. With this information, any decisions made regarding these camps can be done more ethically. By having this information, the decision can be made based on camp threat level, not simply the camp's existence. Having this distinction is inherently more equitable because it allows for certain camps that are not deemed a threat to remain in place. While these camps should not remain in place indefinitely, waiting for a period of time to a point when there are more resources available for the residents would result in a much better outcome for the camp residents. It is important to note that for this to be successful, this requires increased coordination with the local human services agencies that provide these resources. Currently, WSDOT already has a resource like this. All WSDOT maintenance records are stored on the Highway Activity Tracking System (HATS) (Inventory Homeless Encampment 2020). This database also has a section where records of all homeless encampments are stored. For WSDOT, this effectively acts as the fulfills this recommendation; I included it for other state DOTs that might not have something like this already created.

Once this information is available it is imperative that it is used properly to ensure that homeless encampments are treated fairly and to remove without just cause. To that end, having a policy that defines when a homeless encampment should be removed and when a homeless encampment removal should be delayed will address this issue. Having such a policy in place will greatly increase the equity of homeless camp removal because it will ensure that only those camps that pose the highest threat will be removed. This will limit trauma caused by camp removal by leaving camps that do not pose an immediate threat alone. As mentioned above, no camps should be left along the roadway indefinitely due to the significant health concerns for the camp residents, however having this metered approach will ensure that camps are not cleared unnecessarily. Currently, WSDOT does have some policy that addresses this topic. In some jurisdictions, WSDOT does utilize the prioritization policies of local agencies. Examples of this include the cities of Seattle and Tacoma. In Seattle, WSDOT has relinquished some of the homeless removal prioritization decisions to the City of Seattle. They are made through a partnership with the City of Seattle Human Services Department and The City of Seattle Police (McCormick 2020). In Tacoma, the city conducts all of the prioritization of camps that fall within the city limits, including those on WSDOT right of way (Homelessness Services - City of Tacoma 2020)(Cowan 2020). While this is a good start for addressing the prioritization of camps, this policy could be made more universal. By creating a policy that addresses all encampments, this will ensure equity between all of the camps on state right of way. Currently, the camps in the cities of Seattle and Tacoma receive special consideration due to their location inside the city limits and the higher level of resources available in those cities. There does not need to be a single rule that works in all cases of homeless camps; there will certainly be provisions that say ‘In the cities of Seattle and Tacoma (and perhaps other places), continue to use city policy for prioritization of homeless encampments’ and these procedures will be more robust than those where WSDOT does not have the same level of local support. However, having a generally applicable policy for use in areas without such additional resources will be incredibly valuable for the equitable treatment of the individuals in homeless encampments.

Another policy that greatly enhances the safety of encampment removal for state DOT employees is an encampment removal policy. This again is something that WSDOT already has in chapter 2 of the Safety Procedures and Guidelines Manual (Safety Procedures and Guidelines Manual M 75-01 2018) but is valuable for other states that have not created such a policy. This type of policy will enhance the safety for DOT workers operating in and around homeless encampments. As has been noted before, very few states actually have some form of written policy specifically addressing homeless encampment removal. In these cases, the employees rely on general safety guidelines and procedures coupled with common best practices to maintain safety. This is a good baseline for employee safety, but a specific safety policy will enhance that. This will increase the consistency of a DOT’s approach to removing homeless encampments, which will overall reduce the exposure of DOT employees to hazards. Additionally, this will make it easier to ensure that all employees are properly trained and prepared to address these encampments. On top of the safety benefits this brings, it also can increase the equitability with which homeless encampment residents are treated if the policy is properly designed. By including this type of information in a safety manual, it normalizes the existence of camps on state right of way. By state DOTs

recognizing the importance of addressing these camps, assuming the policy includes sections on how to equitably and respectfully interact with the camp residents, begin to shift the paradigm away from treating camps as a nuisance that can simply be removed toward treating them as a long term issue that requires solving. While these shifts are relatively minor in scale, they represent a significant change of thinking around homeless encampments that is critical to facilitate if we as a society are ever going to solve the issue of homelessness.

Coupled with a cohesive and effective policy comes the need to ensure that staff training is adequate so that all of the positive benefits of such a policy can be felt. A safety policy has the potential to increase safety for DOT employees, but this potential will never be realized if the staff are not properly trained to utilize the policy properly. Every state DOT has different methods of training for their maintenance employees, and as such any new training that involves addressing homeless encampments should be made to fit into the current training structure of each state DOT. With this in mind, what this recommendation really amounts to is a call to continue to improve safety training to ensure the safe and equitable removal of homeless encampments along state right of way. Since most DOTs do not have a specific safety policy related to homeless encampments, the best way to do this is ensure that all current and new staff be trained on a policy if one is created. For states that do have this kind of policy like WSDOT, there are always ways for the safety training to be improved. Improving the training for staff on interacting with homeless encampments will only increase the level of safety for all employees and increase the equitable treatment of the camps.

Similarly, it is important that state DOT staff continue to increase their awareness of homelessness and all of many facets of the entire issue. This idea generally stands true for any member of society; as the issue of homelessness grows larger in societies consciousness, so too will the stigma attached to homelessness be reduced and the magnitude of societies efforts to address this pressing issue increase. DOTs then should contribute to increasing the knowledge of homelessness as part of our effort to address the issue. There are many ways for a DOT to do this. First and foremost is ensuring that all DOT employees are aware of the issues related to homelessness. This includes all employees in all areas, not just employees who work in the maintenance departments who might be exposed to homeless encampments as part of their job. This will serve to grow public though about this issue so society will be more likely to act on all fronts of this issue. The specifics of how this is done can vary greatly. There are countless ways awareness can be raised in a DOT. This can include department wide memos, flyers, meetings, or many other mediums. In all cases the result is the same; bring homelessness to the front of people's minds so that over time thinking about homelessness will grow to the point where there is a much wider response than from one department. Similar products can be made to be distributed to the public to inform them of the issue of homeless encampments along state right of way. This will have the same effect as internal growth of awareness in that it brings this critical issue to the forefront of people's minds. Another effective way to increase the awareness of DOT employees is to send them on immersion experiences like was described above. WSDOT already does some of this work. They regularly work with news agencies and other media sources to raise awareness of this issue. If done in a way that does not demonize the camps and instead focuses on the larger issues at hand, this can have a profound impact on society's effort to address these camps. WSDOT and other DOTs

should continue this effort to raise awareness to push society to look for long term, sustainable and equitable answers to this issue.

Another way state DOTs can begin to address the issues of homelessness is by providing resources to support efforts to address homelessness. DOTs are not in a position to give monetary resources, but there are other assets they can provide. Most notably, DOTs have a great deal of land that they oversee as part of their operations. Most of this land is used as transportation right of way or for other purposes, but there are still significant portions that are unused. Therefore, it would be highly beneficial for state DOTs to allow this land to be used to address homelessness. Land is one of the most constraining factors when addressing homelessness. Ultimately, one of the best ways to support homeless in addressing their needs is to provide them with long-term housing options. Any program that offers subsidized housing inherently requires land. Before in this report some of the issues related to finance have been brought up. Land can also be considered as an issue of finance; land can always be acquired, the issue becomes for how much money. Often times, this is a considerable sum that makes it difficult for municipalities to fund acquisitions of the necessary amount of land to fulfill the needs of their projects. This then leads to an ideal situation for DOTs and municipalities. DOTs have extra land that can be used by these municipalities for temporary and semi-permanent housing. This has already occurred in other states, with a very prominent program in the state of California. Recently, they passed a proposition through the state legislature that designates over 4 billion dollars for transportation. A part of this money was designated toward finding and using Caltrans property for temporary housing (Takigawa 2019). This is one example where this type of intervention has been implemented in other states showing how state DOTs can help address homelessness by allowing other groups to use their unused property assets. This has also been looked into in specific places in Washington. This kind of lease was investigated with the City of Olympia. The goal was to find a property to locate another mitigation camp. Thus far these searches have not been successful in Olympia. The City of Olympia has only established one of these camps which has been created on a city owned parking lot (Cowan 2020)(Homelessness - City of Olympia 2020). This is one example of the type of housing that can be created with these types of property leases can be used. They can also be used to create more permanent styles of housing, like apartments or other more permanent housing. Each of these types of housing have benefits and negatives. Creating a sanctioned camp like the mitigation camps in Olympia is much simpler and cheaper than creating permanent housing solutions but does not provide as positive a living situation for the homeless. Conversely, more permanent housing is much more difficult and costly to create but provides better shelter and opportunities for the homeless. In reality, it does not concern state DOTs what kind of housing project is created on their property. They will take no part in managing these housing projects; all state DOTs will do is lease the property to a municipality with social services agencies or a non-profit to operate. Since WSDOT will not take part in managing these properties, there are no tangible negatives for WSDOT. This type of arrangement will be beneficial both to WSDOT and the local municipalities. This type of program will be greatly helpful for local cities and municipalities to address homelessness by not requiring them to purchase land. In turn, this will reduce the total homeless population over time meaning less encampments that form on state right of way.

6.4 Recommendation Summary

There are many ways state DOTs can improve with regards to homelessness. Practices, policy, communication, and goal setting are important for DOTs to ensure they are addressing the issue of homelessness equitably, safely, and effectively. This section contains several recommendations by which state DOTs can better achieve their goals in addressing homelessness. A summary list is below:

- Further analyze current practices of state DOTs, local municipalities, and federal and state regulation.
 - Cause better communication between state DOTs and local agencies to address homelessness safely and equitably.
 - Better coordination of policy between local jurisdictions and state DOTs.
- Promote regional organization to address homelessness on a regional scale in complement to local programs already in place.
 - Increase awareness of issues facing the homeless population for decision makers, potentially through immersions.
 - Communicate directly with homeless population to ensure their voice is heard in policy making decisions.
 - Allocate more money from various sources to address the issue of homelessness in a more robust manner.
- State DOTs should create a strategic homelessness plan to define goals and wanted outcomes with regards to addressing homelessness.
 - Create a database of homeless encampments.
 - Create a prioritization policy for state DOTs.
 - Create a removal policy for state DOTs.
 - Increase staff awareness of the issues of homelessness.
 - Find unused DOT land parcels and lease them for sanctioned camps or permanent housing.

All of these recommendations will have a positive effect for addressing homelessness. It is important to remember however that any of these recommendations needs to be created with the local context in mind. Different state DOTs have different practices and different partner organizations; any solution implemented needs to consider the unique aspects of each of these factors to ensure that it meshes with the current practices of a state or region to have the greatest effect. Conversely, if a project is implemented without regard for local context, there is a distinct likelihood that the project will fail to meet expectations for addressing homelessness. This shows how it is critical for each implementation of these recommendations to be done using the local knowledge and expertise of state DOTs to ensure a successful outcome. These recommendations focus on Seattle and the Puget Sound region, but the general concepts are transferrable to other areas of the state where there are issues of homelessness, such as Spokane or Vancouver. Additionally, they are transferrable to other states and regions of the country as well.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

It is clear that homelessness is a significant issue faced by our society. The stigma that has been built up around homelessness is incredibly damaging to the homeless population by entrenching systemic forces that maintain homelessness at a high level. It is also rooted in long held racial discrimination where people of color are far more likely to become homeless. Homelessness takes a physical, emotional, and psychological toll on those who experience it. As a society we need to begin to shift how we think about homelessness in order to alleviate this issue and support those who find themselves in this situation in a way that is equitable for the homeless.

Nationally, homelessness has remained steady over recent years, showing no trend up or down. This shows how difficult it is to shift this pressing issue. There is a significant amount of inertia when it comes to homelessness. In general, in the United States there is not enough funding to create a significant lasting difference on the overall homeless population. Even though this issue has remained steady at a national level, some local areas have seen homelessness grow considerably over recent years. Seattle and the Puget Sound region is one such area. As the population of the Puget Sound region has continued to grow and the price of housing has skyrocketed, the homeless population has steadily grown. Until this year, it had grown at a rate of approximately 4 percent each year. This year, it did drop 8 percent, but a one-time drop is not indicative of a trend in the downward direction.

Homelessness has been of concern to state DOTs as well. Homeless encampments along state right of way pose serious risks for state DOTs. These encampments mostly form along access-controlled freeways. They can directly interfere with regular DOT maintenance procedure. If they are located such that a DOT employee would need to work in proximity to or move through a camp to access the work location, they would be exposed to health risks that they otherwise would not be. These hazards include drug paraphernalia, needles, biohazards, debris, trash, and many others. These hazards also extend to those working in operations of the roadway beyond those who have direct interactions with the camps as well. Beyond the hazards that DOT employees are exposed to, these camps are also extremely hazardous for the homeless campers themselves. Firstly, in these camps they are more exposed to noise and pollution than camping in other areas. Additionally, there is always the threat that a vehicle could potentially run off the road and injure or kill the camp inhabitants.

For these reasons, it is imperative that state DOTs address this issue of unsanctioned encampments along the state right of way. Currently, the only action state DOTs are in a position to take is to remove the encampment when there is a threat to the camp inhabitants, or it hinders regular maintenance work of the roadway. To do this, states use the multi-agency approach to ensure the camp is removed both safely and equitably. The multi-agency approach involves using the expertise of local municipalities in providing services to the homeless that state DOTs are not positioned or qualified to provide. These groups usually take two main forms: a human services agency and a law enforcement agency. The local law enforcement agency is responsible for ensuring the safety of those working in proximity to the camp with regards to physical confrontation with camp residents. The human services agency is responsible for providing the

services for the camp residents to utilize to address their needs. Finally, the state DOT acts as the property and asset manager who removes the debris from the camp and ensures there is no damage to structures or other assets. The multi-agency approach also has a common procedure that is followed. First, homeless encampments along the highways are identified. This can take many forms, the most common of which are through citizen complaints or employee reports. Next, the known camps are prioritized to decide which poses the most threat to safety, DOT assets, and to the encampment residents themselves. Those that pose the most threat are identified so that they can be removed first. This is usually done by the state DOT, although on occasion other partners are consulted or help make the final removal decision. Once a camp has been identified and prioritized to be removed and a date has been selected for the removal, outreach with the camp is conducted. This is mostly conducted by the local human services agency. There are many ways to conduct outreach: flyers, postings, and camp visits to name a few common ones. The goal of the outreach is to provide services to the homeless in an attempt to address their needs and support their goals of leaving homelessness. Once this is complete, on the decided date the camp is removed. This is mostly done by the state DOT, with support from the local law enforcement. In this, usually law enforcement will sweep the camp to ensure there are no individuals in the camp. Then the DOT employees remove all of the hazards and debris. Finally, preventative maintenance may occur. This involves altering the landscape and environment to make it less desirable for camps to form in the future. This step is optional and is done by the DOT. There is always some inherent inequity of removing a camp, even with the multi-agency approach. Forcing a homeless community to vacate their living area is a traumatic experience that can have severe negative consequences. This inequity however is often balanced by positive outcomes from the multi-agency approach that mitigate the inequity of the displacement, mitigate the special health risks of living near access controlled freeways, and provide equitable resources for the camp population to address their underlying causes of homelessness. It is critical that every camp removal carefully weigh these considerations to ensure that the homeless are being treated equitably and that a camp removal ends up being a net positive for the camp inhabitants. It is important to note that the level of equity and safety of a homeless encampment removal does not solely rely on the state DOT. Instead, it is a combination of all of these agencies policies and guidelines that affects how effective the process is. Therefore, it is critical to ensure that state DOTs have a firm understanding of the partner agencies policies and that there is ample communication so that all groups can work compatibly and efficiently.

To ensure the homeless encampment removals are done in a safe and equitable way as described above, many states have adopted homeless encampment removal policies. Other states often follow the same general procedure; however, it is fairly uncommon for states to have dedicated policy for addressing homeless encampments. Of the 17 states that responded to the RAC survey, only three had specific written policy addressing homeless encampments along state right of way, one of which was WSDOT. The other two in question were ODOT and Caltrans. These states that do not have dedicated policies often rely on more general safety guidelines and best practices to ensure the safety of their employees. While these guidelines are adequate at ensuring the safety of the maintenance employees, there is a higher likelihood that there will be situations that the employees are not prepared for that could create an unsafe situation. These policies and guidelines

serve to ensure that DOT employees have a common procedure to follow which decreases the likelihood that employees will be put into dangerous situations or treat the homeless camp population inequitably.

WSDOT has this kind of policy. WSDOT's encampment removal policies are imbedded into their "Safety Procedures and Guidelines Manual." This manual has an entire chapter dedicated to the removal of homeless encampments. In this section, they provide clear guidelines to ensure the safety of the DOT employees, including such tasks and mandating the creation of a group safety plan before each removal, ensuring nobody enters a camp unaccompanied, and ensuring training to recognize hazardous material that requires special treatment and potentially requires specialized personnel to dispose of. In the multi-agency approach, this policy only refers to the actual removal procedure, not the steps that come before and after. For preventative maintenance, the employees use other sections of the safety manual that pertain to the particular treatment being used. For the identification and outreach, WSDOT mostly relies on their partner agencies to facilitate these parts of the multi-agency approach.

The agency that WSDOT works most closely with in the multi-agency approach is the city of Seattle. This city has the highest concentration of homelessness in the state of Washington and is the epicenter of the growth of homelessness in the Puget sound region. Being a large city, they have robust policies for addressing homeless encampments. The Human Services Department is the main group that works with WSDOT in addressing homeless encampments along state right of way. This group is responsible for all outreach activities in the city with regards to homelessness, including on the state right of ways. They have a close partnership with the Seattle Police Department which provides the law enforcement aspect of the multi-agency approach. Seattle outreach procedure requires 72-hour notices to be posted at any camp that is to be removed in the city, including those on state right of way. This is a policy that has been adopted by WSDOT and implemented statewide. Additionally, they are required to conduct at least one camp visit within the 72-hour window with trained outreach professionals to connect with the camp residents and provide them resources. Additionally, the HSD also is responsible for providing temporary housing for all of the encampment residents during the entirety of the removal process as mandated by the federal supreme court case *Martin v. Boise*. One interesting difference to the multi-agency approach that take place in Seattle is in the prioritization phase. In this phase, WSDOT collaborates directly with the City to determine which camps to remove, which is unique as most commonly the DOT has final say in this matter.

Another city that highlights the multi-agency approach with WSDOT is the city of Tacoma. The City of Tacoma operates a dedicated team of both outreach professionals and police officers whose sole purpose is to address homeless encampments, called the Homeless Outreach Team. This joint group serves as both the law enforcement and outreach agency in the multi-agency approach. Tacoma has the second highest rate of homelessness in the state of Washington behind Seattle. The HOT provides the same types of services that the City of Seattle HSD provides, and is under the same federal guidelines as the City of Seattle, so there are many similarities to their procedures. One truly unique aspect of the City of Tacoma is that they take full agency of the identification and prioritization of homeless encampments, even on state right of way. While they still utilize

WSDOT when physically removing the encampments, they identify, prioritize, and conduct outreach with camps independently from WSDOT. Of course, they communicate which camps they are working with on WSDOT property with WSDOT, WSDOT has sacrificed agency in this area to allow for a more streamlined process.

A third city that WSDOT partners with regularly is the city of Olympia. This city holds different challenges than the larger cities of Tacoma and Seattle. This city does not have the sheer numbers of homeless like Seattle and Tacoma. While this is a good thing, this city also does not have anywhere near the level of resources that those other larger cities have. This has created different issues for addressing their homeless population. They have worked to take a more regional approach to addressing homelessness by creating an agreement with other cities in Thurston County (where Olympia is located). The idea of this type of agreement is that when pooled together the resources of all of these cities will be greater than their sum. This idea is positive in the long term, but in the short term the City of Olympia is struggling as they hold the majority of the homeless population in Thurston County and it takes time for those resources to disseminate and the positive effects of the regional agreement to take effect. This also affects WSDOT and state right of ways because it means that the City of Olympia is over capacity in the services they can provide and thus they cannot always remove homeless encampments that need to be removed.

This highlights one of the inherent issues faced by groups trying to address the homelessness. There is a disconnect between the local and regional ramifications of homelessness. Currently, most of the programs that are meant to address homelessness are implemented on a local level, usually in cities and counties. However, the effects of homelessness are inherently regional as homelessness does not just starkly change at the borders of different municipalities. The homeless population is constantly shifting throughout regions in this way. This topic is especially tricky for WSDOT and other state DOTs as they are inherently regional organizations but need to interact with the local programs to address homelessness. This is evident in the fact that WSDOT has separate partnerships with each different city and county for addressing homelessness. This requires an extra level of organization, coordination, and communication with all of the municipalities that state DOTs work with to address homelessness.

From this issue of regional and local pressures and the other safety and equity concerns regarding homeless encampment removal, we compiled a list of recommendations for to use to improve their procedures and guidelines. This includes both broad recommendations that will help society address the homelessness issue and more specialized recommendations that will help state DOTs reduce the prevalence of encampments along state right of way. The recommendations are as follows:

- Further analyze current practices of state DOTs, local municipalities, and federal and state regulation.
 - Cause better communication between state DOTs and local agencies to address homelessness safely and equitably.
 - Better coordination of policy between local jurisdictions and state DOTs.
- Promote regional organization to address homelessness on a regional scale in complement to local programs already in place.

- Increase awareness of issues facing the homeless population for decision makers, potentially through immersions.
- Communicate directly with homeless population to ensure their voice is heard in policy making decisions.
- Allocate more money form various sources to address the issue of homelessness in a more robust manner.
- State DOTs should create a strategic homelessness plan to define goals and wanted outcomes with regards to addressing homelessness.
 - Create a database of homeless encampments.
 - Create a prioritization policy for state DOTs.
 - Create a removal policy for state DOTs.
 - Increase staff awareness of the issues of homelessness.
 - Find unused DOT land parcels and lease them for sanctioned camps or permanent housing.

These recommendations are all critical to addressing homelessness. Not all are applicable to DOTs directly and not all will be applicable to the context of certain states, but these recommendations are important to ensure that progress continues to be made by DOTs and society as a whole in addressing homelessness. Each of the three broad recommendations are critical. Further analyzing current practices will allow state DOTs to better mesh their policies with local agencies as well as state and federal regulations. Supporting a committee to address homelessness will enhance the ability for decision makers to effectively find and address homelessness. Finally, creating a strategic plan that details the goals and guiding outcomes for a state DOT to address homelessness will create a guiding document that they can reference whenever a new policy or program needs to be created so that it is effective, efficient, equitable, and increases accountability for the DOT. These recommendations will overall increase both safety and equity because it will ensure that these state DOTs are following best practices and continuing to innovate to address the issue of homelessness.

This report uses WSDOT and the Puget Sound Region as one example of how a DOT is addressing homelessness. The general ideas in this report however are much more broadly applicable. The recommendations and basic policy analysis can be taken and applied to any other state DOT wanting to better address homeless encampments along its right of way. Of course, the context of each individual state, and even regions within states, needs to be considered when attempting to use the findings of this report. For this, a study of a regions policies and procedures needs to be completed. But once that is done all of these findings can be implemented in a context sensitive way.

To conclude, it is the responsibility of all of society to help address homelessness. Even if a person or group has no direct contact with the homeless, all people must work to break down the stigma that has formed with regards to the homeless population to ensure that the homeless population is treated with equality. DOTs certainly are a group that does interact with homeless regularly in the form of unsanctioned encampments along state right of way, and as such, they need to ensure they are contributing to an equitable solution to this issue.

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