Project Delivery Method Selection Guidance

July 2025

Purpose:

This guidance is intended to aid WSDOT staff in evaluating projects to determine the most appropriate delivery method for a project. Each project's attributes, opportunities, and risks will be considered in identifying the most cost effective and best value delivery method.

Goals:

- Establish a systematic approach to be consistently applied for projects
- Establish how and when a project's delivery method should be assessed
- Allow scalability in selection process
- Identify the documentation needed for project delivery method approval
- Identify approval levels and endorsements in the process

Background:

The Project Delivery Method Selection Guidance (PDMSG) is WSDOT policy for the selection of delivery methods.

WSDOT is legislatively authorized to use Design-Build, Progressive Design-Build, and General Contractor/Construction Manager as delivery methods for projects. For Design-Bid-Build, Design-Build projects, and Progressive Design-Build, regional authorities provide the approval of the final delivery method. The use of General Contractor/Construction Manager requires approval from the Capital Projects Advisory Review Board (CPARB), a separate entity outside of WSDOT.

This guidance will be applied to all WSDOT projects to determine the optimal delivery method.

Introduction

This document provides evaluation tools to determine the optimal delivery method for projects, scalable to the appropriate level of effort based on the type and size of the project. Projects less than $10 million (total for PE,

RW, and CN Phases) are programmatically exempt from this process.

This guidance is integrated into the existing project development processes as outlined in the WSDOT Design Manual (M22-01), including the Project Deliverables Expectation Matrix (Section 305.04(1)(b)). It also coordinates with the Cost Risk Assessment (CRA) and Cost Estimate Validation Process (CEVP) workshop processes as described in the Project Risk Management Guide. The Project Delivery Method (PDM) determination is to be included in the project file, but not part of the Design Documentation Package (See DM CH 300).

The Benefits and Timing of Project Delivery Method Selection

No single PDM is optimal for every project; therefore, each project should be evaluated to determine the best PDM. Some of the benefits associated with selecting the optimal delivery method for WSDOT projects include:

- Achieving the best value for the project,
- Achieving critical schedule requirements for the project including key milestones,
- Achieving the best quality and maximum scope within the limitations of cost, schedule and other project limits,
- Achieving alignment with the Design and Construction Office staff resources for the delivery method to increase contract administration efficiency,
- Achieving alignment to meet the project goals by utilizing the best delivery method to effectively mitigate or respond to project risks

Identifying the optimal delivery method early in a project provides the greatest benefits. After a project reaches 30% design completion, the advantages of evaluating different delivery methods decrease significantly. However, the chosen delivery method should be revisited if there are major changes to the project scope or if new information emerges that affects the project's characteristics or risks. It should be recognized that if delivery method is revisited and a change in delivery method is suggested after 30% design, the project schedule may be greatly impacted.

The benefits of early identification of the delivery method include:

- Maximizing the benefits of having a Project Management Plan (PMP) that is tailored to the delivery method selected.
- Supporting early staffing decisions and helps define design effort, resource needs, scheduling, and budgeting more effectively.
- Improving risk allocation in cost estimates by aligning with the specific requirements of the chosen

delivery method.

- Enhancing the accuracy of scoping estimates by allowing the team to estimate using factors appropriate to the delivery method.

The Project Delivery Methods Available to WSDOT

The delivery methods differ based on how contracts are established between the parties (WSDOT, designers, and contractors), as well as the technical relationships that develop between each party within those contracts. The delivery method determines when the parties become engaged and influences the overall project design. No single delivery method is ideal for all projects. Each project must be examined individually to determine how it aligns with the attributes of each delivery method. WSDOT primarily uses two types of delivery methods: Design-Bid-Build (DBB) and Design-Build (DB). Progressive Design Build (PDB) or General Contractor/ Construction Manager (GCCM) may also be pursued under the right circumstances.

Design-Bid-Build (DBB):

Design-Bid-Build (DBB) is the traditional delivery method used by WSDOT. In this method, WSDOT either designs the project in-house or hires a designer to complete the design, then advertises and awards a separate construction contract based on the finished design documents.

With DBB, WSDOT has full control over the process and is responsible for the design details during construction. As a result, WSDOT also bears the cost of any errors or omissions discovered during construction. In DBB, contractors are prequalified for specific types of work and then the contract is awarded to the responsive bidder with the lowest bid proposal.

Design-Build (DB):

Design-Build is a delivery method in which WSDOT procures both design and construction services in the same contract from a single, legal entity referred to as the Design-Builder. WSDOT typically uses a two-phase selection process, where WSDOT issues a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) and Design-Builders are shortlisted in the first phase. WSDOT the issues a Request for Proposals (RFP) then selects a Design-Builder based on “Best Value” in the second phase.

The DB project delivery method allows design and construction phases to overlap. The Design-Builder becomes involved early in project development, at approximately the 15% to 30% design level, offering opportunities for innovation and improved constructability, and confirming project costs early. The Design-Builder controls the details of design as the engineer of record and is typically responsible for the cost of any design errors or omissions encountered during construction.

Progressive Design-Build (PDB):

Progressive Design-Build (PDB) is a delivery method in which WSDOT procures both design and construction

services in the same contract from a single, legal entity referred to as the Design-Builder. The procurement is done earlier than standard Design Build, between 0%-10% design, when only a general scope is typically known. WSDOT issues an RFQ and then short-lists proposers to move on to the RFP process. Unlike standard DB procurement, the PDB proposers provide a management plan and approach to resolving the project's biggest risks as well as a price factor such as hourly rates, home office overhead and profit, and the level of effort to accomplish the first phase of the project. The proposers interviewed, and are scored on experience, qualifications, and their project delivery approach.

Following contract award, the Progressive Design-Build (PDB) agreement advances into Phase 1 services. This phase begins with the validation of the project's scope, schedule, and budget assumptions. The design-builder and owner collaboratively establish a feasible scope and schedule that aligns with the overall budget, accounting for identified project risks. Subsequently, the project begins design development, during which the parties jointly develop the basis of design, complete preliminary engineering, and refine the project's scope, schedule, and target price. This phase is typically executed under a cost-reimbursable contract structure, which necessitates comprehensive cost transparency from the design-builder. It also requires ongoing, structured collaboration and communication between the parties to establish the final commercial terms for the project.

After design is approximately 60%-70% complete, Phase 2 services are negotiated. Phase 2 includes final design and construction of the project. If the Phase 2 negotiations are not successful, WSDOT has the option to advertise the remainder of the project for completion.

Note: Contract templates for Progressive Design-Build (PDB) have not yet been developed. If a project office chooses to use this delivery method, additional time must be allocated to create the necessary contract documents. Using PDB may also require support from experienced consultants during contract development and negotiations. Involvement of a qualified Independent Cost Estimator is required. WSDOT has delivered three projects using the Progressives Design Build delivery method. The documents from those three projects are available as a resource.

General Contractor/Construction Manager (GCCM):

General Contractor/Construction Manager (GCCM), sometimes referred to as Construction Manager, General Contractor (CMGC), is a delivery method in which WSDOT selects a firm to provide services during the design phase, selects a separate firm to perform constructability reviews during the design phase and to act as construction manager and general contractor during the construction phase. A maximum allowable construction cost is negotiated with the construction manager/general contractor firm.

The GCCM is selected at a time in the project when the GCCM's participation provides value, so that the GCCM can provide early input to the construction process, including constructability, pricing, input on construction methods for environmental and local permitting and construction phasing. By providing these services early in design, the GCCM can save future costs by potentially avoiding costly changes.

The GCCM and WSDOT then collaborate to develop a Maximum Allowable Construction Cost (MACC) once the construction documents and specifications are at least ninety percent complete. The GCCM typically continues to play a role on the project as the general contractor and construction manager during the construction phase. Subcontractors are selected using a public bidding procedure with optional pre-bid determination of

subcontractor eligibility.

Note: At this point, GCCM contract templates have not been developed. If a project office were to select this delivery method, the schedule will need to account for additional time for the development of the GCCM contract. Use of this method requires the services of experienced consultants during the contract development and negotiations as well as the support of a well-qualified Independent Cost Estimator (ICE). The first three WSDOT projects deliver using GCCM will require approval from CPARB. This approval will also need to be considered in the project schedule.

Delivery Method Comparison

This table highlights the strengths and weaknesses of each delivery method to help in selecting the most suitable option for specific project needs.

Delivery Method	Design-Bid-Build (DBB)	General Contractor/Construction Manager (GCCM)	Design-Build (DB)	Progressive Design-Bid-Build (PDB)
Pros	- Strong agency knowledge base. - Clear and familiar process. - Competitive bidding can lead to lower initial costs. - Clear delineation of roles and responsibilities. - Easier to manage for the owner since roles are clearly separated. - Design decisions reflect the Department's owner/operator perspective.	- Flexibility in selecting contractor with specific expertise. - The construction manager provides oversight to ensure project stays on schedule and within budget. - Often results in a better-quality outcome due to experienced oversight and management. - Opportunity to create a collaborative relationship between contractor and owner.	- Single point of responsibility for both design and construction. - Faster project completion with more efficient coordination. - Reduced potential for design changes during construction. - Reduced likelihood of construction delays due to changes in design.	- Flexibility in design adjustments during the project. - Strong collaboration between design and construction teams from the beginning. - Enhanced cost control as the budget is set early and is based on the evolving design. - Clearer communication and fewer misunderstandings between design and construction teams. -
Cons	- Potential for cost overruns due to unforeseen issues or design changes discovered during construction. - Longer overall project timelines due to sequential design	- Limited agency experience and support structures in this delivery method. - Requires significant owner involvement and decision-making during both design and construction.	- Less owner control over design and interpretation of design guidance as they rely on a single entity. - Possibility of cost inflation due to integration of design	- Limited agency experience and support structures in this delivery method. - Potential for initial cost uncertainty as pricing is more flexible. - Complex negotiations during early phases.

	and bidding processes. - Higher risk of disputes between designer and contractor over project scope or design issues. - No early contractor involvement, so risk of misalignment between design and construction may increase.	- May lead to higher costs due to added management fees and project overhead. - The success of the method depends heavily on the contractor's ability to manage the project effectively. - More complex contract structure compared to DBB and DB. - Requires CPARB approval.	and construction under one contract. - Limited competitive bidding, potentially resulting in higher costs. - Potentially more expensive upfront costs for the integrated design-build contract. - Lack of sufficient bid information and unknowns of high-risk items translate into higher bids.	- Limited competition in pricing early on can lead to inefficiencies. - Contractors may lack incentive for cost-saving early in design process. -
Table Source: Open AI 2025				

Projects are evaluated in two steps:

Step 1: The Probable Project Delivery Method (Probable PDM)

The Probable PDM is a preliminary determination that is used for project planning until the Final PDM is determined early in the Preliminary Engineering (PE) phase. The Probable PDM is determined at the beginning of the scoping stage of a project before the approval of the Project Profile / Project Summary. The Probable PDM process is intended to provide the project office with initial guidance on the project's delivery method. The Probable PDM will be recorded in the project summary/profile. The Probable PDM is much more elementary than the Final PDM and does not require the use of the Contracting Alternatives Suitability Evaluator (CASE) Tool. The Probable PDM will be determined by the Region Program Management Offices and is reported by the HQ Capital Project and Development Management Office (CPDM) for the current delivery plan.

Step 2: Final Project Delivery Method (Final PDM)

The Final PDM is the delivery method determination submitted for approval in PE phase. The Final PDM selection occurs ideally during the pre-design phase (0% - 10% design), or shortly after the project is assigned to a Project Engineer's Office (approximately 10% - 30% design). The Project Engineer's Office or Pre-Design Team will facilitate the PDM process to determine the Final PDM using the WSDOT CASE Tool, Project Evaluation Criteria Sheets, or workshops, depending on complexity of the project. (Refer to *Attachment A* for appropriate level of effort). The CASE Tool is intended to help inform the project team of the optimal delivery method but is not the only factor in selecting a delivery method. Several other factors may influence the Final PDM including:

- Workforce Experience
- Agency Support Structure (i.e. templates for PDB and GCCM are not developed at this time)

- Project Risks

For more complex projects, a workshop may be advantageous. A workshop is required for projects with costs of $100 Million and greater to determine the Final PDM. The workshop should include the Project Engineer (PE), Project Development Engineer (PDE)/Engineering Manager (EM), Assistant State Design Engineer (ASDE), Assistant State Construction Engineer (ASCE), Region and Headquarters support groups, Subject Matter Experts (SME), etc.

If the WSDOT CASE Tool recommends DB, PDB, or GCCM, complete the appropriate "Project Evaluation Criteria" sheet to make a final determination. Note that both DB and PDB recommendations will use the Design Build Score Sheet. Projects recommending a GCCM delivery method will need to be approved by CPARB.

Contracting Alternatives Suitability Evaluator (CASE) Tool

The Contracting Alternatives Suitability Evaluator (CASE) Tool was developed by FHWA to help steward public funds to save time and dollars on federal projects. It integrates strong national best practices from FHWA, other state DOTs and local jurisdictions using alternative contracting methods. This tool was developed using a synthesis of case studies and assessments of existing methodologies on alternative contracting methods, Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), and DOT delivery methods. In 2019, the CASE Tool was pilot tested by several state DOTs, including WSDOT.

In coordination with FHWA, WSDOT has developed a "WSDOT" version of the FHWA CASE Tool to better align with WSDOT practices. This is called the WSDOT CASE Tool. (From this point on, the WSDOT CASE Tool will be simply referred to as the CASE Tool.) This CASE Tool replaces the previous process's PDMSG Checklist and the PDMSG Matrix.

The CASE Tool evaluates the following delivery methods: Design Bid Build (DBB), Design Build (DB), Progressive Design Build, and General Contracting/Construction Manager. Based on a series of questions, the CASE Tool will provide a recommended delivery method.

WSDOT CASE Tool

The CASE Tool is a MS Excel file with embedded formulas. It will be imperative for the user to only manipulate designated cells. Within the CASE Tool, there are five tabs:

- **Project Information Tab**: This tab requires your basic project information

- **Project Details Tab**: This tab is the "intelligence" input which influences the delivery method recommendation.

- **Results (Ordinal Ranking) Tab**: This tab is the output from the Project Details using the Ordinal Ranking method.

Ordinal Ranking is a quick way to assess a delivery method most appropriate for your project based on prioritizing 5 Project Delivery Method Goals: 1) Technical 2) Schedule 3) Cost 4) Context or 5) Finance. This method is appropriate when not much information is known about the project, as in the pre-design phase of a project.

- **Results (Point Ranking) Tab**: This tab is the output from the Project Details using the Point Ranking method.

  Point Ranking is a more extensive assessment to determine a delivery method most appropriate for your project. A total of 100 points is assigned to the 5 Project Delivery Method Goals: 1) Technical 2) Schedule 3) Cost 4) Context or 5) Finance. This method is recommended when more information is known about the project, but prior to a project's 30% Design milestone. If this ranking method is used, a brief explanation of point assignments is recommended.

  - **Final PDM Tab**: This tab summarizes and documents the Final Project Delivery Method. It also serves as the signature page denoting approval of delivery method. Note that if GCCM delivery method is selected, CPARB will need to approve this recommendation. If DB, PDB or GCCM is recommended, fill out the appropriate "Project Evaluation Criteria" Sheet for a final determination. (Use *Attachment B* for DB and PDB projects, or *Attachment C* for GCCM projects.) This is a separate file from the WSDOT CASE Tool.

Once complete, the workbook should be converted into a PDF file. Signatures from the Project Engineer, Project Development Engineer/Engineering Manager, and Regional Administrator (or designee) as noted in the table above are required for approval. (Note: If GCCM is recommended, CPARB approval is required.) Once approved, the Final PDM is to be included in the project file.

Attachment A

Level of Effort for Delivery Method Selection:

Project Delivery Method Selection Process		
Project Cost [1]	Selection Document/Tools	Authorizations
Projects under $10 Million [2]	Projects may be Design-Bid-Build. [2]	Programmatically Exempted [2]
$10 Million or Greater but Less than $25 Million	WSDOT CASE Tool – Ordinal Method Recommended	• Signature by Project Engineer • PDE / EM Manager Approval
$25 Million or Greater but Less than $100 Million	WSDOT CASE Tool – Ordinal Method but consider using Point Method	• Signature by Project Engineer • PDE / EM Manager Endorsement • Regional Administrator Approval
$100 Million or Greater – Alternative Delivery Method Recommended	WSDOT CASE Tool – Point Method and workshop recommended	• Signature by Project Engineer • PDE / EM Manager • Regional Administrator Approval

Attachment A

Notes:

[1] The Project Cost is the total of the Preliminary Engineering, Right-of-Way and Construction Costs.

[2] Projects under $10 million are programmatically exempt from PDMSG and will be Design-Bid-Build. For all other projects under $10 million, using the delivery method selection process is optional, not required.

If a previously approved Final Project Delivery Method requires a change, follow the table above for a new delivery method selection. For projects greater than $100 million, a change in delivery method will require Assistant Secretary of Regions / Principal Engineer.

Attachment B

Project Evaluation Criteria (for Design-Build or Progressive Design-Build projects):

Project Review Committee (PRC)
Application Evaluation Sheet
Public Agency Design-Build Project

Date: _____ Approved ____

Public Agency: _____ Denied ____

Project Name: _____

PRC Member: _____

Project Evaluation Criteria
Design-Build

Determine that the Agency's proposed use of Design-Build on the project meets the requirements for alternative contracting procedures:

	Pass	Fail
A. Provides substantial fiscal benefit or traditional delivery method is not practical.		
B. Project meets qualifying criteria under RCW 39.10.300. Public bodies may utilize the DB procedure for public works projects in which the total project cost is over two million dollars and where: *(Pass if meets 1 of 3)*		
1. The construction activities are highly specialized, and a DB approach is critical in developing the construction methodology; or		
2. The projects selected provide opportunity for greater innovation or efficiencies between the designer and the builder; or		
3. **Significant savings in project delivery time** would be realized.		
C. Public Body has necessary experience or team: ***(must meet all 6 to pass**; 1 fail fails all)*		
1. Project delivery knowledge and experience;		
2. Sufficient contract administration personnel with construction experience;		
3. Written management plan with clear & logical lines of authority;		
4. Necessary & appropriate funding and time to carry out the project;		
5. Continuity of project management team with project type & scope experience;		
6. Necessary and appropriate construction budget.		
D. For Design-Build projects, construction personnel independent of the DB team are knowledgeable in DB process & capable to oversee & administer the contract.		
E. Public Body has resolved any audit findings relative to previous projects.		

Overall Evaluation by Committee/Panel Member
Reason for Determination:

_____

_____

Observations/Concerns:

_____

_____

_____
Signature

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Criteria extracted from RCW 39.10.300

Attachment C

Project Evaluation Criteria (for General Contractor/Construction Manager projects):

Project Review Committee (PRC)
GC/CM Project Evaluation Sheet

Date: _____ Approved _____
PRC Member: _____ Denied _____
Public Agency: _____
Project Name: _____
Requesting Alternative Subcontractor Selection? Yes _____ No _____
Subcontractor/Subcontract Package(s): _____ Approve ASSP (y/n) _____

Project Evaluation Criteria
General Contractor/Construction Manager

Determine that the Agency's proposed use of GC/CM on the project meets the requirements for alternative contracting procedures:

	Pass	Fail
A. Provides substantial fiscal benefit or traditional delivery method is not practical.		
B. Project meets qualifying criteria under RCW 39.10.340. Public bodies may utilize the GC/CM procedure for public works projects where at least one of the following is met: *(Pass if meets 1 of 6)*		
1. Implementation of the project involves complex scheduling, phasing, or coordination, or		
2. The project involves construction at an occupied facility which must continue to operate during construction; or		
3. The involvement of the GC/CM during the design stage is critical to the success of the project; or		
4. The project encompasses a complex or technical work environment; or		
5. The project requires specialized work on a building that has historic significance; or		
6. The project is, and the public body elects to procure the project as, a heavy civil construction project. However, no provision of this chapter pertaining to a heavy civil construction project applies unless the public body expressly elects to procure the project as a heavy civil construction project.		
C. Public Body has necessary experience or team: ***(must meet all 6 to pass; 1 fail fails all)***		
1. Project delivery knowledge and experience		
2. Sufficient contract administration personnel with construction experience		
3. Written management plan with clear & logical lines of authority		
4. Necessary & appropriate funding and time to carry out the project		
5. Continuity of project management team with project type & scope experience		
6. Necessary and appropriate construction budget		
D. Public Body has resolved any audit findings relative to previous projects.		

Alternative Subcontractor Selection Process

Determine that the Public Agency's proposed use of alternative subcontractor selection by the GC/CM on the project meets the requirements for alternative subcontracting procedures: (*must meet all 6 to pass; 1 fail fails all*)

	Pass	Fail
E. Public Benefit		
a. Benefits of alternative subcontractor selection versus low bid selection		
b. Process for determining if alternative subcontractor selection is in the best interest of the public		
F. Public Body Engagement/Knowledge		
a. Participation in the alternative subcontractor selection process		
b. Oversight of the GC/CM during the alternative subcontractor selection process		
c. Knowledge of Public Body responsibilities		
d. Knowledge of audit requirements		

Reason for Determination Observations/Concerns:

_____

_____

_____
Signature

Revised 7/27/2023 *Criteria extracted from RCW 39.10.340*