

Strategic Communications Plan 2025

The background of the slide features a stylized, high-contrast image of a running track. The track is composed of white lines on a black background, creating a sense of depth and perspective as the lines converge towards the top. Large, bold white numbers '1', '2', and '3' are positioned along the track, likely representing lane numbers. Several yellow arrows are overlaid on the track, pointing from the left towards the center, suggesting a path or direction.

Project Overview

- WPPA hired Fisher McCabe Public Affairs to conduct a series of qualitative interviews in the spring of 2025 with a representative sample of WPPA member ports.
- Interviewees included: commissioners, chief executives, port consultants and public affairs/communications staff.
- This work reflects recommendations from the WPPA strategic planning process.



Strategic Comms Plan: Goals!

- Help answer the question: What do ports do?
- Help WPPA identify additional strategies to raise the public understanding and support of Washington state's public ports.
- Provide a practical tool that port representatives can use in engaging with their communities.

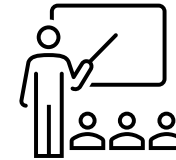
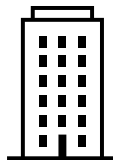


Key Findings

Washington ports are consistently and primarily focused on creating economic opportunities in their communities.

Ports engage in environmental remediation, developing access to energy resources, increasing public access to natural resources, and supporting civic and cultural activities.

“A lot of ports in smaller towns act as commercial developers because there are no other entities doing that or promoting commercial growth.”



There is an opportunity for WPPA to lead on educating the public and other key audiences about the work and value of Washington's ports – particularly in areas outside of Puget Sound.

“Our community seems to have a pretty good understanding of what the port does. But there are always people that don't have any idea about what the port is or does.”

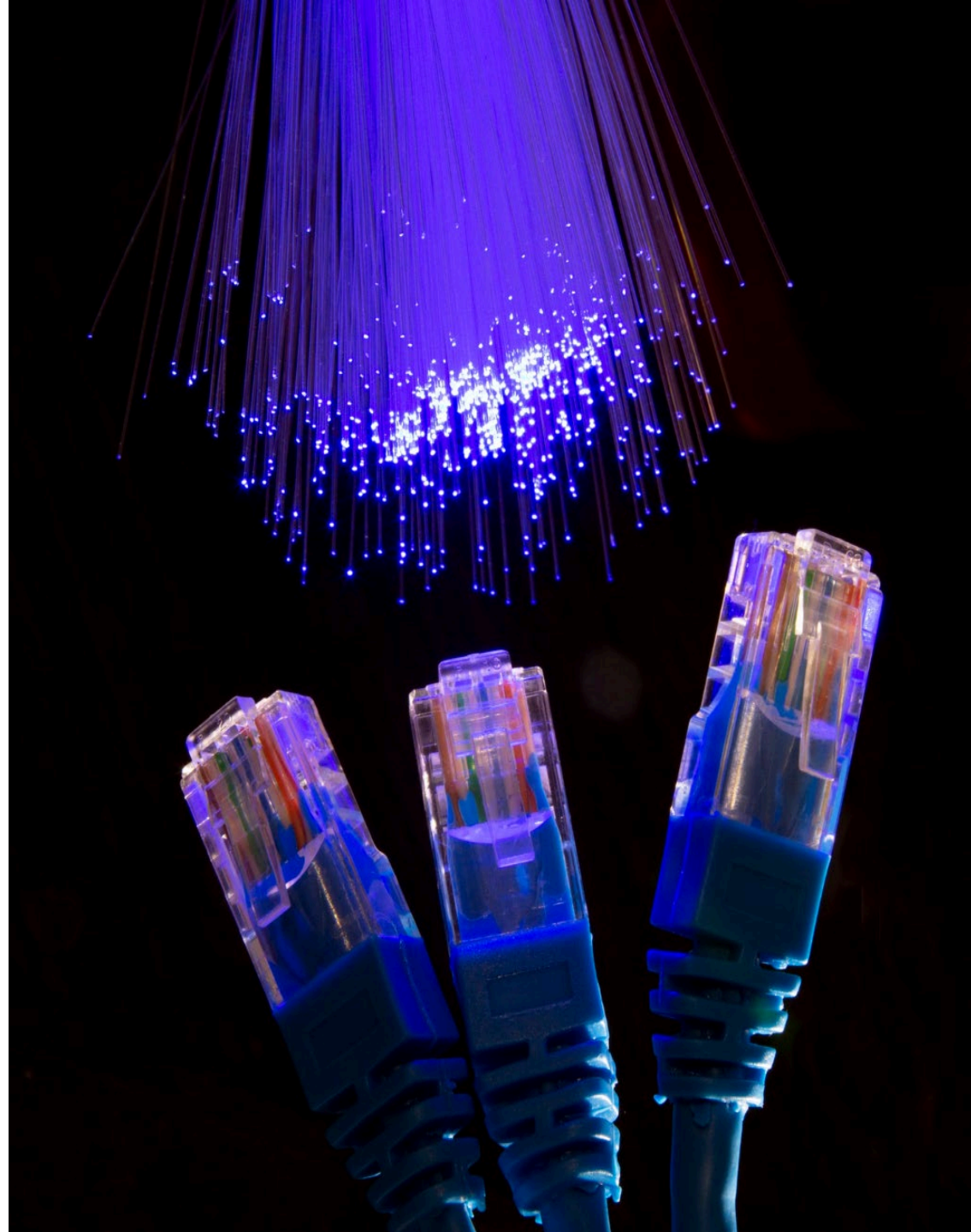
Key Findings – Continued

- Washington's ports have also diversified beyond "traditional" port activities and are engaged in a variety of initiatives to build stronger futures for their communities.

"Getting fiber to a community that didn't have good internet connectivity was the greatest thing we've ever done."

- WA ports actively partner with local school districts, community colleges/trade programs, local governments, state and federal lawmakers, public safety agencies, arts communities and local tribes.

"The tribes are a big deal. We have had projects held up because of tribal concerns. You can't just go to the tribe when you want something. We're trying to make it a stronger ongoing relationship."



MORE Key Findings

- While some audiences may recognize ports' contributions to the economic and civic vitality of the community, many — including taxpayers — still lack a full understanding of what ports do and the contributions they make.

“We need to help people understand the impact [ports] can have on their communities.”

- Local property taxes are used differently by different WA ports. Some dedicate these funds to debt service, real estate development, etc. There's a risk/reward to be weighed before actively discussing the tax.

“We levy a local property tax and wouldn't survive without it. But the tax is less than half of our budget.”

- Some WPPA member ports have completed economic analyses — most are not very recent. No statewide analysis has been conducted beyond reports of the state's economic reliance on international trade.

“We did one a few years ago. We didn't spread the result far and wide because of an anti-tax group of voters.”



LAST Key Finding:

Ports of all sizes recognize, value and appreciate the support they receive from WPPA.

Small- and medium-sized WPPA members — whose operations are stretched thin and may lack dedicated staff to manage internal and external communications and government relations — are especially grateful.

“I think what they do now is just awesome! They could help enhance the visibility of small-and mid-sized ports. The larger ports take care of themselves.”

“WPPA can help smaller ports that don’t have dedicated comms capability, offering resources or materials. Also, help with crisis communications planning.”

Recommendations

1. A coordinated statewide campaign would raise the profile of Washington's ports.
2. All WPPA members, but especially smaller ports, would benefit from additional strategic communications support.
3. A statewide economic impact study could help all ports better quantify their work.
4. A statewide messaging poll would help inform a public awareness campaign

