



I-5 Marvin Rd to Mounts Rd Planning and Environmental Linkages

Technical Advisory Group Meeting #5 Summary

Meeting purpose

The purpose of the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) meeting was to:

- Review Proposed Preferred Alternative with Bridge Options
- Review Proposed NEPA Strategy
- Prepare for Draft PEL Report public review
- Celebrate participation in PEL process

Meeting logistics

May 16, 2023, 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Virtual Meeting

Attendees

TAG Participants

- Aubrey Collier, City of Lacey
- Dave Smith, City of Olympia
- David Troutt, Nisqually Indian Tribe
- Deirdre Wilson, Port of Tacoma
- Glynnis Nakai, Billy Frank Jr Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge
- Jeanette Dorner, Nisqually Land Trust
- Jody Metz, Washington State Patrol
- Justin Hall, Friends of Nisqually NWRC and Nisqually River Council
- Katrina Van Every, Thurston Regional Planning Council
- Klayton Leingang, Pierce County
- Larry Leveen, Forevergreen Trails
- Liana Lui, Federal Highway Administration
- Martin Hoppe, City of Lacey
- Matt Unzelman, Thurston County
- Matthew Pahs, Federal Highway Administration
- Melissa Flores Saxe, Sound Transit
- Mindy Roberts, Washington Environmental Council
- Paul Bucich, City of Lakewood
- Peter Stackpole, Intercity Transit
- Rob LaFontaine, Intercity Transit
- Sallie Donahue, Joint Base Lewis McChord
- Scott Moeller, Pierce County Public Works
- Shukri Sharabi, City of DuPont

WSDOT Study Team

- Ashley Carle
- Emma Dorazio
- Hayley Nolan
- Hillary Pope
- Hunter Henderson
- John Perlic
- Kirk Wilcox
- Lucy Temple
- Rachel Durham
- Richard Warren
- Sharese Graham



Meeting Opening, Purpose and Goals

The I-5 Marvin Rd. to Mounts Rd. Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study Technical Advisory Group (TAG) met for the fifth time on Tuesday, May 16, 2023. The WSDOT study team began the presentation by welcoming participants, reviewing the agenda, and sharing best practices and guidance for engaging using Zoom features during the meeting.

The study team convenes the TAG to receive input, facilitate active participation, and build an understanding of the PEL process among local agency representatives. In the fifth TAG meeting, participants reviewed the Proposed Preferred Alternative with Bridge Options and the Proposed NEPA Strategy and walked through the Draft PEL Report outline.

The responsibilities of the TAG include:

- Representing agencies and communities in the study area
- Providing data and input on direction of study
- Advising on range of alternatives and alternatives evaluation criteria
- Helping to build consensus and support for alternative(s) selection

Schedule and study process

The team reviewed the study schedule and status. The study is on track with the planned schedule, working to reach concurrence point number four by July, which will focus on the final PEL Report.

Outreach and coordination summary

Over the course of the PEL study, the study team shared information and gathered input from the public. Community engagement channels included:

- Online open house with two public comment periods
- Project email
- WSDOT blog
- Social media
- Community briefings and interviews
- Interviews with community-based organizations

Through these channels, the study team heard about the following community priorities:

- Address any environmental effects from the project
- Be compatible with high-capacity transit, including rail
- Include a separated shared-use path
- Consider induced demand from additional capacity
- Keep I-5 open during construction
- Consider improved/new alternate routes around I-5
- Preserve access to the Nisqually interchange/exit 114
- Maintain access through the corridor for people getting to work
- Consider potential increases in northbound traffic due to issues with affordable housing
- Mitigate construction impacts for roadway users and project area neighbors
- Share information about the upcoming changes to the corridor as design progresses
- Consider requests for improved transit in Thurston County and along this corridor



Moving into the NEPA process, which is anticipated to begin in September 2023, WSDOT will continue to engage community members. NEPA engagement efforts will include additional convenings of the ACG, TAG, and EAG, online open houses, and ongoing tribal consultation.

Discussion

Larry Leveen (Forevergreen Trails) invited the study team to engage with the Pierce County Transportation Advisory Commission. The study team shared appreciation for this suggestion.

Detailed Alternatives Evaluation Results

The study team reviewed the results of the Level 2 Alternatives Evaluation and changes since to the criteria ratings and results since Meeting 4. In the prior meeting, based on the results of the Level 2 Alternatives Evaluation, ACG, TAG, and EAG members shared the most support for Alternative 2 and Design Options B and C.

The study team reached Concurrence Point #3 the week of May 8, which focuses on identifying alternatives to advance into NEPA, in partnership with the Federal Highway Administration. The study team is seeking agreement on the Purpose and Need, Range of Alternatives, and Preferred Alternative with the Nisqually Tribal Council this month.

Based on the Alternative Evaluation results and advisory group feedback, the study team will be including the final Preferred Alternative in the Final Report. The Preferred Alternative includes Alternative 2 with Bridge Options A – C and a shared-use path for the full length of the project, north of I-5:

- Alternative 2 includes a widened I-5 with managed or HOV lanes, which will provide operational flexibility, maintain consistency with adjacent sections of I-5, and maintain flexibility for compatibility with the upcoming I-5 Border to Border Master Plan and PEL.
- Bridge Options will be refined during NEPA, and the Preferred Alternative may be a hybrid of the Bridge Options studied in the PEL.
- The shared use path will be a minimum of 14 feet wide, will include rest and view areas, and will provide access to local streets.

Proposed NEPA strategy

The study team reviewed the roadmap for the NEPA process. During the PEL study, the study team conducted field work, gathered data, and engaged community members to understand the potential for environmental benefits and impacts and inform the recommendation for the proposed NEPA strategy.

Some key findings from this analysis include:

- Construction, in particular the removal of fill, could cause periods of water quality impacts, but the project has the potential to provide significant water quality benefits incorporating stormwater runoff treatment.
- The project would result in both temporary and permanent wetland impacts. Benefits to wetlands include creating 20 or more new acres of wetland and creating an opportunity for distributary channels to return to more natural flow patterns.
- This project could result in changes to flood levels in the immediate vicinity. Overall, the project would support I-5 resiliency to climate change and to the effects of channel migration.



- Changes to I-5 could result in visual quality impacts for viewers in the natural areas, nearby residents, and roadway users. Improved views to the Billy Frank Jr Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge for I-5 users could provide a potential visual quality benefit.
- The study team will conduct additional surveying to understand the impacts to the Medicine Creek Treaty National Memorial Site during NEPA. Reconnection of historic stream channels and associated habitat would help restore a traditional cultural landscape and would also benefit tribal treaty fishing.
- The project could result in land use impacts for farmlands and Section 4(f) and 6(f) lands. The study team will aim to identify mitigation opportunities to minimize impacts. The Preferred Alternative is anticipated to fit within the existing right-of-way (ROW).
- While construction and changes to I-5 could create hardships for businesses in the project area, reduced congestion and improved transit travel times will improve outcomes for Environmental Justice (EJ) populations along the project corridor.

Based on the information available and input from key informants, the study team is recommending Environmental Assessment (EA) as the proposed NEPA strategy. This recommendation aligns with the project’s potential environmental effects, environmental benefits, and lack of public controversy. The NEPA process will include additional public scoping to provide opportunities for the community and agency partners to continue informing the environmental review process.

Discussion

Larry Leveen (Forevergreen Trails) noted difficulty comparing alternatives without a crosswalk between the matrix of Alternative Evaluation results and the survey result from prior meetings. The study team shared appreciation for this feedback, which will be addressed in the next section of the presentation.

Draft PEL Report

The study team provided an outline of the I-5 Marvin Road to Mounts Road Draft PEL Report, which will be available for public review between June 1 and June 30. The Report will include the following sections.

Report section	Description
Introduction and Purpose and Need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describes PEL requirements and streamlined connection to NEPA • Provides contextual background and study area definition • Defines the project purpose and related needs • Provides a summary of current corridor conditions in the Existing and Future Baseline Conditions Report
Agency and Public Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describes PEL outreach process with partners • Tribal Consultation • Agency Coordination Group • Technical Advisory Group • Executive Advisory Group • CBOs and Special Interest Groups • Highlights community engagement findings
Alternatives Description	Summarizes a range of reasonable alternatives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternative 1 — Operations Improvements (Bridge Options A, B, C)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alternative 2 — Widen I-5 for managed/HOV lanes (Bridge Options A, B, C, D) Alternative 3 — Widen I-5 for GP Lanes (Bridge Options A, B, C, D) Alternative 4 — Convert I-5 Lanes from GP to HOV Lanes (Bridge Options A, B, C)
Alternatives Evaluation Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defines alternatives evaluation criteria Explains results for initial and detailed evaluations and reasons for eliminating alternatives/options Initial evaluation results <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eliminated Alternative 1, Alternative 4, and Design Option D Detailed evaluation results <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identified Alternative 2—widen for managed/HOV lanes was the highest performing alternative
Recommended Alternative and Bridge Options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies Alternative 2 (widening for managed/HOV lanes) as the preferred alternative based on alternatives evaluation results <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves travel times and reduces congestion for general purpose and HOV travel Performs high in ‘Access to Opportunity’ evaluation criteria Recommends Bridge Options A, B, and C for advancement to NEPA
Environmental Resource Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documents existing conditions of the study area for each environmental discipline Describes potential environmental effects and benefits that will be studied in detail during NEPA review
Next Steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies anticipated federal, state, and local permits that will be required during NEPA review Outlines recommended coordination process with partners Recommends NEPA strategy

Appendices will include:

- A. *PEL Questionnaire*
- B. *Existing Environmental Conditions Memos*
- C. *Coordination and Public Participation Summary*
- D. *FHWA Concurrence and Support Letters*

Reflections and next steps

Before closing the meeting with next steps, the study team invited participants to share what they are looking forward to in NEPA. One participant noted excitement about the environmental benefits related to the project.

The study team shared the following next steps:

- Post meeting materials for review
- Online Open House June 1-30
- Publish Final Report in July
- Begin NEPA in September

The meeting adjourned at 11:33 a.m.