

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

Frequently Asked Questions

WSDOT received the following questions during the I-5 Marvin Rd to Mounts Rd Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL Study) public comment period. The PEL study team reviewed public comments and used them to inform the design and evaluation process. Responses to Frequently Asked Questions are addressed in this document and comments are also summarized and addressed in the Final PEL Report. For more detailed information about community priorities shared during this PEL study, please review the [Final PEL Study Report, Chapter 2 – Agency and Public Coordination](#). The study team will move directly from the PEL study into NEPA environmental review and documentation to implement the I-5 and Nisqually Delta area environmental improvements starting later this year. Opportunities for more public involvement and comments are planned to occur during the NEPA review period.

Planning and Environmental Linkages Study

What work will be done as part of the I-5 Marvin Rd. to Mounts Rd. Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study?

A corridor PEL study on I-5 from US-101 to Mounts Road was completed in 2022. The corridor PEL identified strategies for regional congestion management and multimodal mobility for logical sections of the I-5 corridor to study further. The Corridor PEL recommended two improvements for the Marvin Road (Exit 111) to Mounts Road (Exit 116) section—adding a lane to the northbound I-5 on-ramp at the Nisqually Cutoff Road/Martin Way E interchange and adding one lane in each direction to I-5 from Marvin Road to Mounts Road (WSDOT 2022b).

The I-5 Marvin to Mounts Rd [PEL Study Report](#) section was finalized in July 2023. This report documents a more detailed alternatives development and evaluation process as well as a detailed review of the existing environmental conditions.

How has WSDOT included the community in this PEL Study?

The project team received over 300 comments on the PEL Study by connecting through a project website, along with three online open houses (on [Engage.wsdot.wa.gov](https://engage.wsdot.wa.gov)), community emails, WSDOT blog posts, social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit), and briefings and interviews with community-based organizations and interested stakeholders, including landowners and business owners within the study area.

Design

Will the shared-use path be used in emergencies if the road was blocked by an accident or disaster?

Motor vehicles would not be permitted to use the shared-use path in emergencies. Removable bollards would be placed at shared-use path intersections with roadways to prohibit vehicles from entering. Bollards could be removed to allow an emergency vehicle to access the shared-use path to respond to a crash or emergency on the shared-use path.

Are there plans to build a noise wall along the I-5 corridor in this area?

A comprehensive noise evaluation will be conducted as part of the NEPA phase to determine if FHWA noise thresholds would be exceeded due to any changes proposed. At that time, mitigation alternatives, such as noise walls, may be proposed in accordance with FHWA noise regulations to reduce impacts on areas with sensitive residential or other land uses in the corridor.

Are you building a new bridge over the Nisqually River Delta?

As part of this project, the existing truss bridges over the Nisqually River would be removed. WSDOT will design bridge alternatives that will help to restore salmon habitat and saltwater environments by removing a portion of the fill material that was placed during the original I-5 construction. The length of bridge is not yet determined. A range of bridge length options were recommended in the PEL for consideration in the NEPA phase. The bridge type would be a low-level structure on columns approximately 30-to-40 ft above the water surface at the Nisqually River.

Has the study team researched adding access through JBLM or DuPont when traffic backs up?

The northern study boundary for the PEL was the I-5 interchange at Mounts Road. Adding access to JBLM or DuPont will not be considered as part of the NEPA phase. WSDOT has, and continues to, look at options for other improvements in this region (see also the [I-5 Mounts Road to Steilacoom-Dupont Road – Corridor Improvements](#)).

Have you considered moving the truck weigh station?

A separate [planning study](#) was conducted in 2021 to identify infrastructure preservation and improvement needs of the weigh station. Relocation of the truck weigh station has not been considered as part of the PEL.

Will a Link light rail be built as part of this project?

A light rail system will not be built as part of this project. Thurston County is currently outside of Sound Transit's service area. The current Sound Transit Long-Range Plan identifies a possible southern terminus as far south as South Tacoma in Pierce County. Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC) is currently studying the feasibility of high-capacity transit options within Thurston County.

Environment

Does this project plan to enhance or restore riverfront and over 60 acres of wetland? Has the team researched the creation of a mitigation bank for the Nisqually Basin and would there be an opportunity to use future 'salmon mitigation credits' as part of this project?

Construction of the project will have impacts to existing wetlands and streams within the project footprint, and WSDOT will provide mitigation for those impacts. The details of that mitigation will be developed as the project design progresses and will be included in the NEPA documentation. The project will also enable the establishment of new wetlands and aquatic ecosystems by removing a portion of the fill under I-5. A mitigation bank or mitigation credit program is not currently envisioned as part of the project. However, while WSDOT will restore and/or mitigate only those areas affected by the project, the removal of fill will create opportunities for additional restoration efforts by others in the delta.

Will the project team share additional studies on the effects of the project on fish populations?

The project team is preparing a technical study to determine the effects of the project on fish and wildlife in the study area. The results of that analysis will be included in the NEPA documentation.

How will this project affect the movement of McAllister Creek?

McAllister Creek is currently confined to an engineered channel on the south side of I-5 and therefore is not subject to natural channel migration processes. WSDOT is considering options for realigning McAllister Creek to more closely follow its historic stream channel; however, a final decision on realignment has not yet been made. The study team will model these options later this summer to help inform the NEPA process and mitigation planning. Land and businesses owners, local municipalities, and tribes will be consulted on the potential realignment options.

How will this project increase or decrease the risk of flooding in the area?

Hydrologic modelling of the area will be conducted to help determine the project's effect on flood risk. This work will be completed as part of the NEPA evaluation and will be available for review in the NEPA documentation.

Where will stormwater treatment facilities be located?

The location and size of stormwater treatment facilities will be identified as part of the conceptual design work in the NEPA phase.

Environmental Justice

How will each alternative decrease flooding in the Nisqually Valley?

Hydrologic modelling of the area will be conducted to help determine the project's effect on flood risk. This work will be completed as part of the NEPA evaluation and will be available for review in the NEPA documentation.

Will businesses or residents be displaced from this project?

No residential or business displacements are expected to occur as a part of this project. WSDOT's goal is to provide safe, reliable and cost-effective transportation options to improve communities and economic vitality for people and businesses. No exits will be removed and access will be maintained to surrounding businesses and residents. Early in the alternative analysis phase, WSDOT removed an option to build a high-span bridge across the delta because it would impact surrounding properties, remove the Exit 114 interchange, and be too costly to build. The study team is working closely with the Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge and will continue outreach to surrounding businesses and residents throughout this project.

How is WSDOT involving Indian Tribes in this project?

WSDOT initiated government-to-government consultation with seven tribes for input on the planning products produced during the PEL study. Based on previous planning work on the project, guidance from cultural resources experts, location of Usual and Accustomed fishing grounds, tribal consultation areas, and past history of projects in the area, WSDOT requested consultation with the following tribes at the beginning of this PEL process: The Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation, Cowlitz Indian Tribe, Nisqually Indian Tribe, Puyallup Tribe of Indians, Squaxin Island Tribe of Indians, the Muckleshoot Indian

Tribe, and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation. WSDOT meets monthly with the Nisqually Indian Tribe to discuss the progress of this project. The Nisqually Tribe also issued a resolution from their Tribal Council expressing their agreement with the preferred alternative identified in the PEL Report.

[Will this project address road pollution and run-off to reduce impact to native area and farming?](#)

Stormwater runoff from I-5 will be conveyed and treated consistent with current State and Federal requirements.

[How will this project address current and future capacity needs expeditiously?](#)

The project is advancing on an expeditious timeline due to additional state funding provided in 2023. Additional project funding for construction is required to build the project after the environmental and design phases are completed.

Funding

[How is the project being funded?](#)

In 2021, the WA State Legislature appropriated \$5 million to "conduct preliminary engineering to develop alternatives and complete NEPA review for a proposal to provide congestion relief on Interstate 5 between Tumwater and Mounts Rd and restore the Nisqually River Delta at the existing freeway crossing."

The 2022 Move Ahead Washington funding package includes \$56 million for preliminary engineering related to the I-5 Nisqually Delta crossing.

[Is the railroad paying to build new trusses as part of this project?](#)

Improvements to the railroad overpasses will be required as part of the project and included in the project budget. Cost of replacement would be a part of the project cost where I-5 crosses BNSF and Sound Transit railroad right-of-way on easements from the railroads.

Timeline

[What is the study timeline? When will the design be complete and construction begin?](#)

The environmental documentation is anticipated to be complete by the end of 2024. Funding for the design work has been acquired with completion anticipated by 2027, if the current funding is sufficient to do so. Construction could start as early as 2028 if construction funds are identified.

HOV Conversion

[Is an HOV lane the best approach to improve mobility through the corridor between Mounts and Marvin roads?](#)

Travel demand along the corridor is expected to increase from planned population, employment, and economic growth. Alternatives to add one high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) or general purpose (GP) lane to I-5 in each direction help to keep pace with future population and employment growth but do not eliminate future congestion. When the alternatives were evaluated against the screening criteria, the HOV option performed better at accommodating and providing congestion relief for transit/HOV,

providing multimodal access to jobs, services and recreation, and consistency with WSDOT policies. The majority of online open house survey responses indicate public support for adding HOV lanes.

Will the HOV lane connect with the new HOV lane at the Joint Base Lewis-McChord exits?

The HOV lanes will connect to the Marvin Road to Mounts Road section to provide continuous HOV through the JBLM area into Thurston County.

Is there a way to discourage lane changes from the HOV lane to the Mounts Road?

Direct access interchange ramps are the only way to eliminate lane changes from the HOV lanes to interchange off-ramps. Direct access ramp connections are not part of the current project definition but could be added in the future.

Construction

How will traffic be maintained during construction?

During the environmental documentation phase, WSDOT will explore options for maintaining traffic movement during construction. The current three lanes of traffic on I-5 will be maintained in both directions during construction. This project currently does not have funding for construction.

Will traffic increase through Yelm during construction?

The current 3 lanes in each direction will be maintained during construction of the I-5 improvements. Traffic increases through Yelm resulting from the I-5 construction are not expected, although background traffic increases in Yelm will continue through the I-5 design and construction period. Three roundabouts on SR 507 are also funded in relation to this project to help improve congestion through Yelm. The Yelm Loop completion project is also expected within the timeframe of this project.

Will WSDOT acquire any properties to build this project?

The alternatives currently being studied are contained within the existing right-of-way and no properties are anticipated to be acquired to build this project.

When will construction be complete?

WSDOT plans to complete design by 2027, if the current funding is sufficient to do so. The earliest construction could begin on this project is 2028. However, this project does not have funding for construction yet.

Communication

How can I stay informed?

Visit the project website and subscribe to email updates at [I-5 Marvin Rd to Mounts Rd Planning and Environmental Linkage webpage](#).

To contact the project team:

- Call the public comment hotline at 360-570-6699
- Email: orfeedback@wsdot.wa.gov

Next steps

Starting in 2023, the WSDOT study team will move directly into NEPA environmental review and documentation to implement the I-5 and Nisqually Delta environmental improvements.

For more detailed information about community priorities shared during this study, review the [Final PEL Study Report, Chapter 2 – Agency and Public Coordination](#).