Selecting a preferred project alternative and completing the preliminary design.

Holding a combined open house and access hearing on April 5, 2005, in Chehalis as part of the approval process for adding a new interchange at LaBree Road.

Receiving preliminary approval from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) for new access onto I-5 at LaBree Road.

Completing the Environmental Assessment and Biological Assessment for the project.

The final steps are to receive and respond to your input on the preliminary design and the environmental analysis. The public will be given an opportunity to provide input at an open house on September 15 (see meeting announcement below left).

The intent of the open house is to provide an opportunity for members of the public to become familiar with the project, the possible effects of the project, and how WSDOT will minimize project impacts. We hope to receive your comments and concerns prior to completing the environmental process. Once all public comments are addressed, the FHWA will prepare a decision document on whether or not the project can move forward.

Economic Returns for Lewis County

In addition to reducing congestion and improving safety, one of the key purposes of the I-5, Rush Road to 13th Street project is to enhance the economic vitality of Lewis County by providing additional access to the Port of Chehalis. Already, Fred Meyer Stores is expanding their distribution facility at the Port of Chehalis Industrial Park. The Port of Chehalis intends to build upon this momentum to attract additional businesses and jobs to the region.

We estimate that this project will take over two years to be constructed, beginning in 2007. WSDOT engineers project a construction cost of $32.4 million out of an overall total project cost of $41.4 million. Typically, construction workers and contractors purchase materials and daily supplies from local vendors, which brings an influx of money to the area during construction.
Preliminary Design: Decisions and Refinements

In spring 2004, WSDOT held an open house to receive public input on several alternatives being considered for the I-5, Rush Road to 13th Street project, including the new LaBree Road interchange. Three alternatives were under consideration: do nothing ("no-build"); widen I-5 to three lanes in each direction and use a single point urban interchange (SPUI) at LaBree Road (see at right); or widen I-5 to three lanes in each direction and use a diamond interchange at LaBree Road.

WSDOT found that the SPUI design, which passes all interchange traffic through a single signalized intersection on the overpass above the interstate, would perform the best for the projected traffic volumes. The SPUI option was selected as the project’s preferred alternative. I-5 will be widened from two 12-foot lanes to three 12-foot lanes in each direction, including a 10-foot wide outside shoulder and a 22-foot paved center median with a concrete barrier in the middle (see cross section below). For improved safety, a new signal will be added at the existing 13th Street interchange. This signal will be installed during WSDOT’s 2006 construction season.

Keeping and Enlarging Wetlands Near Newaukum River

In preparation for the I-5, Rush Road to 13th Street project and others like it in the area, WSDOT has constructed a 230-acre wetland mitigation bank. This six-year-long effort is the largest mitigation bank ever federally authorized in Washington State. The mitigation bank is located adjacent to the North Fork Newaukum River, east of Chehalis in Lewis County. Typically, wetland replacement work occurs at the same time as the highway construction project (concurrent mitigation). Creating a wetland bank ahead of time allows the new wetland to be fully functional by the time the existing wetlands are impacted by construction.

Construction of the North Fork Newaukum mitigation bank involved restoring water flow patterns and elevations, planting trees, and other work to replicate the forest and wetlands that occurred historically at this site. This work resulted in restoration and enhancement of degraded wetland and streamside habitat adjacent to both forks of the Newaukum River. For more information on wetland banking visit this Web page: www.mitigationbanking.org/whoweare.htm.

What We Found Out During the Environmental Analysis

We found that the project will not significantly affect any environmental, economic, or social resources. The key effects of the preferred alternative are:

- Vegetation: Project will remove 71.7 acres of non-native vegetation during construction. To mitigate this effect, WSDOT will reseed exposed areas and implement weed controls.
- Wetlands: Project will fill 8.7 acres of wetlands, which will be replaced by the North Fork Newaukum Wetland Mitigation Bank (see previous article).
- Water Quality: Project will reduce stormwater storage and infiltration due to 11.7 acres of increased impervious surface area. Stormwater will be treated per the WSDOT Highway Runoff Manual.
- Economics: Project will have a positive effect, providing better access to the Port of Chehalis Industrial Park and a general increase in jobs, business, and tax base with improved roadway safety.

What's Ahead...

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Key Dates

- Relocations: Project will require relocation of one residence. WSDOT will ensure fair, equitable treatment of the property owner with just compensation for property acquisition and payment of all transaction fees.
- Transportation: Project will have a beneficial effect, improving traffic operations in the Napavine-Chehalis corridor.

Please review and comment on the Environmental Assessment

The 30-day public comment period for the completed Environmental Assessment (EA) is from August 30 to September 30, 2005. Copies of the EA are available for review during normal business hours at:

- Timberland Regional Library District, Chehalis Branch
- Chehalis City Hall
- WSDOT Chehalis Area Engineering Office
- Timberland Regional Library District, Centralia Branch
- WSDOT Federal Highway Administration Office
- Copies of the EA may also be purchased for $10.00, or reviewed and/or copied by calling Richard Hensley at WSDOT’s Chehalis Area Engineering Office at 360-740-8900.

Please submit all comments on the EA in writing by September 30 to:

Becky Michaliszyn
WSDOT Environmental Services Manager
P.O. Box 1709
Vancouver, WA 98668-1709
E-mail: michalb@wsdot.wa.gov