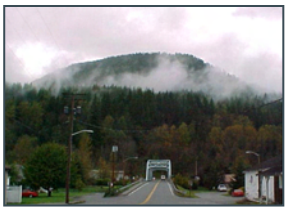


This chapter provides a brief history of the US 2 Corridor Study Area and describes how the US 2 Route Development Plan came about. It describes the purpose of the plan, what it contains, and how the public was involved in the process of developing the plan.

Chapter 1: Introduction

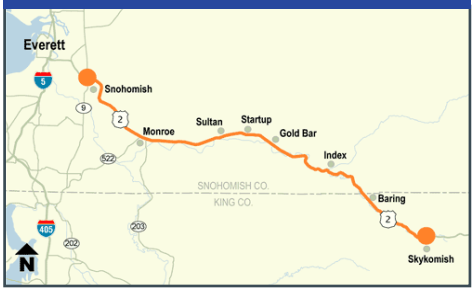
1 How did this project come about?

In the fall of 1997, two separate and tragic collisions occurred at the intersection of US 2 and Fern Bluff Road. Three members of the Sultan community were lost in these incidents, which spurred the formation, in that same year, of the US 2 Safety Coalition (formerly the Highway 2 Traffic Safety Coalition). The stated purpose of the Coalition is to reduce fatalities on US 2 by increasing capacity and adding safety improvements.

In the summer of 2003, Safety Coalition Chair Fred Walser (Police Chief of Sultan) and Vice-Chair Donnetta Walser (Mayor of Monroe) traveled to Washington D.C. to make a personal plea to Washington's Congressional Delegation to fund an Environmental Impact Study (EIS) for US 2 improvements. While the EIS was not funded, $500,000 was secured with which to begin a Route Development Plan (RDP).

The Safety Coalition was energized by this success and made two more successful funding appeals in 2004 and 2006. The first appeal secured $100,000 from the Puget Sound Regional Council's Rural Town Centers and Corridors Program to expand the public involvement process associated with creation of the RDP. In 2006 the Coalition worked with strong grass roots backing and a bipartisan team of Washington legislators in Olympia to secure an additional $700,000 to complete the US 2 Route Development Plan.

Exhibit 1-1. **Project Area**



Source: WSDOT

2 What is a Route Development Plan?

A route development plan is used by the WSDOT and local jurisdictions to identify transportation and safety problems along a state highway corridor, and to develop effective solutions that address these problems. The route development plan can be used by local jurisdictions to solicit funding for community-supported, prioritized projects.

3 How has US 2 evolved over the years?

1800s: Early evidence of US 2 can be traced back to the incorporation of Snohomish County in 1861. Cities along the present day US 2 corridor include Snohomish, Monroe, Sultan, Gold Bar, Index and Skykomish. These cities developed at different times and have a symbiotic relationship with the evolution of the US 2 corridor. When Snohomish County was established, roads existed primarily as narrow pathways slashed through the forest such that settlers had access from their ranches to one another as well as to a "marketplace". This changed with the formation of The Board of County Commissioners (1861) whose duties included dealing with road petitions and hearings. By declaring a road a "county road", the county would adopt a privately built road and become responsible for its future improvement and upkeep.

Exhibit 1-2. **1887 Map of Snohomish County**

Source: Monroe Historical Society

In 1860, settlers moved into the Monroe area necessitating the maintenance of a road between Monroe and Snohomish. It was in this manner that roads were developed and maintained, thus helping to transform their function from pathways to carriageways. The 1880s signified the period in which the first railroads in Snohomish County were built generating an inrush of settlers to the area. Further, county surveyors implemented a survey of a 27-mile road from Park Place (Monroe) to the railroad camp on the Skykomish River, an area the Great Northern Railroad eventually used as a roundhouse, fueling facility and switchyard. As a result, businesses sprang up in Skykomish. The late 1800s were also when settlements were established in Sultan and Gold Bar by prospectors in search of gold.

Exhibit 1-3. **Sultan River Swing Bridge, looking east down Main Street (approx. 1890)**

Source: A Photographic History of the Towns of HWY 2

Early 20th century: The early 1900s saw the incorporation of Monroe, Sultan and Gold Bar successively, coupled with the first acceptance of a bonding proposition for paved highways. Among the numerous projects contained in this proposition were segments connecting Snohomish, Monroe, Sultan and Gold Bar. In addition, in the 1920s the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) established a US Highway numbering system. After State Road 15 (present day US 2) was added to the State Highway System and became the responsibility of the State in the 1930s, its unpaved portion from Gold Bar through Stevens Pass was realigned and paved. (The portion from Everett to Gold Bar was already paved by this time.) In the late 1930s, State Road 15 was re-designated Primary State Highway 15 in accordance with the newly established primary/secondary highway nomenclature. It ran from Everett to Peshastin in Eastern Washington totaling 112 miles.

Exhibit 1-4. **Town of Startup, looking east down US 2 (approx. 1904)**

Source: A Photographic History of the Towns of HWY 2

Mid 20th century: Due to the realignment of US 10 (running from Spokane to Seattle), Primary State Highway 15 was re-designated Alternate US 10. ('Alternate' was used because it became an alternate corridor that accessed Seattle, albeit through Everett.) Then, in the late 1940s, Alternate US 10 was rechristened US 2 and was moved northward, away from the Main Street alignments in Monroe.

Late 20th century: The State Legislature changed its highway naming system from 'Primary/Secondary State Highway' to 'State Route.' In January of 1967, a study for the section between Snohomish and Monroe, that included alignments of a potential Monroe bypass, was completed. In November of the same year, the State Highway Commission granted approval for a route that bypassed both Snohomish and Monroe. In the early 1980s the "Snohomish Bypass" was constructed, relocating US 2 around the north and east side of the then developed area of the City of Snohomish. Right-of-way for most of the Monroe Bypass was purchased, however the facility was not constructed.

US 2 Classification

FHWA Designation: Highway of National Significance (HNS)

State of Washington Designation: Highway of Statewide Significance (HSS)

Functional Classification: Principal Arterial

Freight Classification: T-2 (Strategic Freight Corridor status)

Source: WSDOT

4 Who are the US 2 RDP Partners?

Each jurisdiction along the 47-mile corridor (most of which

are also members of the US 2 Safety Coalition) were invited to participate in the development of the RDP as members of a Corridor Working Group (CWG). The purpose of the CWG is to develop consensus-based recommendations that reflect the ideas and opinions of individual city and town representatives.

The CWG advised the project team (WSDOT and consultant staff) throughout the project, helping them from the conception to the final recommendations of the RDP. In addition, they functioned as an important link by keeping the project team apprised of public concerns as well as the public and their respective local elected officials apprised of new developments. CWG members included:

- Community Transit;
- City of Gold Bar;
- Town of Index;
- King County;
- City of Monroe;
- Puget Sound Regional Council;
- Town of Skykomish;
- City of Snohomish;
- Snohomish County;
- City of Sultan; and
- WSDOT.

Exhibit 1-5. **US 2 open house**

Source: WSDOT

Exhibit 1-6. **US 2 booth at summer fair**

Source: WSDOT

5 How has the public been involved in the process?

Efforts to involve the public in the RDP study process have been quite successful. WSDOT held open houses in June and December of 2006 at both the Gold Bar Elementary School and Monroe High School. Placards containing summary data and information about the US 2 study area were displayed such that attendees could view, understand and give both verbal and written input regarding problems and solutions along the corridor. In total, over 200 persons attended the open houses.

WSDOT also conducted public outreach at six fairs held along the corridor. A US 2 booth was set up at each fair, and placards were displayed to generate interest and feedback. Over the course of these six fairs, the total number of visitors commenting on the corridor surpassed 1,600. Face-to-face interviews and briefings were also held with community groups

and elected officials. Finally, television and radio coverage, as well as internet websites were all used to disseminate information and collect vital citizen comments.

Comments received from citizens were poignant, diverse and reinforced the importance of the project. In general, citizens expressed a sense of urgency for corridor improvements, offering suggestions to address both safety and capacity deficiencies. Among the many ideas generated included constructing jersey barriers and rumble strips, as well as increasing or decreasing the speed limit within certain sections of US 2. To better understand the public comments, the study team grouped characteristic comments according to segment and listed them below.

Segment 1 - Snohomish to Monroe

- "There needs to be a minimum of two lanes each way with a turn lane."
- "Commuter rail frequency on the BNSF track between Everett and Skykomish should be increased."
- "Local access/egress with US 2 should be eliminated."

Segment 2 – Monroe

- "Traffic really bottlenecks from Fred Meyer to the Fairgrounds."
- "It is now more dangerous for Emergency Units to drive through Monroe with a sick patient."
- "Monroe sorely needs a bypass!"
- "I moved to Monroe 18 years ago and the bypass issue has not progressed since!"

Segment 3 – East Monroe to West Gold Bar

- "At Picklefarm Road, create a left-turn pocket and make the existing right-turn lane a thru lane."
- "The new Sultan lights slow down traffic too much. It is frustrating because it takes more than an hour to get home to Gold Bar on a Friday."
- "Add a stoplight at Picklefarm Road or in Startup to slow cars entering/exiting US 2."
- "We need a minimum of two lanes each direction with a turn lane."

Segment 4 – East Gold Bar to Skykomish

- "Highway 2 between Gold Bar and Index is too dangerous to have a 60 mph speed limit."
- "The highway needs to be widened to two lanes in each direction."
- "Please give us congestion relief through Sultan on Sunday afternoons, because backups are up to 60 minutes."
- "Weekend traffic, especially Sunday afternoons and early evenings, is always very slow, especially from Gold Bar to Sultan."

For more information concerning the public involvement process, please consult Technical Memorandum No. 1, Public Involvement Plan.

6 What is contained in this RDP?

The RDP is spelled out over five chapters (including this one). Chapter 2 of the plan describes the existing conditions along US 2, depicting population growth, roadway geometrics and traffic conditions throughout the corridor, including a collision analysis. Chapter 2 lays the groundwork for Chapter 3 in which future conditions are described. Chapter 4 includes descriptions of various options with which to address both current traffic conditions and issues related to future travel demand. Within Chapter 4, a list of short term and long term projects have been identified; projects the CWG hope to see implemented over the next 20 years. The final chapter of the RDP, Chapter 5, includes a summary of "next steps" including funding options.