

Implementation strategies

We worked extensively with businesses and property owners and will continue to do so as we design and ultimately construct the project. The following principles and commitments will guide our work.

We will:

- Develop improvements consistent with state law and in accordance with state design standards.
- Look for opportunities to reduce construction costs and impacts on existing businesses.
- Prioritize left and u-turn opportunities as follows: signalized intersections, immediately upstream of signalized intersections, at local streets, and at high-volume or shared driveways.
- Work with property and business owners during design to consolidate driveways, share driveways and potentially to share parking and inter-business access across property lines. Be creative and sensitive to the parking needs of businesses and shoppers.
- Minimize impacts to businesses and shoppers during construction by:
 - Continuously, pro-actively communicating with affected businesses;
 - Investigating opportunities for non-invasive night work and shortening construction periods during the holidays;
 - Creatively and clearly delineating driveways and access points;
 - Providing adequate advance signing to pro-actively direct traffic when major delays are anticipated or construction activities are planned;
 - Parking construction vehicles so as to not block access or visibility of businesses, especially during non-construction hours;
 - Moving non-safety construction materials and cones out of roadway during non-work hours.
- Use traffic management tools, including signal timing, to avoid backups on the I-5 northbound off-ramp and prevent left-turn backups at signals on SR 539/Guide Meridian from stretching into the through-lanes.
- Provide support for businesses before, during and after construction. The City of Bellingham is committed to supporting and retaining our business community, and enhancing economic development. The Office of Business Relations and Economic Development (BRED) staff are available to assist you with your business-related questions and direct you to community resources to support your business.

What's next?

Fall 2011	Begin design engineering
Winter 2013	Advertise project and select a contractor
Spring 2013	Begin construction
Fall 2013	Finish construction

For more information

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Full report and project information available at:
www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/sr539/i5tohorton/

Sign up for Whatcom County email updates at:
www.wsdot.wa.gov/emailupdates

Submit comments online:
www.wsdot.wa.gov/Projects/SR539/i5toHorton/comments

Contact city of Bellingham Office of Business Relations and Economic Development staff:
business@cob.org or 360-778-8105 or visit www.cob.org/services/business/economic-development.aspx.



SR 539, Guide Meridian: I-5 Horton-Traffic Improvements

October 2011

Why is WSDOT improving the Guide Meridian?



SR 539/Guide Meridian is easily one of the busiest roads in Bellingham. It serves one of the region's most important retail centers and provides a key transportation link between I-5 and the Canadian border. Consequently, it can get quite congested, especially near the I-5 interchange.

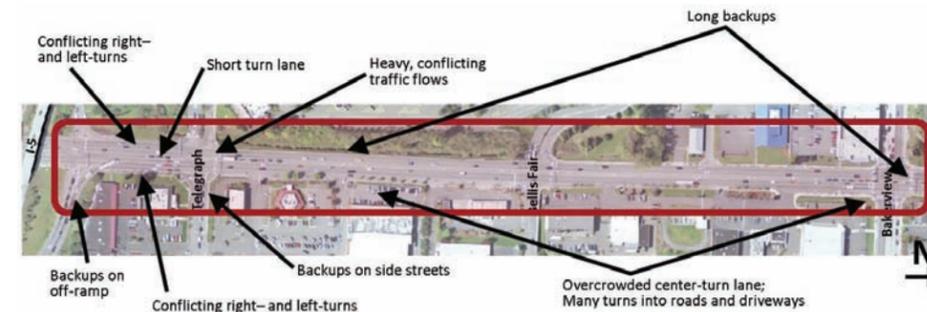
The problem on the Guide is that the combination of high traffic volumes and lots of turns is concentrated in a short section of highway. Essentially, there's just too much activity squeezed into too small a space. That is why WSDOT has secured funds from a federal border highway program to make improvements. There is about \$2.75 million available improvements to provide for

“the safe movement of motor vehicles to and across land border crossings.”

Consequences of too much activity squeezed into a small space:

- More than 700 collisions in 5 years.
- Conflicts on I-5 at the northbound off-ramp between vehicles stopped and those traveling 60 mph on the interstate.
- Difficult to get in and out of businesses.
- Driver impatience and increased risk-taking.
- Hard for pedestrians to predict drivers' actions at driveways.
- Wasted time for drivers, freight and transit passengers.
- Increased greenhouse gas emissions from idling traffic.
- Current and worsening traffic congestion could hurt existing businesses and stifle future development in the corridor.

Too much activity squeezed in a small space



How did we decide which improvements to construct?

This is a pre-design analysis—a precursor to a full design and engineering effort. It was completed by WSDOT with support from city of Bellingham. The pre-design gives us an opportunity to complete technical analysis and solicit public input to evaluate several options before selecting improvements for the highway. The following summarizes the steps involved in the pre-design.

February – April 2011:
Understand the problem and define improvement needs

April – June 2011:
Evaluate potential projects and weigh benefits and disadvantages

June – September 2011:
Further analyze remaining options and determine which will be selected for full engineering and construction in 2013.

Public outreach strategies:
City council
Local media
City transportation commission
Mayor's neighborhood advisory committee
Email listserve
Online comment form
Interviews with community groups, property owners and businesses

We will move forward with the following improvements



✓ Restrict northbound left-turns at Telegraph

Backups on southbound SR 539 often extend to Bakerview Road and even further north. Restricting the northbound left-turn at Telegraph Road reduces the number of turning activities happening at the intersection to allow more time for traffic to move south on the SR 539/Guide Meridian. Ultimately, that will reduce backups - in fact, it is anticipated that this change would reduce southbound delays by 30 percent. The disadvantage is that drivers wanting to make those left turns will have to do so elsewhere, so it may mean a slightly longer trip and more left turns at the next intersection. New signs would be provided to guide drivers; for example, directing those exiting northbound I-5 to utilize the direct-access ramp into Bellis Fair Mall.



✓ Remove center-turn lane and install curb to restrict left turns; consolidate driveways

Traffic volumes on SR 539/Guide Meridian far exceed federal and state standards for a center-turn lane. State law requires public agencies to manage access to improve safety and traffic flow on highways. Therefore, this project must support the city of Bellingham's effort to initiate, implement and maintain an access management program for the SR 539/Guide Meridian. Removal of the center-turn lane is an access management strategy to manage left turns that's been shown to significantly reduce collisions and move traffic more efficiently.

Low-cost, high-benefit improvements: access management

Over time, increasing traffic volumes and new driveways and traffic signals have eroded mobility along SR 539/Guide Meridian. If we were to build the highway new today, we would not be allowed to construct a center-turn lane. Why not? It's the combination of high traffic volumes and lots of turns. It's common sense that unrestricted access on a busy corridor like the Guide creates too many traffic conflicts.

Access management is conflict management: If you reduce the rate and severity of conflicts the driver encounters, you will reduce the collision rate and injury rate and increase the smooth flow of traffic. The objective is to enable access to businesses and private property while maximizing roadway safety and mobility. With the increasing demands on SR 539/Guide Meridian, implementing access management is the logical next step needed to keep this corridor functioning.

Access management supports business by helping provide what customers want:

- Congestion relief on SR 539/Guide Meridian;
- Driveways unblocked by traffic backups;
- Easy access in and out of businesses;
- Access to traffic signals and side streets to make left turns; and
- Safe driving conditions.

Studies consistently show that well-managed roadways are often 40% to 50% safer than poorly-managed routes and operate at more efficient speeds. These local examples illustrate the success of access management:

- A recent access management project on SR 99 in Shoreline reduced collisions by 64 percent. Tom Naski- SR 99, Shoreline Retail Strip Mall owner said he thought the access management project was a "big benefit." Customers have remarked "it sure is nice now" and the improvements "made for happier tenants now that the chaos has been reduced and there is a proper flow of traffic."
- An access management project on SR 7 in Pierce County significantly reduced the number of collisions during the afternoon peak period.



Replacing a continuous center-turn lane with curb, as shown here on SR 542/Sunset Drive in Bellingham, is a common access management technique.

✓ Improve right-turn at I-5 northbound off-ramp

This improvement will help reduce backups and improve sight distance. It will be especially beneficial for large trucks and pedestrians.



✓ Extend northbound right lane between Bellis Fair Parkway and Bakerview Road

This improvement adds a third northbound lane by widening to the north of Bellis Fair Parkway for approximately 600 feet. Extending this lane provides significant benefits for reducing wait times and backups, including on the I-5 northbound off-ramp.



✓ Complementary improvements

There are several types of minor improvements that we will consider to complement projects selected for construction in 2013. These will be implemented by WSDOT or city of Bellingham as funding allows:

- Analyze the speed limit between Kellogg and Horton Road.
- Update equipment to provide more efficient real-time traffic management.
- Adjust traffic signal operations to complement constructed improvements.
- Modify highway signs to complement implemented improvements.
- Develop and adopt an access management plan to set expectations for future redevelopment.