



I-90 Tolling Project

Initial Scoping Summary Report

July 2013

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1 Introduction

Public scoping is intended to encourage early communication in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process to help the lead agencies gather public input and understand public concern. This scoping report describes public, agency, and tribal involvement opportunities to date to learn about the proposed I-90 Tolling Project and environmental process, and summarizes the comments received during the January 22 to February 22, 2013 public scoping period.

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) proposes to introduce tolling to the Interstate 90 (I-90) corridor between Interstate 5 (I-5) in Seattle and Interstate 405 (I-405) in Bellevue, Washington (Exhibit 1). The specific boundaries of the project's study area will be defined in the environmental documentation. The total length of the corridor is approximately 7 miles. Before tolling can be implemented WSDOT must (1) complete the environmental review process; (2) receive Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) approval; and (3) receive authorization from the Washington State Legislature and toll rates from the Washington State Transportation Commission.

WSDOT is studying the environmental effects of adding tolls to all through lanes of I-90, between I-5 in Seattle and I-405 in Bellevue, at the request of the state legislature. FHWA is the federal lead agency responsible for administering the National Environmental Policy (NEPA) and required approvals for this project. The I-90 and State Route 520 (SR 520) bridges are the major east-west routes linking the Seattle area and communities to the east, and together form the

on the I-90 corridor. Revenue generated from tolling I-90 would be used to fund a portion of the SR 520 Bridge Replacement and HOV Program that has a funding gap of \$1.4 billion. FHWA and WSDOT held a public scoping period from January 22 through February 22, 2013, as part of the project's proposed NEPA process (40 CFR 1501.7). During the public scoping period, FHWA and WSDOT received just over 3,400 comments, including 13 letters submitted by local agencies and organizations. Approximately 1,010 people attended the public scoping meetings in Mercer Island, Bellevue, and Seattle. Section 4 of this report summarizes the comments received during the public scoping period.

NEPA encourages lead agencies (FHWA and WSDOT) to involve the public in decisions that affect the community. Feedback from the scoping period will help shape the scope of alternatives and environmental analysis. Based on what was heard during scoping and in order to comply with new legislative direction, the NEPA document is transitioning from an Environmental Assessment (EA) to an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). We anticipate issuing a Notice of Intent (NOI) late this summer (2013). When updated information on the proposed project is available, additional scoping meeting(s) will be held to introduce project changes. The updated information will include a revised purpose and need statement and the range of alternatives that will be considered during environmental review. The additional scoping will provide an opportunity for the public, agencies, tribes, and jurisdictions to comment on the project's purpose and need, alternatives, and potential effects. When NEPA environmental review is complete, WSDOT proposes to adopt the NEPA document to satisfy the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) requirements.

Consistency with the Regional Transportation Plan – Transportation 2040

In 2010, the Puget Sound Regional Council adopted the Regional Transportation Plan – Transportation 2040. The plan addresses regional mobility and accessibility and recognizes that financial resources will be scarce and investments in transportation will need to be strategic. The Regional Transportation Plan sets out broad policy direction for a sustainable future with increasing reliance on user fees and tolls, culminating in a highway network

managed and financed as fully tolled facilities. It also calls for a clear relationship between tolling facility users and system benefits. A guiding principle is that toll policies should result in travel benefits for all users in the project corridor.

The proposed tolling of I-90 is listed in the 2010 Action Strategy, of the Regional Transportation Plan (Appendix C). The action strategy includes a list of projects that comprise the Regional Ten-Year Transportation Investment Program. It lists the I-90 Tolling Project as project 5435 and estimates the project cost at more than \$30 million (2008 dollars). The I-90 Tolling Project is included in PSRC's current Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and on the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) as project WDTOLL-1 in both documents. The STIP was approved on February 19, 2013, and the TIP was approved on June 12, 2013.

2 Scoping Process

Outreach Overview

The public scoping process included a variety of public involvement opportunities and communications tools to inform the public and encourage comments on the project purpose and the full range of concepts. During the public scoping process, FHWA and WSDOT encouraged the public to be involved and comment through a variety of methods, including:

- Attending public open house meetings
- Providing input using an online comment form
- Viewing information on the project website, which included open house materials and the online comment form
- Sending scoping comments by mail or email

The project website² serves as an online resource with regular updates and contains the library of project information for the project.

Notification of Public Comment Period

WSDOT conducted the public scoping period from January 22 to February 22, 2013. WSDOT advertised the public comment period and scoping meetings through:

- Direct email to 611 stakeholders
- Briefings to 37 organizations and key stakeholders, including city officials, staff and organizations in the project vicinity
- Flyers sent to 26 Seattle community centers
- Legal notice advertising the scoping meetings published in the Seattle Times
- Press release posted in Seattle media outlets including dailies and weeklies, and ethnic media outlets throughout King, Pierce, and Snohomish Counties

Attachments

Attachment A contains the scoping materials that were presented at the public meetings and are available on WSDOT's website. It also includes notices published during the public scoping period.

Attachment B contains the comment form distributed by mail and at the public meeting, and the form used on the online survey tool.

Attachment C contains a list of the outreach meetings that have taken place up to March 7, 2013.

Attachment D contains the scoping comment letters received from agencies and organizations.

² <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/I90/CrossLakeWATolling/>

- Display advertisements ran in 23 news outlets and were translated into Russian, Spanish, and Mandarin (Chinese)
- Postings on 130 community calendars from December 2012 up to the meetings in January 2013
- Placing 282 posters in Bellevue, Mercer Island, and Seattle neighborhoods (West Seattle, International District, Rainier Valley, Central District, Beacon Hill, and Pioneer Square)
- WSDOT emailed 16,443 subscribers throughout King County
- WSDOT tweets reached 2,035 followers

For a complete list of outreach meetings, please see Attachment C.

Public Scoping Meetings

WSDOT hosted three in-person public scoping meetings and provided the meeting materials online to encourage public review and comment on the scope of alternatives and the environmental document, which at the time was proposed as an environmental assessment. Approximately 1,010 people attended the meetings in Mercer Island, Bellevue, and Seattle. The meeting details are listed below.

Mercer Island

January 29, 2013, 4–7 p.m.
 Mercer Island Community Center
 8236 Southeast 24th St.
 Mercer Island, WA 98040
796 attendees

Bellevue

January 30, 2013, 4–7 p.m.
 Bellevue City Hall
 450 110th Ave NE
 Bellevue, WA 98004
157 attendees

Seattle

January 31, 2013, 4–7 p.m.
 Yesler Community Center
 917 East Yesler Way
 Seattle, WA 98122
57 attendees



Public Scoping Meeting on Mercer Island January, 29, 2013.

At each public meeting, WSDOT asked participants to sign an attendance list. WSDOT provided meeting participants with a *Community Guide to Scoping* brochure and a comment form. WSDOT staff and project team members answered questions and explained the proposed concepts to participants. WSDOT staff gave a presentation on the project history, the concepts under consideration, and opportunities to get involved. The WSDOT Toll Division Director also facilitated a question and answer session. Participants were encouraged to submit written comments by completing a paper form, using the one of the online forms, providing a verbal comment with a digital voice recorder, or sending an email to the project team.

On the project website, people were able to view all of the meeting handouts and presentation boards, which are included in Attachment A. Online commenters had the option to send comments via email, fill out the comment form, or submit their comments using an online survey form.

Outreach to Public Service Providers

Between November 2012 and January 2013, the project team contacted 31 organizations that provide services to limited-English proficient and low income populations who may use I-90. These organizations were identified by reviewing service providers in the Rainier Valley, Central District, Beacon Hill, Mercer Island and East Bellevue, and the list of providers identified during the SR 520 Variable Tolling Project. Public information officers from the Cities of Issaquah, Bellevue, Mercer Island and Seattle were also asked about service providers in the area. The identified service providers were contacted by phone or email to see if they would be willing to participate in a meeting.

During December 2012 and January 2013, project team members met with 11 social service providers. The intent of these meetings was to inform social service providers who might be affected by the project about the environmental process and background, the type of feedback WSDOT was soliciting during the upcoming scoping period, who to contact for further questions, and answer any questions. Most importantly these meetings were an opportunity to gain a better understanding of potentially affected populations serviced by these providers and the potential effects

the project may have on those populations. Feedback from the providers was tracked with action items and questions assigned to communications team members for follow up. WSDOT met with the following social service providers during this early phase:

- Bellevue College
- Bellevue Human Services
- Centerstone
- Chinese Information Services Center
- Crossroads Mini City Hall
- King County Housing
- Mercer Island Human Services
- Northwest Kidney Foundation
- Sound Mental Health
- Seattle Central Community College
- Wellspring

All of the service providers contacted were also sent flyers about the public scoping meetings.

3 Agency and Tribal Coordination

FHWA and WSDOT sent invitations to be a participating or cooperating agency or tribe for the I-90 Tolling Project on January 4, 2013. Invitations have been accepted by:

Participating Agencies

- City of Kenmore
- City of Sammamish
- Port of Seattle
- Puget Sound Clean Air Agency
- Snoqualmie Tribe
- Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation

Cooperating Agencies

- City of Bellevue
- City of Issaquah
- City of Mercer Island
- City of Seattle
- King County Metro
- Sound Transit

The Puget Sound Regional Council has declined to be a cooperating agency in this process. At this time responses have not been received from:

- City of Newcastle
- Muckleshoot Indian Tribe
- Tulalip Tribes
- Yakama Nation

WSDOT emailed agencies and tribes on January 22, 2013, to ensure they knew the public scoping period had started and to invite them to attend the public meetings. WSDOT also provided these agencies and tribes with the opportunity to review the draft purpose and need statement and agency and tribal involvement

plans. WSDOT extended an invitation to meet with any of the agencies or tribes individually to discuss any concerns or comments during the public scoping period. A follow-up email was sent on February 14, 2013, to remind the agencies and tribes that the comment period would close on February 22, 2013. FHWA and WSDOT will continue to coordinate with these agencies and tribes throughout the environmental process.

On April 4, 2013, additional invitations were sent to the Cities of Bothell, Lake Forest Park, Kirkland, Renton, Tukwila, and Maple Valley to become participating agencies. Invitations have been accepted by:

- City of Kirkland
- City of Lake Forest Park
- City of Tukwila

The City of Maple Valley has declined to be a participating agency in this process. At this time responses have not been received from:

- City of Bothell
- City of Tukwila

A summary of the comments received from agencies during the scoping period is included in Section 4, Summary of Comments from Agencies and Organizations.

4 Summary of Comments

FHWA and WSDOT received just over 3,400 comments during the public scoping period at public meetings by mail, email, and using an online survey form. These included:

- 311 letters and comment forms
- 1 letter with a petition including 5,237 signatures
- 1,376 emails
- 1,712 online survey forms

Most of the comments received were from individual public citizens. Comments were also received from local cities, organizations, community groups, businesses, and churches. Copies of individual comments are available from WSDOT upon request.

All comments received were reviewed by WSDOT to identify information that could help shape the development and analysis of the project under NEPA. While reading hard copy letters and forms, the main topics were noted to help develop the list of key themes. For comments received online, text mining software was used to identify word frequencies. Word searches were also conducted to assist in identifying themes.

The WSDOT Toll Division Director also facilitated a question and answer session during the public scoping meetings. The verbal exchange during the question and answer period was not digitally recorded, but WSDOT staff took notes to ensure the general themes are included in this summary. Participants were encouraged to submit written comments by completing a paper form, using the one of the online forms, providing a verbal comment with a digital voice recorder, or sending an email to the project team.

Key Themes

WSDOT and the project team have reviewed all of the comments received during the public scoping period. The key themes that emerged from agencies and the public during the public comment period are summarized in this section. Key themes included:

- Tolling
 - Initiative Process
- Purpose and Need
- Alternatives
- Economic Effects of Tolling
- Effects on Land Use and Development on Mercer Island
- Effects on Public Services
- Effects on Community Life
- Environmental Justice
- Traffic Effects
- Effects to Freight
- Effects on the Region
- Level of NEPA Documentation

Each of the key themes is discussed and includes representative quotes from comments received during scoping. These comments capture all relevant issues for environmental analysis under NEPA.

Summary of Comments from the Public

Tolling

Overall, the most frequently made comments expressed opposition to tolling and concern for the financial burden it would place on people. People also expressed many other reasons why they are opposed to tolling such as the effects to the economy, businesses, employees, low-income people, public services, and access. Several commenters question if tolling I-90 is legal and feel it would be a tax.

A large number of Mercer Island residents voiced that the toll would be unfair because there is no other way off the island. Many residents in retirement communities expressed that tolling would be a financial hardship for them as they have fixed incomes.

NO TOLLS ON I-90!

– Online survey commenter

At the very least, instituting tolling would violate accepted standards of fairness, equity and safety. Residents of Mercer Island are captives of I-90; without it, we cannot get on or off the island to avail ourselves of goods and services other residents of western Washington take for granted.

– Email commenter

There needs to be a way to cross Lake WA other than going around via 405 that does not involve tolls.

– Comment form commenter

Please understand that we (and many others) are retired living on a fixed income in a Retirement Home on Mercer Island. We need to make frequent trips for medical appointments OFF the Island.

A toll for getting off the Island is equivalent to a penalty for living on the Island.

– Letter commenter

Please demonstrate the legal basis for a federal road's toll paying for a state road, or for one road's toll to pay for another

– Email commenter

There were a few comments that supported tolling and spreading the cost of our transportation infrastructure across the region.

The two bridges across Lake Washington serve the same purposes; supporting efficient transfer of people and freight across a single natural transportation barrier. All users should pay as they go.

– Online survey commenter

Initiative Process

A few commenters expressed opinions about the initiative process, past initiatives, and potential future initiatives.

The federal highways already are already paid for by federal dollars, for example federal gas tax. I am in favor of the initiative to ban any tolls being put on Interstates.

– Online survey commenter

The only reason there is congestion on I-90 is due to tolling on 5-20 [sic]. I disagree with any I-90 tolling initiative in the works.

– Online survey commenter

*I expect that if the Legislature and WSDOT push forward with this ill-considered plan to toll the I-90 bridges, the citizens will file an initiative/referendum to reverse any I-90 tolling scheme. It is also possible that public anger will reach a level that an initiative would strip the state of the power to impose *any* future tolls without first subjecting the plans to a public vote.*

– Email commenter

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the I-90 Tolling Project is to raise revenue for substantial transportation improvements in the Cross-Lake Washington Corridor and to help alleviate congestion on I-90 between I-5 and I-405. Section 1 of this report also describes the need for tolling as congestion management to improve the movement of people and goods.

Numerous commenters who expressed opposition to tolling are against using the funds generated by I-90 tolls to pay for SR 520 or a project on another roadway. As a result, there is overlap in the comments that express opposition to tolling and comments on the purpose and need. Some comments are against using funds to pay for SR 520 construction because they believe that project has not been managed well, resulting in the funding gap.

Many commenters expressed opinions that tolling will not alleviate congestion on I-90 because the region will still have the same two bridges across and the same routes around Lake Washington, and that congestion has been caused by SR 520 tolling. Additionally, instead of improving the movement of people and goods, commenters expressed concern that tolls would create a barrier.

Revenue from tolling should be related to the project being tolled.

There is no connection between what is being proposed and the use of the money.

– Online survey commenter

The 520 Bridge has nothing to do with the I-90 Cross Lake Corridor.

Putting a toll on the I-90 will not cut down on congestion.

– Comment form commenter

Alternatives

Commenters made several suggestions for tolling including reducing the cost of the toll if both the I-90 and SR 520 bridges are tolled, tolling one direction of both bridges, looking at additional alternatives for the I-90 tolling locations, providing an incentive for carpools, and setting a cap for Mercer Island residents and employees. A few commenters expressed a preference for static tolls (a set amount all the time) instead of variable rate tolls. Several commenters also suggested using other revenue sources to pay for the SR 520 bridge such as the gas tax, vehicle tax, high occupancy toll (HOT) lanes, or a mileage-based fee.

Congestion on the I-90 started when the 520 was tolled. The toll on the 520 is a ridiculous amount. Perhaps if you made it a reasonable toll you would see more people take the 520.

– Email commenter

Increase either the gas tax and/or vehicle licensing, but please stop tolls.

– Comment form commenter

I prefer you look for other more equitable solutions that spread the cost equally across all residents of King County. For example:

- *Increase the gas tax*
- *Mileage tax which has the benefit of collecting from alternative energy vehicles*
- *Add a surcharge to our annual vehicle registration fee*

– Email commenter

The study should broaden its scope to include other methods of reducing traffic flow on the cross-lake corridor and other methods of generating revenue including tolling hot [high occupancy toll] lanes, increase car tabs, and gasoline taxes, just to name a few.

– Online survey commenter

One option that would be much more fair would be to have split gantries on each side of Mercer Island, paying a partial toll at each. ...I would also like to see a per-household or per-vehicle cap on tolls.

– Online survey commenter

Economic Effects of Tolling

A great deal of concern was expressed by commenters who live across the region, as well as on Mercer Island, about the financial impact of tolling on businesses, their employees, and the general

community. There are many individuals and families who need to commute to, from, or through Mercer Island to reach schools, activities, and jobs. Many commenters expressed concern for minimum wage workers who commute to or across Mercer Island; they would not be able to afford the toll and would have to find another job. Businesses on Mercer Island are also concerned that off-island employees, customers, and clients will not pay to come work, shop, or use their services. In addition, several comments from Mercer Island residents expressed concern that tolling will harm their property values. Several commenters feel this would be an additional tax on the people who use I-90.

Not only will it hurt the property values on the island, but it will hurt the workers that come here from off island. I spoke to a checker yesterday that said he couldn't afford the toll and would have to find another job.

– Email commenter

While the direct financial impact to our family is of great concern, I'm more concerned about what the toll would mean for the Mercer Island School District, Mercer Island government workers (like firefighters and police officers), Mercer Island day care facilities (like the Stroum Jewish Community Center where we send our children), and Mercer Island restaurants and businesses. I understand several teachers, workers and day care providers live off the island. Imposing a toll on these workers would make it cost prohibitive to work on the island and they may choose to work elsewhere.

– Email commenter

Tolling in the Puget Sound will have a chilling financial effect by redirecting money that would otherwise have been returned, to a significant extent, to the local economy and by effectively putting a barrier in place that hampers commerce across the region.

– Online survey commenter

There is no question that if I was looking for a home now, the tolling on Mercer Island would cause me to reconsider.

– Email commenter

Effects on Land Use and Development on Mercer Island

Several commenters expressed concern that tolls will influence people to live in other locations and, along with the financial

effects on property values, could affect future land use and development on Mercer Island. Commenters stated that tolls could discourage businesses from operating on Mercer Island and discourage people from moving to Mercer Island due to the increased costs.

The tolling of the I-90 floating bridge corridor will have a severe impact on the city of Mercer Island and its residents. It will impact the financial stability and viability of the businesses located on the island. It will effect [sic] how the city functions, as a large majority of the city work force lives off-island, as do the employees of the Mercer Island School District (MISD).

– Email commenter

Following King County's growth management plan, there has been a substantial build-up of downtown Mercer Island, with a number of new 4 to 6 story mixed use buildings. Already much of the street level commercial space is empty. It would be very difficult to get people off the Island to come shop here and support local businesses were they to have to pay a toll just to shop.

– Email commenter

Effects to Public Services

Many commenters are concerned about access to hospitals and other critical medical services, especially for the elderly population living in retirement communities on Mercer Island.

Tolling I-90 will punish those seniors that are in need of medical care and have to pay to go to medical appointments at Swedish first hill and Cherry Hill campus'. [sic] Parking costs are bad enough, but those of us on Medicare and fixed incomes cannot stand another charge.

– Online survey commenter

In addition, currently there is no hospital located on the island and ... Residents should have a right to get to a hospital without having to pay a toll.

– Email commenter

Another common issue that emerged was the concern for educators (both public and private schools), public employees, and police and fire department personnel to be able to afford working on the island. If tolls are implemented, Mercer Island residents are concerned that losing staff could affect the quality of

the local schools and affect the ability of the police and fire departments to serve the community. In addition, several commenters were concerned that the increased costs could affect services such as trash collection.

We fear that tolling I-90 would have a very negative effect on Island businesses, schools, and public employees. The quality of Mercer Island schools could be seriously affected, as most school teachers live off the Island. The same can be said for police, fire, and other city employees.

– Email commenter

I work on Mercer Island, in the school district. I live off the island. I must use I-90 to go to work every day. As it is, educators earn far less than they should, but we do this because we care about the next generation. Paying a daily toll will cause a financial hardship for teachers and staff of the Mercer Island School District.

– Online survey commenter

Effects to Community Life

Many commenters indicated that tolling would hinder normal everyday activities such as participating in community organizations (i.e., sports practices, church services) and social activities (i.e., going to a concert, visiting relatives). Residents on Mercer Island expressed that tolling would limit their ability to access off-island shops and services. Many commenters also fear the financial burden of tolling would deter, and could prevent, middle or low-income families from being able to participate or volunteer in social, educational, and religious activities.

There are many social cultural programs on Mercer Island, attended by people from all over the Seattle area. The Hungarian American Association of Washington meets regularly on the Island, the Stroum Jewish Community Center has regional activities, and many churches have various religious and educational offerings – all of which would be severely hampered by tolling on I-90.

– Online survey commenter

My children also attend a religious school located on Mercer Island, and I know that approximately ½ of the families that attend the school live in Bellevue or other eastside communities.

– Email commenter

You are making it too expensive for the average citizen to move about in society. This would just add another barrier.

– Online survey commenter

Environmental Justice

Several commenters stated that tolling would have an unfair financial effect on the low-income population. Commenters who identified themselves as low-income individuals expressed that tolls would make it difficult to get to work and medical appointments.

The tolls unfairly affect the low income, working poor and middle class.

– Online survey commenter

For people with low incomes who must travel to work there, there just aren't enough busses and public transportation. You need to go back to the system to tax cars based on their value. Or- how about if you must toll, then DO NOT toll people who carpool.

– Online survey commenter

I am low income and have a disability which prevents me from working. Recently, I moved to Mercer Island to get subsidized housing, which I'm very grateful for. However, my life and medical appointments are in Seattle and many of the low income services I receive are in Bellevue, so a toll on I-90, regardless of where the toll is put, would have a detrimental impact on my life.

If you must put this toll in place, please have something in place that would help low income people and/or people with disabilities to pay the toll, a special sticker of [sic] something.

– Email commenter

Traffic Effects

Several commenters expressed concerns about traffic diverting around Lake Washington to avoid the tolls. They are concerned that traffic diversion will cause greater congestion and lengthen commutes on I-405, I-5, and SR 522. There is concern that tolls could push additional traffic onto arterials near I-405, I-5, and SR 522. Several comments suggested that public transportation should be improved to help congestion, and that using public transportation can be challenging for Mercer Island residents as the park and ride lot is often full. Currently, many off-island

commuters use the Mercer Island Park and Ride. A few commenters also expressed concerns about implementing tolls without sufficient transit options in place, such as light rail.

*Your studies need to take into account the effects of tolling on *all* east-west corridors around Lake Washington. The establishment of tolling on SR 520 has significantly increased traffic on SR 522 on the north end of Lake Washington. SR 522 is already near max capacity, and as a result commute times have suffered and congestion has increased in Kirkland, Bothell, Kenmore, Lake Forest Park, and Seattle's Lake City Way. Adding tolling to I-90 will additionally push traffic to alternate routes, most likely I-405 and possibly contributing further to SR 522.*

– Online survey commenter

Using public transportation is difficult today because there is a small, main park & ride on the island which is normally filled by 7am on weekdays. Transportation to the park & ride from homes is limited and would dramatically increase commute times for many residents.

– Email commenter

Effects to Freight

Many commenters are concerned that tolling I-90 would increase the cost of goods and services both locally and across the state. Several commenters asked how tolling would affect freight operators traveling to and from the Port of Seattle to locations east, and if it would change the routes that these trucks take.

Local and interstate commerce will be penalized throughout the state on movement of raw materials, products, finished goods, and services. There is no alternative route from Port of Seattle to Bellevue, Issaquah, etc, PLUS E. Washington, Idaho, Montana, E. Oregon.

– Online survey commenter

Tolls should not be placed on vehicles that support daily living, such as buses, garbage trucks, delivery trucks to local grocery and drug stores, package delivery vans, service vehicles supporting utilities, such as telephone and electrical power, delivery trucks for fuel oil and gasoline.

– Online survey commenter

It will add costs to shipping into and out of the port of Seattle that will likely impact business negatively. It will make transportation in the region more costly for all goods, services, and workers.

– Online survey commenter

Effects on the Region

Many commenters expressed that tolling would present a barrier between the populations on the east and west sides of Lake Washington. This barrier could discourage people from frequenting businesses and services across the region. It could also limit the ability of employees to access jobs, and for employers to attract employees from the opposite side of the lake. Many commenters expressed that not only would there be economic effects on Mercer Island, but the effects of tolling would increase the costs of goods and services, which could affect businesses and development across the region.

Please do NOT mandate tolling on I-90. It will create extreme traffic congestion on both I-405 and I-5, and will isolate Seattle and the East side communities from each other.

– Online survey commenter

Depending on where the tolls are collected, East side residents will also be discouraged from coming to Seattle to enjoy many of the vast & diverse goods & services such as minority owned restaurants in the international district or Rainier Ave.

– Online survey commenter

Less movement of people, goods and services between the two sides of Lake Washington will certainly result from an I-90 toll, which can only curtail economic activity in the Seattle area. This is a bad outcome in general, but especially during this time of global economic hardship.

– Online survey commenter

Level of NEPA Documentation

Several commenters questioned the level of environmental analysis needed to assess the I-90 Tolling Project. They are concerned that tolling I-90 will have significant environmental effects that should be analyzed in an EIS.

The proposed tolling of I-90 would have a devastating adverse impact on my wife and I personally and on most Mercer Island residents and

all other users and goods and trade carried intra and interstate on I-90, which is a major trade route that connects between the Puget Sound to eastern WA and the rest of the US. This clearly requires a full EIS, not just an EA.

– Online survey commenter

I implore WSDOT to provide the appropriate level of substantive environmental study and adequate level of process through the EIS process. Please provide adequate level of study and public involvement process to this important proposal. The decision to toll impacts not only this generation, but many generations to come.

– Email commenter

Summary of Comments from Agencies and Organizations

FHWA and WSDOT received 17 letters submitted by the following agencies and organizations:

- Bellevue Chamber of Commerce
- City of Bellevue
- City of Issaquah
- City of Kenmore
- City of Mercer Island
- City of Renton
- City of Seattle, Department of Transportation
- Eastside Friends of Seniors
- King County
- Mercer Island Education Association
- Mercer Island School District, Board of Directors
- No Toll on I-90³
- Pipe Organ Foundation
- Port of Seattle
- Sound Transit

³ A petition with 5,237 signatures was submitted with this letter.

- State of Washington Freight Mobility Strategic Investment Board
- Stroum Jewish Community Center

Letters received from agencies and organizations are included in Appendix D.

While their individual perspectives varied, collectively, comments from these agencies and organizations contained all of the key themes expressed in the summary of public comments, including a concern for the financial impact to public service employees and teachers. Most of the cities expressed concern about traffic diversion and a desire for robust transportation, social, and economic impacts analyses. Many of the agencies and organizations requested that a portion of the toll revenue should go to mass transit, and/or maintenance and improvements on I-90. Several comments also highlighted the importance of I-90 as a freight corridor.

Tolling Opinions

...we do not support tolling I-90. It is critically important to us that any proposal for tolling I-90 mitigate the impact on students, school district employees and Mercer Island Taxpayers.

– Letter from Mercer Island School District Board

Purpose and Need

I-90 is the major commerce corridor for our state, providing the most direct route between eastern Washington and the Port of Seattle, as well as the facility best designed for multi-axled trucks. There is no direct nexus, nor benefit, for trucks to pay tolls for construction of SR 520, especially when there are other proposed improvements in the I-90 corridor that would be of a direct benefit to their trip.

– Letter from Port of Seattle

Alternatives

The Transportation 2040 Plan also recognizes that broad geographic tolling (i.e., including all of the I-450 lanes, I-5, and SR-522) would be more effective at balancing revenue and impacts. WSDOT and FHWA should consider imposing lower tolls on more roads within the Central Puget Sound Region to meet the stated purposes, be more consistent with the Transportation 2040 Plan, and spread burdens more equitably between Central Puget Sound Region communities.

-Letter from City of Mercer Island

Economic Effects of Tolling

Diversion: The study must address the impact on discretionary container freight flows through the Seattle seaport, which might divert to a less costly port of entry, moving local jobs, revenue and taxes with them.

– Letter from Port of Seattle

Effects on Land Use and Development on Mercer Island

Tolling I-90 will make Mercer Island less attractive to businesses, residents, and employees. In the long-term, this could lead to vacancies in commercial and residential property and undermine the City's efforts (consistent with the Growth Management Act) to create a vibrant economic town center that is integrated with the region and will accommodate a certain level of anticipated growth.

– Letter from City of Mercer Island

Effects on Public Services

A high tolling cost could negatively impact Mercer Island School District's ability to attract and retain a quality workforce. We expect to lose experienced staff who live off Island if they see their commuting costs significantly rise. We are concerned we may have trouble recruiting the best possible candidates for open positions because people may avoid jobs on the Island due to tolling fees.

– Letter from Mercer Island Education Association

Effects on Community Life

WSDOT and FHWA should evaluate the social and economic impacts of reduced access to off-Island establishments (e.g., performing arts venues, sporting venues, civic events, museums, recreational opportunities and shopping). While Mercer Island is a distinct community, it considers itself a part of the greater Puget Sound region and its residents enjoy the opportunities offered in neighboring cities. Tolling I-90 means that Mercer Island residents cannot access any of these amenities without paying a toll, unlike every other community in the Puget Sound which has untolled alternate routes.

– Letter from City of Mercer Island

Environmental Justice

The EA should consider the lack of a robust regional transit service in and around the city of Renton, particularly along the I-405 corridor and the lack of any Sound Transit service between the City

of Renton and City of Seattle. This lack of transit service alternatives will be a hardship on low-income residents unable to afford tolls.

– Letter from City of Renton

Traffic Effects

It is important to consider whether sufficient transit service will be available to serve the increased number of people crossing the I-90 corridor on transit after the implementation of tolling.

– Letter from Sound Transit

Traffic has increased on SR 522 post tolling of SR 520. The numbers we have seen range from 9-13%. WSDOT does not believe the am/pm peak to be significantly impacted for travelers along the larger Monroe/Woodinville to Seattle SR 522 corridor. This conclusion is an oversimplification of how increased traffic of this magnitude impacts our City. Impacts to Kenmore's residents are real and include increased noise, air pollution, traffic congestion (not just on SR 522 but also our north-south and east-west local roads), utilization of transit and parking in our neighborhoods.

– Letter from City of Kenmore

Effects to Freight

We are concerned that the purpose lacks relevance to freight moving from the Port of Seattle and other freight intermodal terminals to and from Eastern Washington and beyond. I-90 is a major freight corridor with the link from I-405 to I-5 comprising a small segment in the movement of imports and exports. Trucks are approximately 10 percent or less of the overall traffic on our interstates and generally operate at different peak hours than passenger vehicles.

– Letter from the State of Washington Freight Mobility Strategic Investment Board

Effects on the Region

Since I-90 is a critical freight corridor connecting Eastern Washington to the east side of King County and the Port of Seattle, the No Build analysis should consider the impacts that congestion will have on freight mobility, and by extension, the local, regional and statewide economies. As we noted in 2009, implementing variable tolling on I-90 is critical for managing regional mobility as the population grows.

– Letter from King County

Level of NEPA Documentation

Tolling I-90 will affect a wide range of resources, and impacts on some of those resources will be "significant." NEPA requires preparation of an EIS for a "major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment." 42 U.S.C. § 4332(2)(C) (emphasis added).

– Letter from City of Mercer Island

5 Next Steps

FHWA and WSDOT are using the feedback from the public scoping comments to help shape the scope of the analysis conducted for the environmental review. Based in part on this information they have determined that an EIS is appropriate and will be issuing a Notice of Intent (NOI) summer 2013. As the environmental review process continues they will be discussing the analytical approach with the participating and cooperating agencies and keeping these agencies apprised as the analysis proceeds. WSDOT and FHWA will also provide regular briefings to local agencies and community groups and other interested stakeholders. Another scoping period will be provided after the NOI is issued to provide agencies, tribes, jurisdictions, and the public an opportunity to give additional input on the purpose and need, alternatives, and potential effects.

The EIS will evaluate the environmental and transportation effects of the project in two future years; when tolling would begin in 2016 and to evaluate long-term effects in 2040. If potential significant adverse effects are identified, avoidance, minimization and mitigation measures will be developed and evaluated. The analysis will consider direct, indirect, and cumulative effects. All effects will be compared to a no-action alternative.

FHWA and WSDOT anticipate publishing the EIS in late 2013 or early 2014. Once the document is published, there will be a comment period during which the public will be encouraged to provide input. Several public meetings will be held during the comment period that will serve as hearings to receive comments. At these meetings, people will be able to learn about the project and results of the environmental analysis in an open house format. Comments will be accepted at the public meetings and throughout the comment period. In addition to the formal comment period, the public may submit comments or questions at any time by contacting:

Emily Pace, WSDOT
I90Study@wsdot.wa.gov
206-716-1116

Project information is available on the project website at:

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/I90/CrossLakeWATolling/>.

To join the project mailing list, enter your contact information at:

https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/WADOT/subscriber/new?topic_id=WADOT_304.