

CHAPTER 3

What are the alternatives and how did we develop them?

We evaluate two alternatives in this EA:

- A **Build Alternative**, which will add one new travel lane in each direction along a 2-mile section of I-405 between I-90 and Southeast 8th Street and extend the existing outside southbound HOV lane north to begin at Southeast 8th Street.
- **No Build Alternative**, which would include no major transportation improvements in the study area, but would include regular ongoing maintenance activities.

We narrowed our focus to these two alternatives after the I-405 Corridor EIS explored the range of alternatives for different methods of moving people and freight, as well as mitigation measures proposed for the corridor.

How did we advance from the I-405 Corridor Program to the Bellevue Nickel Improvement Project?

The I-405 Corridor Program environmental process, shown in the sidebar, describes the key steps we have taken to get where we are today.

During preparation of the I-405 Corridor Program Draft EIS (DEIS), decision-makers evaluated a variety of travel modes as they developed the alternatives to be analyzed in the EIS. These travel modes included single-passenger automobiles, motorcycles, carpools, buses, commuter trains, light-rail trains, bicycles, and walking.

The alternatives advanced for detailed study represented a range of improvements. Designers wanted to create capacity for a different mix of travel modes and technology that together could work as a complete and coordinated transportation system.

Once we had completed the I-405 Corridor Program and made it available for public and agency review, the project decision-makers selected a Preferred Alternative for analysis in the FEIS. The Preferred Alternative was a combination of highway, transit, local arterial, and other improvements at critical locations within the 30-mile-long I-405 corridor. We included the details of the

The I-405 Corridor Program Environmental Process

Discipline Reports

We prepared 19 technical reports to evaluate the potential effects of six project alternatives on the environment within the study area.



National/State Environmental Policy Act Draft EIS

The Draft EIS summarized the findings from the discipline reports and formally documented the potential environmental effects of the proposed action and other alternatives that are part of the I-405 Corridor Program.



Preferred Alternative

WSDOT selected the Preferred Alternative from among the alternatives analyzed in the Draft EIS. We included the details of the Preferred Alternative analysis, as well as the analysis of the other alternatives, in the FEIS.



Selected Alternative

FHWA and FTA agreed on a Selected Alternative and documented that decision in a formal ROD.



Record of Decision

The ROD identified the Selected Alternative and listed a wide range of mitigation commitments that we will implement to avoid or minimize adverse environmental effects.



Bellevue Nickel Improvement Project

The Bellevue Nickel Improvement Project is a collection of project-specific improvements from the Selected Alternative that address urgent transportation needs in the section of the I-405 Corridor between I-90 and Southeast 8th Street.

The Bellevue Nickel Improvement Project Environmental Review Process

Step 1: Discipline Reports

For each environmental topic, a discipline report describes the affected environment, the proposed actions, and how we will avoid, minimize, or mitigate effects of the proposed action.



Step 2: Environmental Assessment

An EA is a concise document that briefly discusses the purpose and need for an action, presents alternatives to the action, and provides sufficient evidence and analysis of effects to determine whether to prepare an EIS or a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).



Step 3: FONSI

A FONSI presents the reasons why an action will not have a significant effect on the environment and therefore does not require the preparation of an EIS. Based on analyses and project feedback received to date, we anticipate preparing a FONSI for the Bellevue Nickel Improvement Project.

What are the boundaries for the Bellevue Nickel Improvement Project?

The project area begins just north of the I-90/I-405 interchange and extends north to just beyond Southeast 8th Street in the City of Bellevue. All of the construction related directly to the project will take place within the existing I-405 right of way.

Preferred Alternative in the FEIS, along with the analyses of five other alternatives.

With some modifications, the Preferred Alternative in the FEIS became the Selected Alternative in the I-405 ROD approved in October 2002. The ROD described the reasons for the decision to advance the Selected Alternative, and explained how the project would avoid, minimize, and compensate for any resulting adverse environmental effects.

We expect that it will take 20 years or more to implement the Selected Alternative for the entire I-405 Corridor Program. To move forward as quickly as we can to improve conditions for those who depend on our transportation system, WSDOT has identified smaller-scale projects that we can implement with available funding. The Bellevue Nickel Improvement Project is one of these projects, and serves as a first step toward completing the Selected Alternative.

How did we develop the Bellevue Nickel Improvement Project?

Using the Selected Alternative as the master plan, we developed a design concept that will improve traffic flow on I-405 between I-90 and Southeast 8th Street. We developed the design concept for the Bellevue Nickel Improvement Project with the following benefits in mind:

- Improving the worst congestion choke points along I-405.
- Improving safety.
- Increasing travel speeds on I-405 in Bellevue during peak commuter hours.
- Improving freight mobility (i.e., truck traffic).

Using professional engineering and planning judgment, we began to shape the design of the Bellevue Nickel Improvement Project. We modified the design of the project where possible to avoid or minimize potential effects.

We are completing the environmental review process for the Bellevue Nickel Improvement Project in three distinct steps, shown in the margin. These steps are consistent with FHWA requirements for preparing a NEPA EA.

Why do we consider a No Build Alternative?

We evaluated a No Build Alternative to create a baseline for comparing the effects associated with the Build Alternative. The No Build Alternative maintains the status quo, meaning that only routine activities such as road maintenance, repair, and safety improvements would occur over the next 20 years.

This alternative does not include improvements that would increase roadway capacity, reduce congestion, or improve safety meaningfully. For these reasons, it does not satisfy the project's intended purpose of providing capacity improvements within the corridor and is not the preferred course of action.

Why have we prepared this environmental assessment for the Bellevue Nickel Improvement Project?

Using the evaluation in this EA, we will determine whether we can issue a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and proceed to build the project or conclude that we need to prepare an EIS. This EA builds on the analysis in the earlier I-405 Corridor EIS, offering a more in-depth evaluation of the potential effects of this project. Our assessment does not re-examine corridor-level alternatives, effects, or other measures already analyzed and approved in the I-405 Corridor Program EIS.

Did environmental issues directly influence the design of the project?

WSDOT included many refinements intended to avoid or minimize effects to the environment (see Chapter 5, “How will the project affect the environment and what will we do about those effects?”). For example, we modified the design several times to limit contact with streams and wetlands during construction of the improvements.

How have we involved the public as we have developed and studied the alternatives?

We have involved the public in the Bellevue Nickel Improvement Project through a wide range of activities such as:

- Inviting citizens to participate in the project scoping and development process.

What is project scoping?

Project scoping is a public process that serves the following purpose:

- Inform the public and agencies of proposed actions and alternatives.
 - Serve as a forum to identify potential environmental effects.
 - Ensure that the environmental documents consider reasonable alternatives.
 - Help to clarify focus on issues or concerns that are important to the local community and to agencies.
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**Project Scoping Meeting,
January 25, 2005**

Bellevue Nickel Improvement Project Outreach

Charette and Van Tour:
October 7, 2002

Bellevue Advisory Committee Meetings:
April 7, 2004; monthly thereafter

Scoping Meeting with Resource
Agencies and Jurisdictions:
January 25, 2005

Public Scoping Open House:
January 25, 2005

Neighborhood Meetings:
March 2005 to present

- Reaching out to the public by conducting open houses, producing newsletters, maintaining a website, and giving presentations at neighborhood meetings.
- Launching other outreach efforts such as Executive, Steering, and Advisory Committee meetings.

Project Scoping and Development

More than 100 citizens attended the Bellevue Nickel Improvement Project scoping meeting on January 25, 2005. We invited attendees to submit written and verbal comments to WSDOT during a public comment period. On that same day, we met with cities and agencies that have jurisdiction in the study area to identify and incorporate their concerns and comments.

During the comment period, which occurred from January 9 to February 10, 2005, we actively communicated with citizens via letter, email, and telephone.

Following these meetings, we categorized and compiled the comments into the Bellevue Nickel Improvement Project Scoping Report (see Appendix W). The comments addressed topics such as noise, traffic disruptions, air quality, water quality, stormwater management, and aesthetics.

Public Outreach

Since the Bellevue Nickel Improvement Project received funding in July 2003, we have worked closely with the public, elected officials, local/state/federal agencies, and tribes. We have communicated with the public about the Bellevue Nickel Improvement Project through neighborhood meetings, open house events, and visits to community facilities and businesses.

For example, WSDOT conducted outreach efforts to minority and low-income populations in the area. We contacted municipal agencies and private organizations to identify and locate special groups and to learn about their transportation needs. Some of these organizations included senior centers, area food banks, public health facilities, and libraries.

Committee Involvement

Several standing committees have met regularly to provide ongoing dialogue and coordination for the project. These groups include:

- The **I-405 Executive Committee**, composed of executives from FHWA, FTA, WSDOT, King County, and Sound

Transit, as well as members of the Washington State Transportation Commission and elected officials from cities along the I-405 Corridor, provides monthly to quarterly input on policy matters.

- The **Bellevue Advisory Committee**, made up of citizens, business people, elected officials, partnering agencies, WSDOT, and city staff, effectively reached Bellevue neighborhoods by engaging the community in design, environmental, and aesthetic issues.
- The **I-405 Steering Committee**, consisting of senior staff from the local, regional, state, and federal agencies having jurisdiction within the Bellevue Nickel Improvement Project study area, provides technical and policy guidance. The Steering Committee meets regularly to provide valuable feedback on technical feasibility, environmental acceptability, costs, and performance.
- The **Multi-Agency Permitting (MAP) Team**, composed of eight senior environmental regulators from WSDOT, the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology), the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), the U.S Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), and King County focuses on issues pertaining to project permitting. The I-405 Team and the MAP Team meet regularly to make project permitting decisions.
- The **I-405 Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) Committee** focused on the “view from” or “view through” viewshed within the I-405 right of way, as well as the overall theme and character of the roadway. This group of community members and local jurisdictions has provided advice on elements that create a strong visual character and continuity along the entire 30-mile corridor. Measures could include architectural enhancements such as noise/retaining wall treatments, landscaping, bridge treatments, mainline lighting, corridor design themes, and sign structures.

How have we involved government agencies?

We have involved governmental agencies through regular meetings and other means to address issues on an as-needed basis. Government agencies have played major roles in the development of the Bellevue Nickel Improvement Project. Here are examples of the ways we have interacted with these key contributors:

How have we communicated with the public?

Speaker's Bureau – WSDOT personnel made formal presentations to community organizations.

Environmental Outreach – Field studies put WSDOT in touch with residents living in the same area. For example, WSDOT contacted agencies who provide services to low-income and minority populations to discuss the project and how it could affect their services.

Project Website – We provided the I-405 Project Website, at www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/I-405, as a resource for the public and have updated it regularly.

Newsletters/Project Updates – Newsletter mailings and email updates offered an ideal opportunity to inform the public on project progress.

Return Mail Postcard – Mailings included a return postcard offering an opportunity to comment on the project and to request WSDOT's participation at organization meetings. We distributed individual postcards to libraries, multi-family apartment/condominium associations, and special housing establishments.

- Briefings with Washington State legislators representing districts within the I-405 Corridor Program study area and U.S. Congress members from the Washington State delegation.
- Sessions to review stormwater management strategies with representatives from Ecology, King County, and the City of Bellevue.
- Sessions with the Corps, Ecology, King County, and the City of Bellevue to coordinate wetlands mitigation strategies and site selection.
- Scoping meetings with agencies to discuss traffic, air, noise, endangered species, water, wetlands, and mitigation strategies.
- Discussions with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on Endangered Species Act (ESA) issues.

How have we involved tribal governments in the project?

WSDOT Executive Order E1025.00

WSDOT Executive Order E1025.00 is based on the Centennial Accord Between the Federally Recognized Tribes in Washington State and the State of Washington (1989) and the Washington State/Tribal Government-to-Government Implementation Guidelines (1999).

Tribal governments can help identify social issues and solutions that may affect tribal members or other social resources of interest to the tribes. WSDOT commits itself to respectful, effective consultation and communication with tribal governments in recognition that project activities may affect their rights and interests. WSDOT Executive Order E1025.00 on Tribal Consultation (February 19, 2003) established this commitment to an effective working relationship with tribal governments.

WSDOT initiated consultation with the following Tribal Governments during preparation of the I-405 Corridor Program EIS: Muckleshoot Tribe, Tulalip Tribe, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, Snoqualmie Tribe, and Duwamish Tribe. This consultation continues as part of the Bellevue Nickel Improvement Project and will help to involve tribal governments in each stage of the environmental analysis. To date, tribal representatives have participated in the Bellevue Nickel Improvement Project by attending project scoping meetings, site visits, participating in public outreach efforts, and meetings with WSDOT to discuss issues of interest.