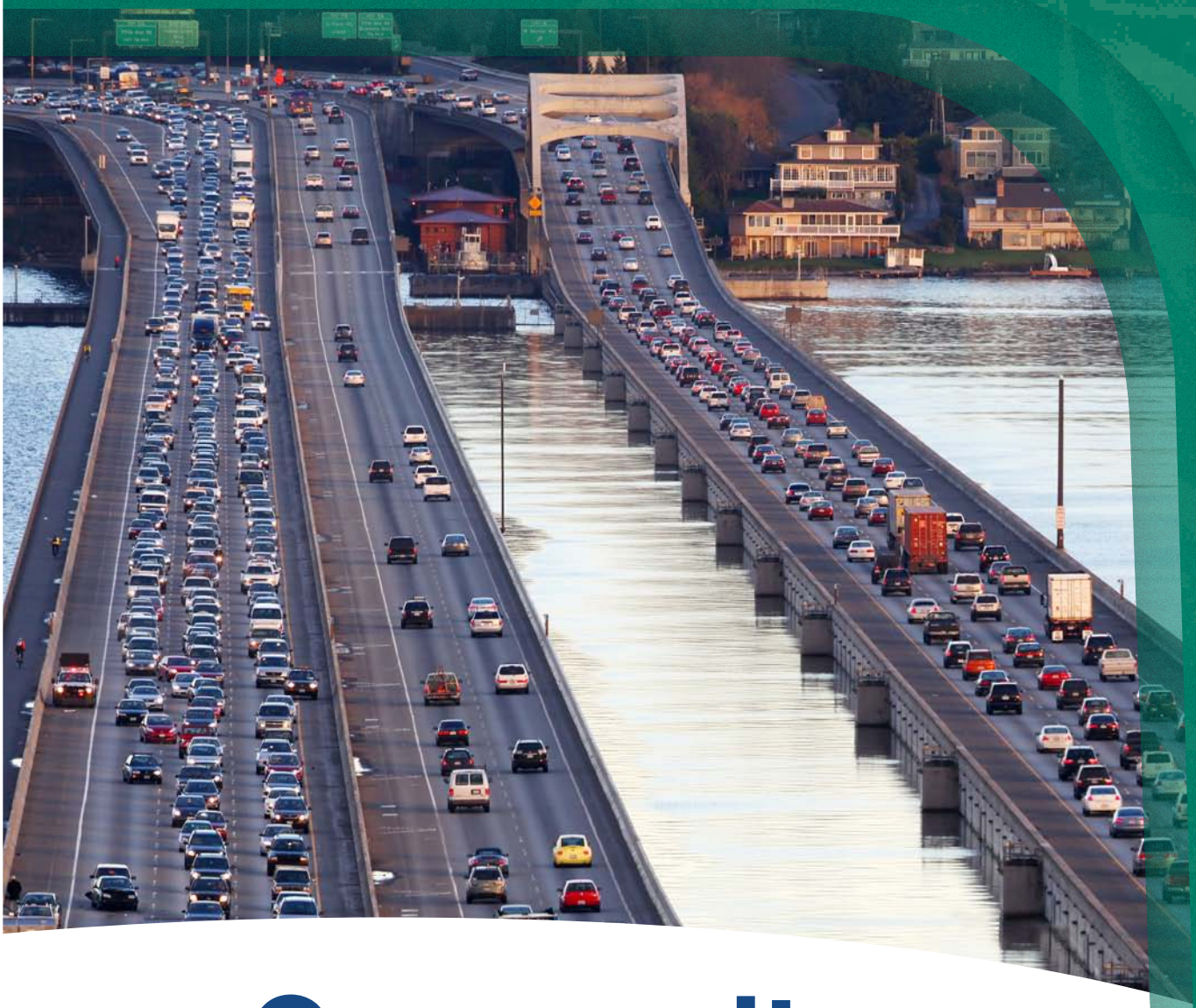
Tolling Environmental Assessment



# Community Guide

## How to provide input to the I-90 Tolling Environmental Assesment

January 2013

Washington State Department of Transportation

# How to use this Community Guide

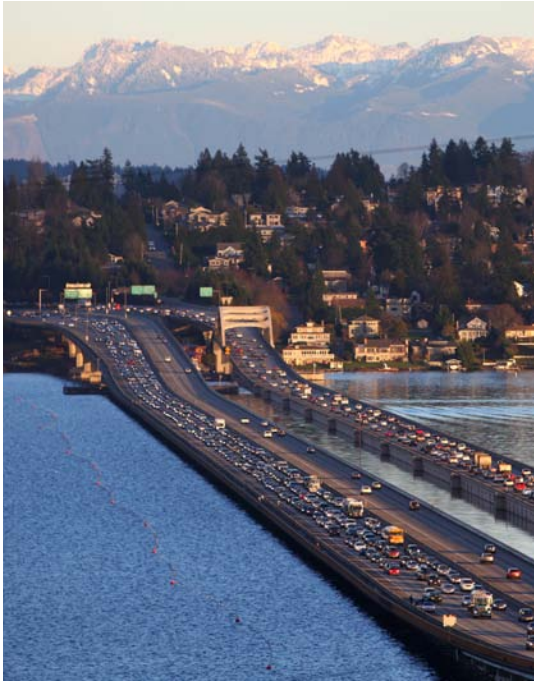
This Community Guide provides information and guidance on how to best provide meaningful and timely input to the I-90 Tolling Environmental Assessment (EA). This guide provides background and information on the project and the schedule we are following to adhere to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

This guide includes

- How to use this Community Guide
- Project description, history, and background
- What is scoping?
- Why are we doing this Environmental Assessment?
- The proposed project Purpose and Need
- Schedule
- What else is happening in the Cross-Lake Washington Corridor?
- Technical terms
- How to get involved

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is preparing an EA that will evaluate the environmental effects of tolling on the I-90 corridor between I-5 and I-405 to raise needed revenue to complete the SR 520 program and to alleviate congestion on I-90. Drivers, commuters and communities are encouraged to get involved with the decision-making process by learning about the project and submitting comments at three public scoping meetings in January. An on-line public meeting will also be available during the scoping period between January 22 and February 22, 2013. Answers to frequently asked questions to help guide peoples' involvement are provided below:

**What types of comments are most helpful during scoping? –** During scoping we are looking for information that helps us form and complete our analysis. Comments that suggest sources or locations of information for our analysts to use (for example a vantage point for evaluating visual quality) or identify ways the analysis should be conducted (for example time periods to look at traffic diversion) are most helpful.



**What can people comment on? –** Prior to conducting our analysis, it is helpful to have the public comment on the subjects being studied in the EA (see page 2) and why we are doing this project (the Purpose and Need) stated on Page 3.

**How will public comments be used? –** WSDOT environmental analysts will use comments provided during the scoping period to prepare their work. Analysts may revise the scope of their work accordingly; for example, they may look at other locations, other data sources, or reach out to different stakeholders.

# Project Description, History, and Background

## What is the Cross-Lake Washington Corridor?

I-90 between Seattle and Issaquah and SR 520 between Seattle and Redmond are parallel facilities that serve as the two main routes for crossing Lake Washington. For many travelers they serve as alternative routes for one another and are referred to as the Cross-Lake Washington Corridor.

The operation of I-90 across Lake Washington, especially between Seattle and Bellevue, affects the operation of SR 520 and vice versa. Both highways have general purpose lanes in both directions. High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes are planned for SR 520 as part of the bridge replacement. I-90 also has reversible express lanes in the center roadway and an HOV lane in each direction between Mercer Island and I-405.

## History of Tolling on the Cross-Lake Washington Corridor

In 2008 the Washington (WA) State Legislature charged the 520 Tolling Implementation Committee (with members from WSDOT, the Puget Sound Regional Council and the Washington State Transportation Commission) to look at tolling options on the Cross-Lake Washington Corridor including SR 520 and I-90. The Legislature established the SR 520 Legislative Workgroup under ESHB 2211. In 2009, the workgroup's charge was to review and recommend a financing strategy, in conjunction with WSDOT, to fund the projects in the SR 520 corridor that reflect the design options recommended by the workgroup. The financing strategy was to be based on a total cost of all the intended projects in the SR 520 corridor of no more than $4.65 billion.

### Legislative Direction for Tolling I-90

Tolling I-90 was identified as a potential strategy to fill the funding gap and complete the SR 520 connection to I-5, thus completing the Cross-Lake Washington Corridor. The Legislative Workgroup recommended to the governor and legislature a financing strategy that attempts to exhaust all other financing options prior to considering tolling I-90. Those options are listed below:

- Use of the base funding previously identified, including early tolling of SR 520 (prior to construction completion),
- The creation of, and early tolling of HOT lanes on I-90 as soon as is practicable,
- The funding gap to be filled by new federal or state revenue, to be identified in the next year or two, and
- ***If that doesn't happen,* then general tolling of I-90 to fill the gap starting no sooner than 2014.**

Source: SR 520 Legislative Workgroup Recommendations Report, December 2009

## I-90 Tolling Environmental Assessment Underway

Tolling I-90 is being considered to fill the funding gap to complete the SR 520 program. Tolling alternatives are being developed and will be evaluated against no action alternatives, where I-90 operates as it does today. The tolling alternatives will include tolls collected electronically in both directions between I-5 and I-405. Like SR 520, WSDOT is evaluating all lanes being tolled, and tolls paid either by the *Good To Go!* pass or photo tolling will vary by time of day. Rates charged may be similar to SR 520, and will be determined by the Washington State Transportation Commission. Tolling could start as early as 2016.

## What is Scoping?

Scoping is held early in the planning of a project and helps determine the "range" of issues to be studied under NEPA. During the scoping phase of the environmental process, WSDOT and The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) will review and consider input to the draft purpose and need, the range of reasonable concepts for meeting the project purpose and need statement and the projects potential issues and effects.

**Scoping is an opportunity to gather feedback that will shape the project.** Members of the public, tribes, and other government agencies may offer comments throughout the scoping period (January 22 to February 22, 2013). A comment form is included in this guide for your use in providing comments.

Following scoping, the NEPA EA will present results of an in-depth analysis of the alternatives in relationship to key environmental resources. Environmental resources cover the built, natural, and social environments on topics such as transportation, air quality, and environmental justice. Public comments will help us identify the most important issues to consider as we evaluate the project alternatives. An additional comment period will follow the release of the EA. More information about how to get involved and provide comments is provided on the back cover.

**By e-mail**
i90EAcomments@wsdot.wa.gov
Jan. 22 – Feb. 22

**In Person**
Public Meetings
Jan. 29, 30, 31

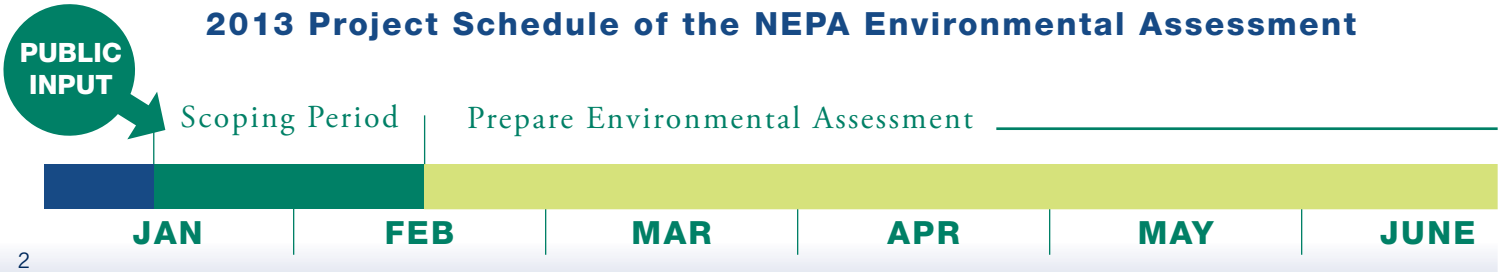
**By Mail**
Angela Angove,
I-90 Tolling Project
999 Third Ave., Suite 2200
Seattle, WA 98104
Jan. 22 – Feb. 22

## What are We Studying in the EA?

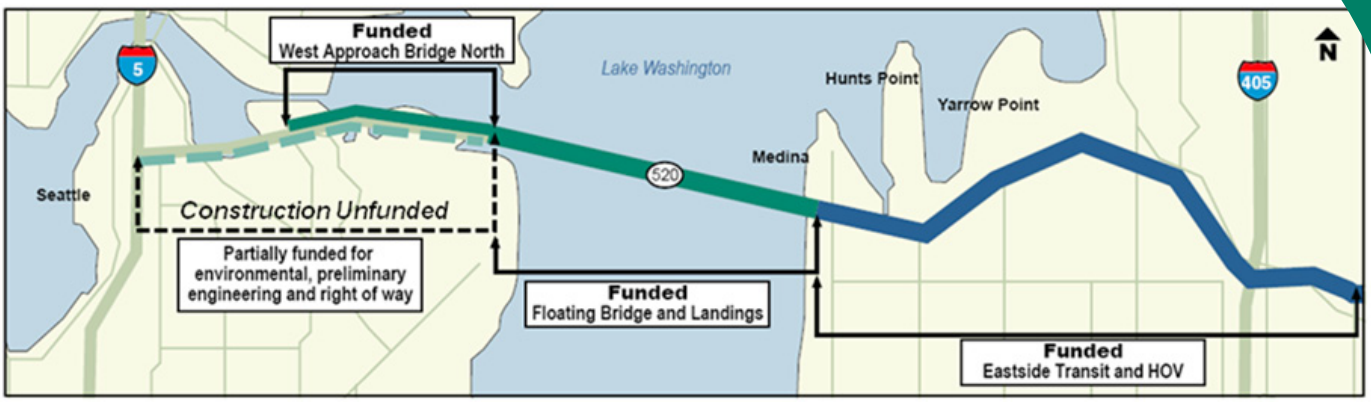
Analysts will study the effects of the project alternatives in regard to a variety of environmental resource areas. Areas of particular focus will likely include:

- Transportation
- Land Use/Economic
- Cultural/Historic Resources
- Energy/Greenhouse Gases
- Social/Environmental Justice
- Air Quality

**2013 Project Schedule of the NEPA Environmental Assessment**



# Why are we doing this Environmental Assessment?




*SR 520 is part of the Cross-Lake Washington Corridor. Toll revenue from I-90 would help complete construction of the corridor.*

# The Proposed Project Purpose and Need

### Purpose of the I-90 Tolling Project

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.

### Need for the I-90 Tolling Project

The movement of people and goods needs to be improved on both the I-90 corridor and the overall Cross-Lake Washington corridor. The following sections describe current and forecast future conditions in the corridor and demonstrate the need for tolling and congestion management.

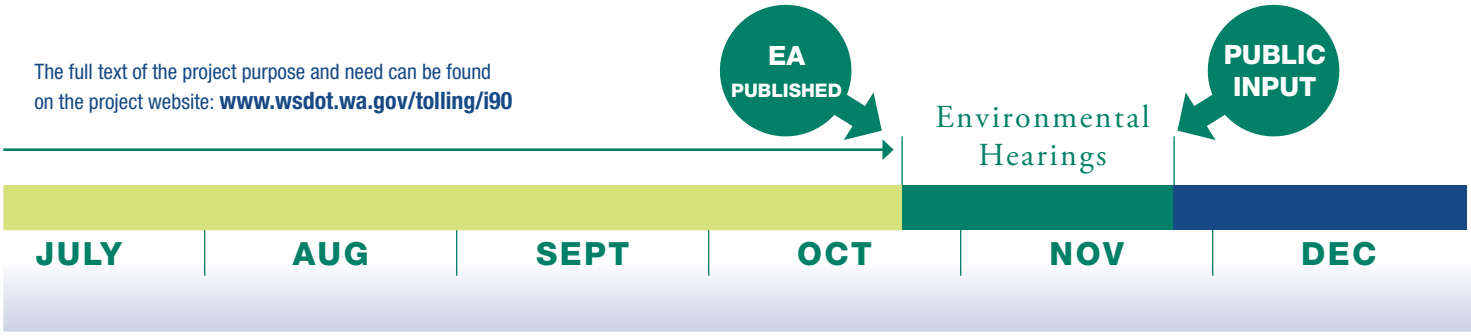
- **Raise Revenue for Cross-Lake Washington Corridor Improvements**
  The tolling component of this project is needed to fund transportation improvements in the Cross-Lake Washington Corridor. Revenues generated from tolling I-90 will make a major contribution for the portion of the SR 520 Bridge Replacement and HOV Program that is currently unfunded.

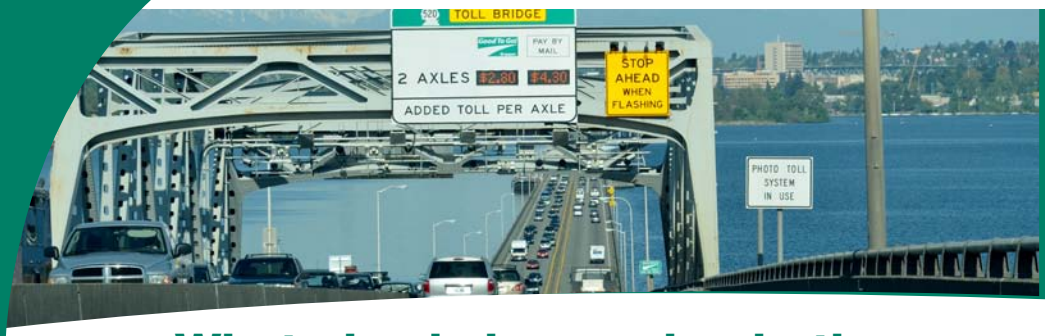
- **Alleviate Congestion on the I-90 corridor**
  Current travel conditions in the I-90 corridor can be extremely congested, particularly during rush hour. With variable rate tolling on I-90 some travelers will likely make their trips outside of the peak periods to avoid paying higher tolls which would redistribute some trips on the I-90 corridor and help reduce peak period congestion.

- **Accommodate Regional Growth**
  Long-term forecasts for growth in the region show continued steady increases in population and employment. Regional forecasts anticipate the population of King County to increase from just under 2 million in 2010 to over 2.56 million in 2040 while jobs increase from about 1.2 million to about 1.8 million jobs for the same time period. Much of this growth is expected to occur in Seattle and the eastside of Lake Washington. By reducing congestion during peak periods tolling on I-90 may improve overall throughput.

- **Provide Reliable Travel Conditions in the I-90 Corridor**
  Two of the most substantial outcomes of severely congested traffic conditions are increased travel time and reduced reliability. With heavily congested conditions, the difference in travel times between non-peak periods and peak periods increases. The heavily congested conditions also mean it is more difficult for motorists to maneuver and change lanes, which can result in crashes or near misses between vehicles.

The full text of the project purpose and need can be found on the project website: **www.wsdot.wa.gov/tolling/i90**






*Electronic Tolling is being used on the SR 520 bridge. There are no toll booths, tolls are collected through a Good to Go! Pass or through photo tolling. Tolls change by time of day.*

# What else is happening in the Cross-Lake Washington Corridor?

In the I-90 Tolling Environmental Assessment we will evaluate tolling alternatives against no action alternatives, where I-90 would operate as it does today. Tolling scenarios are still being developed and will include: tolling gantries where tolls are electronically collected in both directions between I-5 and I-405. Like SR 520, we are evaluating all lanes being tolled, and tolls paid either by the *Good To Go!* pass or photo tolling. Rates charged may be similar to SR 520, and will be determined by the Washington State Transportation Commission. Tolling could start as early as 2016.

## I-90 Two Way Transit Project

WSDOT and Sound Transit are adding high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes to the outer roadways (existing general purpose lanes) in both directions of I-90 between Seattle and Bellevue by restriping the bridges. The first stages have completed HOV lanes from Bellevue to Mercer Island. The last stage (Stage 3) will extend the HOV lanes from Mercer Island to Seattle and is currently in design. Construction of the lanes is expected to be complete by 2016.

**www.wsdot.wa.gov/Projects/i90/TwoWayTransit/**

*Tolling on I-90 is consistent with the state's Moving Washington strategy.* See www.wsdot.wa.gov/movingWashington/

## East Link Light Rail Extension to Redmond

Sound Transit is extending its Link Light Rail service from downtown Seattle to the Overlake area in Redmond connecting Seattle, Mercer Island, Bellevue, and Redmond. The project follows the I-90 corridor utilizing the center roadway. The project is currently in design and will start construction in 2015. Construction is expected to be completed by 2022 with service starting in 2023.

**http://projects.soundtransit.org/x3245.xml**

## I-90 Bellevue to North Bend Corridor Planning Study

This I-90 planning process was undertaken by WSDOT and corridor communities to gather information to determine if improvements are needed to meet existing and future transportation needs. The corridor report for I-90 provides WSDOT and communities along the corridor with a list of safety and mobility improvements that could be implemented over the next 20 years if funding becomes available. A report documenting the study was completed December 2012.

**www.wsdot.wa.gov/planning/RDP/i90/EastgateTo465th**

## SR 520 Bridge Replacement

There are two projects currently under construction on SR 520. The SR 520 Floating Bridge and Landings Construction is underway to replace the vulnerable SR 520 floating bridge and adds HOV lanes and bike lanes across Lake Washington. The project is expected to be open to drivers in 2014.

The other project on SR 520 is from Medina to SR 202. The Eastside Transit and HOV Project will complete and improve the 8.8-mile HOV system from Evergreen Point Road to the SR 202 interchange. The improved six-lane corridor is currently under construction and is scheduled for completion by 2013.

**www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/sr520bridge**

# Technical Terms

## NEPA TERMS

**NEPA** – A study guided by the National Environmental Policy Act triggered for projects on the Interstate or using Federal funds. Federal legislation that contains procedures to ensure that federal agency decision-makers take environmental factors into account.

**Environmental Justice** – An Executive Order which states that federal activities, programs and policies should not produce disproportionately high and adverse effects on minority or low-income populations.

**Environmental Assessment** – An environmental assessment is a study required to establish any influences either positive or negative about a potential project. The end result will be a report that consists of technical evaluation, economic impact and social results that a project might bring.

## TOLLING TERMS

**Traffic Management** – Strategies for improving flow of traffic. Strategies include ramp metering, active traffic management and tolling.

**Active Traffic Management** – Use of technology to increase the flow of traffic including variable speed limits (on overhead gantries), surveillance, variable message signs and ramp metering.

**Electronic Tolling** – Collection of tolls without use of toll booths. Instead, tolls are collected by overhead devices reading transponders in vehicles where tolls are deducted from preset accounts or through photo tolling where vehicle owners are billed.

**Photo tolling** – Collection of tolls using an overhead device that takes a picture of a vehicle's license plates. Tolls are collected by sending a bill by mail. Drivers are charged a higher rate for photo tolling to offset administrative costs.

**HOT Lanes** – High occupancy/toll lanes (HOT lanes) are a road pricing approach that give motorists in single-occupant vehicles access to a high-occupancy vehicle lane (or "HOV lane"). Tolls are collected for the use of those lanes exclusively, often using electronic toll collection systems.(Example: SR 167)

**Express Toll Lanes** – Express toll lanes (ETLs) are similar to HOT lanes, but often include a double tolled lane to further manage congestion. The I-405 corridor will feature express toll lanes from Bellevue to Lynnwood. The Washington State Transportation Commission will ultimately decide on policies such as whether the lanes will be open without a toll to motorcycles, vehicles with two or more occupants, vehicles with three or more occupants, or a combination depending on the time of day. We are also considering the possibility of offering a discounted toll rate for carpools. This decision will be made prior to the lanes opening in late 2015. (Example: Potentially I-405)

**Mainline Tolling** – Motorists either pay a toll on entry or exit. All lanes are tolled.

**Single Point Tolling** – Places toll fee collection at a single point on the roadway; drivers passing this single point will incur the entire toll fee. (Example: SR 520)

**Variable Rate Tolling** – Varying the toll rate based on the time of day. For example, a higher toll rate is often charged at peak time and discounted tolls during off-peak time. (Example: SR 520)

**Dynamic Tolling** – Charging tolls based on traffic congestion conditions throughout the day, regardless of time of day as a strategy for managing congestion. (Example: SR 167 HOT Lanes)

**Fixed Tolling** – Charging the same toll amount regardless of time of day and level of congestion. (Example: Tacoma Narrows Bridge)

## Tolling I-90 is not a new idea

Tolling I-90 was a recommended strategy of the 2008 SR 520 Toll Implementation Committee (with members from WSDOT, the Puget Sound Regional Council and the Washington State Transportation Commission) and the 2009 SR 520 Legislative Workgroup – both directed by the legislature to review toll implementation strategies. Additionally, the I-90 Tolling EA complements WSDOT's I-90 Bellevue to North Bend Corridor Planning Study (2012), a strategy for transportation improvements east of I-405 along the I-90 corridor.

# How to get involved

Project scoping is an ideal time to provide input to the Environmental Assessment process. The EA scoping period runs from January 22 through February 22, 2013; however community input is always welcome throughout the life of the project. Different options for the community to provide feedback are shown below:

**By e-mail**
i90EAcomments@wsdot.wa.gov
Jan. 22 – Feb. 22

**In Person**
Public Meetings
Jan. 29, 30, 31

**By Mail**
Angela Angove, I-90 Tolling Project
999 Third Ave., Suite 2200
Seattle, WA 98104
Jan. 22 – Feb. 22

Contact:
**Michell Mouton,** WSDOT Communication
**moutonm@wsdot.wa.gov 206-464-1249**
**www.wsdot.wa.gov/tolling/i90**

*Public Scoping Meetings are scheduled:*

**Mercer Island**
**January 29, 4-7PM**
Mercer Island
Community Center
8236 SE 24th Street

**Bellevue**
**January 30, 4-7PM**
Bellevue City Hall
450 110th Avenue NE

**Seattle**
**January 31, 4-7PM**
Yesler Community Center
917 E Yesler Way

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