

CHAPTER 5: AGENCY, TRIBAL, AND PUBLIC COORDINATION

5.1 Why does WSDOT coordinate with the agencies, tribes, and the public?

Public involvement, including opportunities to participate and comment in transportation decision-making, is a basic tenet of the NEPA process. According to FHWA policy, public involvement and agency coordination are essential to the development process for the proposed action. In the spirit of WSDOT’s management principle to be accountable to the people of Washington, elected officials and other transportation partners, WSDOT coordinates with agencies, tribes, and the public to communicate information about possible project environmental impacts. Through this interactive process (giving and receiving information), WSDOT raises public awareness and helps ensure that the public is involved with the decision process. This also helps the project team to improve the design and find ways to avoid, minimize, and appropriately mitigate adverse environmental impacts. We strive to initiate this coordination at the earliest possible time to inform, involve and collaborate with the agencies, tribes, and the local community.

Public interaction is planned to be early and often.

5.2 What is the background of coordination regarding the Belfair Bypass?

A Belfair bypass similar to the current proposal has been included in numerous local and regional plans that have been adopted over the last 10 to 15 years. The planning processes typically included public involvement as well as interagency coordination.

Mason County

- *The Mason County Comprehensive Plan* (April 1996, as updated) includes a Belfair bypass as a *potential new road*.
- Mason County prepared an environmental assessment of a Belfair bypass in 2001.
- Mason County identified Belfair as an UGA in 2002 as part of its Growth Management Act planning responsibilities. The UGA plan reports the planning process and recommendations from 2002, the lack of a local street system hindering development of the UGA, calls the bypass a planned route, identifies a potential Romance Hill road connection to a bypass. Includes recommendations to improve transportation facilities in Belfair including an alternative north/south bypass route.

Kitsap Regional Coordinating Council (KRCC)

- The Bypass has been identified by the KRCC as a legislative priority since 2010. The KRCC notes broad support from Port of Bremerton, Mason County, WSDOT, Puget Sound Regional Council, and Overton & Associates for the Belfair Bypass.

Peninsula Regional Transportation Planning Organization (PRTPO)

- The Belfair Bypass is on the PRTPO's list of legislative outreach priorities.

WSDOT has also led some collaborative planning processes that identified the need for a SR 3 bypass around Belfair:

- Washington State Highway System Plan 2007-2026: long-range plan which is the basis for the budget request to the state legislature, developed in collaboration with local governments, regional planning agencies, and private transportation providers.
- Bremerton Economic Development Study: planning study focused on the state highway corridors within South Kitsap/North Mason County area, in collaboration with the counties, cities, ports, economic development councils, chambers of commerce, and transit agencies in the area. The Belfair Bypass is one of the top three priority projects identified. The interagency and public involvement process began in 2008, and the final report was produced in March 2012.

5.3 How has WSDOT involved agencies in the currently proposed project?

WSDOT coordinates with agencies that are responsible for issuing environmental permits and who have special expertise in project related environmental fields. This coordination is accomplished through e-mails, meetings, verbal contacts and official letters. For this project, coordination is ongoing with: FHWA, USFWS, NMFS, EPA, US Army Corps of Engineers (USACOE), WDOE, WDFW, DAHP, Mason County, Kitsap County, Mason and Kitsap County Transit Systems, and the North Mason and Kitsap County School Districts.

5.4 How has WSDOT involved tribes?

WSDOT is committed to government-to-government consultation with interested tribes in the project area. The consultation process under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (16 USC 470f and 36 CFR 800) is followed to make sure tribal issues are considered in the design of projects. To comply with the NEPA environmental review and Section 106 processes, WSDOT follows the Model Comprehensive Tribal Consultation Process for the NEPA (available on the WSDOT Web site) when coordinating with tribes. This model provides a consistent method of tribal consultation and opens a channel of communication between WSDOT and tribes whose area of interest is within the project boundaries.

Six tribes were informed about the project and were given opportunity to comment on the Area of Potential Effects: Jamestown S’Klallam, Port Gamble S’Klallam, Puyallup, Skokomish, Squaxin Island, and the Suquamish. The APE is the project area that may include impacts due to ground-disturbing activity for the roadway widening and the wetland mitigation site. The tribes were also contacted for input during the cultural resources survey by the WSDOT consultant. The survey reports were sent to the tribes for comment before sending to the DAHP.

WSDOT consulted with DAHP by informing them of the project APE and of subsequent changes in that APE. Cultural resources reports and their effect determinations were developed and sent to DAHP for their concurrence. WSDOT received letters of concurrence from DAHP in February of 2012.

WSDOT is consulting with the Jamestown S’Klallam, Port Gamble S’Klallam, Puyallup, Skokomish, Squaxin Island, and the Suquamish Tribes under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

WSDOT will continue to keep the tribes informed of project activities with regular updates through letters and through the project website.

5.5 How has WSDOT involved the public with the currently proposed project?

2006–2007

WSDOT offered three open houses in the Belfair area in 2007. The open house on January 9, 2007 was held at the Theler Center in downtown Belfair. This event focused on the history of the project, why WSDOT was revisiting the Mason County design, and showcased the connection alternatives at the north and south ends of the Bypass. WSDOT learned from the first open house that a larger venue was needed to accommodate citizens wishing to attend. In response, the following two open houses were held at the North Mason High School gym. The April 25, 2007 open house had a large turnout. Progress on connection alternatives was discussed and the Newkirk Road Connector was introduced. The third open house, held on October 23, 2007, presented the chosen designs for the end connections and the associated costs.

WSDOT also met with many neighborhoods and other civic groups, and interested individuals, during this time period, and maintained a web site for the project.

2009–present

In the 2009 transportation budget, the Washington State Legislature directed WSDOT to re-engage the public to reconsider the scope and budget of the project. WSDOT initiated a multi-faceted outreach approach, with the goal of collecting input from as many community members as possible. Public comments were compiled using 1) the project website, 2) a project survey, 3) stakeholder interviews, and 4) a town hall meeting.

A modified website became active on February 9, 2010 where the project survey and town hall meeting information were provided. Six thousand copies of the survey were also printed and distributed throughout the community. WSDOT received over three hundred and ninety responses to the survey. When asked about important issues contributing to traffic in Belfair, most commented that there are too many cars on the road and not enough lanes to accommodate them. Community members also stated that some roadway intersections need improvements, and that there is a

lack of an alternate route when traffic collisions occur on SR 3. When asked “If we could fix one thing in Belfair, what would it be?” the majority of the survey responses said “build the bypass”. All of the comments have been documented in the project record.

The following stakeholders were interviewed, or were offered an interview, by WSDOT:

- Allyn Community Association
- Belfair Bypass New Alignment Project Manager
- Bremerton Economic Development Study Project Manager
- City of Shelton
- Economic Development Council of Mason County
- Kitsap County Public Works
- Federal Highway Administration
- Mason County Public Works
- Mason County Transit Authority
- North Mason Chamber of Commerce
- Port of Allyn
- Port of Bremerton
- Port of Shelton
- Shelton Mason County Chamber of Commerce

A SR 3 Belfair Bypass project town hall meeting was conducted on March 17, 2010 at the North Mason High School gymnasium. To ensure broad publicity, advertising included: word of mouth (through the interviews), the website, providing information on the survey, paid newspaper advertising in five local newspapers, and paid advertising through the Mason County Daily News Radio Website. Participants were given a chance to speak, hear their neighbor’s comments, complete a copy of the survey, and ask questions. The information gathered from the town hall meeting and the surveys was considered by an Expert Panel, which in turn forwarded recommended actions to WSDOT for further analysis. On June 23, 2010 the resulting report was delivered to the Legislature, documenting the findings and recommendations. The Belfair Bypass Proviso Report can be viewed at: <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/SR3/SR3BelfairBypassEnvironmentalAssessment/>

Once funding was provided, WSDOT would consider specific recommendations individually and in combination, and in relation to other improvements to the state and local roadway system, with the goal of increased benefits and reduced costs. In the 2010 supplemental budget,

the Legislature provided \$750,000 to advance work related to preliminary design and deliver the required NEPA documentation.

A Bypass information and public input booth was included at open houses WSDOT conducted for the SR 3 Belfair Area Widening & Safety Improvements project in 2011. It involves improvements through the Belfair commercial area as another means to improve safety and relieve congestion in Belfair.

This EA will be sent to agencies and tribes, and available to the public for review and comment. Copies of the EA will be available in Mason and Kitsap County offices and libraries. An environmental hearing is tentatively scheduled in March 2013. This is a formal public meeting, which is recorded.

WSDOT will continue to meet with regulatory agencies and interested parties, and respond to issues and concerns. The project web page will be updated at the beginning of each month to highlight progress on the project. <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/SR3/SR3BelfairBypassEnvironmentalAssessment/>

More specific information on meetings, agency and Tribal coordination, and letters are found in Appendix H of this document.