INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) has prepared this Route Development Plan (RDP) for the segment of State Route 99 North (Aurora Avenue N.) between the north end of the Battery Street Tunnel and North (N.) 145th Street in the city of Seattle, Washington (milepost 32.44 to milepost 40.47). This RDP is a 25-year plan intended to assist WSDOT, the City of Seattle, and King County Metro in making informed decisions on future improvements to the State Route (SR) 99 North corridor.

This RDP includes the analysis and recommendations of the SR 99 North Corridor Study. The purpose of the SR 99 North Corridor Study was to develop a set of improvement recommendations for the study corridor that is intended to help reduce accidents and improve mobility for corridor users.

Study Background

Yesterday

State Route 99 (SR 99) North began as a rough wagon road, known as the R.F. Morrow Road when it opened in 1901. At first, the road simply ended at the King-Snohomish county line. The road was eventually extended as growth occurred in south Snohomish County. In the 1920s to 1932, Pacific Highway 1 was constructed along the Morrow Road alignment.

Completion of the George Washington Memorial Bridge in 1932 (See Photo I-1) and the Aurora "speedway" through Woodland Park provided a fast link to downtown and functioned as this region's primary north-south highway.

Photo I-1:

Aurora Bridge (George Washington Memorial Bridge) circa 1932

Today

Today, known as SR 99 North or Aurora Avenue North, the corridor is a significant regional route and a critical parallel north–south arterial to Interstate-5 (I-5). The average annual daily traffic (AADT) on the corridor ranges from 38,800 to 84,700—dependent on location. The corridor carries local and regional bus service to downtown Seattle and is also a significant freight corridor. This corridor is also part of the Transit Priority Network in the City of Seattle's Comprehensive Plan as amended November 18, 1996. In its Six Year Transit Development Plan for 2002 to 2007, adopted September 2002, King County Metro has identified Aurora Avenue North as a candidate corridor for a future bus rapid transit investment.

According to WSDOT accident data from 01/01/99 through 12/31/01, the SR 99 North study corridor is one of the more accident-prone roadways in the Puget Sound Region, as well as the state of Washington. The corridor exhibits an accident rate higher (and in some cases much higher) than the state average for urban principal arterial highways. The study corridor also experiences substantial congestion during peak commuting periods.

Substantial growth in population and employment is projected to occur in North King County over the next 25 years. With the projected growth, congestion and accident rates are expected to increase. The expected increases in traffic congestion and accidents along the corridor can be mitigated, controlled, or avoided by implementing a variety of mobility and safety improvements along SR 99 North.

In 2000, WSDOT's Planning and Policy Office, the City of Seattle, and King County Metro, with input from the City of Shoreline and the assistance of Entranco and Pacific Rim Resources (PRR), began a study of the SR 99 North corridor from the north end of the Battery Street Tunnel to N. 145th Street (See Figure I-1). The principal objectives of this study were to develop recommendations that will enhance corridor safety and keep people moving along the corridor.

Study Development Process

The SR 99 North Corridor Study was managed by WSDOT's Planning and Policy Office (formally the WSDOT Office of Urban Mobility) with the assistance of a consultant team consisting of Entranco, HDR, and PRR.

The study was guided by the SR 99 North Corridor Study Joint Policy and Technical Steering Committee (Steering Committee), a Stakeholder Advisory Committee, community and business organizations, and interested members of the public. The Steering Committee was composed of transportation technical and policy experts from WSDOT, the City of Seattle, King County Metro, and the City of Shoreline. The Stakeholder Advisory Committee was composed of representatives from local community councils, business interests, and bicycle, pedestrian, and transit advocates.

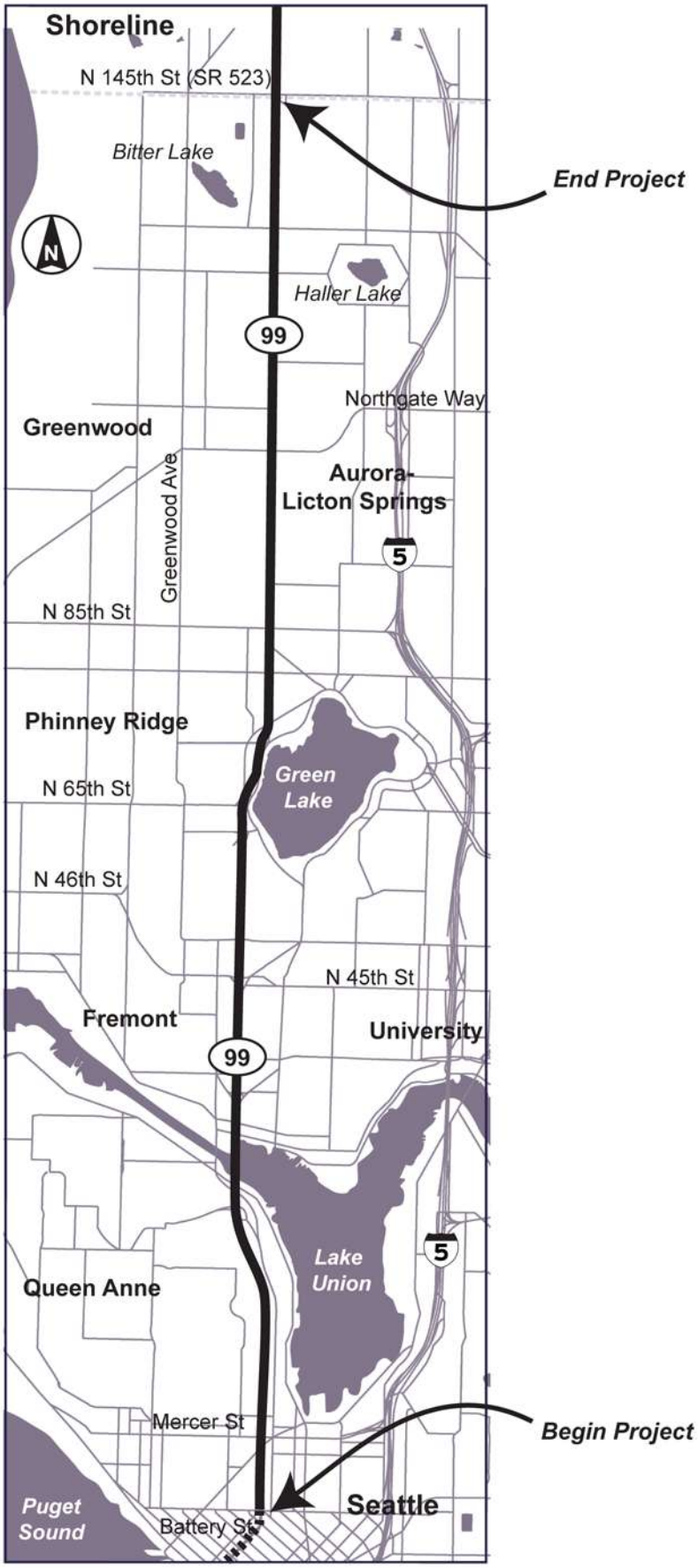


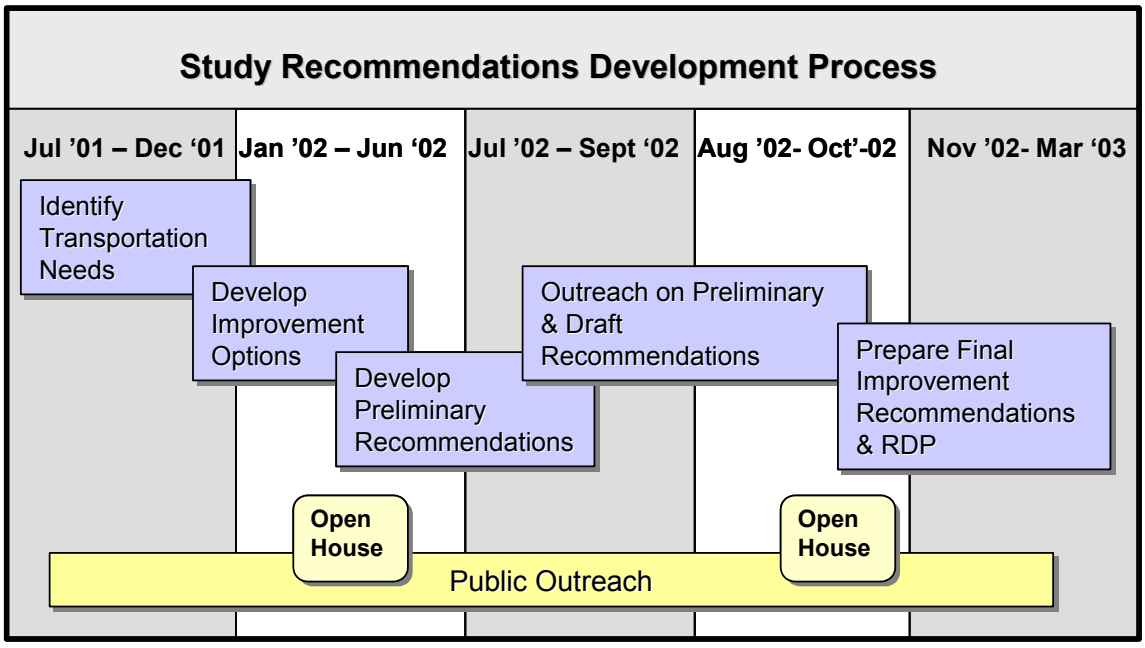
Figure I-1
SR 99 North Corridor Study Project Area

Public input has been provided through over 50 meetings with community and business organizations along the corridor, two open houses in May and October of 2002, and through emails, letters, and telephone calls with interested citizens.

Between January and June 2002, a range of transportation improvements were developed based on input received from the study's committees and the public. On May 23, 2003 the first open house was conducted to present the SR 99 North Corridor Study's safety and mobility improvement options for the study corridor. Based on comments received at the first open house and through other outreach activities, the Steering Committee developed a set of preliminary improvement recommendations in July 2002 to address the safety, mobility, and access needs and concerns that had been identified.

At a series of meetings during July, August, and September of 2002, this preliminary set of improvement recommendations was presented to community and business organizations for comment and refinement.

At the second open house on October 24 2002, a refined set of draft recommendations was presented to the public for additional comment and review. In December 2002, final recommendations were developed with a final report to be completed by March 2003. See Figure I-2 for an overview of the study recommendations development process.



The improvement recommendations developed by the SR 99 North Corridor Study and presented in this RDP are pre-design, planning-level recommendations and may not be the ultimate project level improvements implemented on the corridor. The ultimate project level improvement recommendations for the corridor will result from a State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) and a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process and may differ for this RDP's recommendations. A SEPA review and NEPA

review will occur before any decision is made to proceed to the design Plans, Specifications and Estimates (PS&E) stage of implementing the ultimate corridor project level improvement recommendations resulting from a SEPA and NEPA review. See Chapter 9: Environmental Inventory, for a further explanation of the environmental review processes required before implementation of a proposed improvement.

Context Sensitive Design

Context Sensitive Design (CSD) is an approach to transportation planning that considers the needs of the users, the neighboring communities, and the environment (both built and natural). It integrates projects into the context or setting in a sensitive manner through careful planning, consideration of different perspectives, and tailoring designs to particular project circumstances.

The CSD uses a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach that includes early involvement of key stakeholders to ensure that transportation projects are not only "moving safely and efficiently," but are also sensitive to potential impacts to the natural, social, and economic environment.

The CSD requires an early and continuous commitment to public involvement, flexibility in exploring new solutions, and an openness to new ideas. Community members play an important role in identifying local and regional problems and solutions that may better meet and balance the needs of all stakeholders. Early public involvement can help reduce expensive and time-consuming rework later on and thus contributes to more efficient project development.

The near- and long-term recommendations presented in this Route Development Plan are consistent with the CSD approach to transportation planning. As presented in Chapter 7: Public Outreach, public input was a critical component of the SR 99 North Corridor Study and was incorporated into every step of the study process—from identifying transportation problems through developing the study's final recommendations.

Key Findings

The following is a summary of the SR 99 North Corridor Study's key findings.

Mobility and Congestion

The SR 99 North corridor is a principal urban arterial carrying a substantial volume of traffic in a north-south direction in the Seattle metropolitan region. SR 99 North is heavily congested during peak hours, with the majority of its signalized intersections within the study area operating at Level of Service D or worse. It is expected that sections of the

study corridor will experience traffic growth by as much as 39 percent over the next 25 years.

Accident and Safety

Over 1,500 accidents occurred on the SR 99 North study corridor between 01/01/99 and 12/31/01—53 of these were disabling injuries and eight were fatalities. The SR 99 North study corridor includes a WSDOT designated high accident corridor (with the highest number of disabling accidents in Puget Sound), six high accident locations, and 12 pedestrian accident locations (see Figure 3-1).

Most accidents on the study corridor involved rear-end collisions, sideswipes, vehicles hitting fixed objects (such as trees and utility poles), or vehicles colliding at right angles. Along several sections of the corridor, a high number of accidents involved pedestrians and bicyclists.

Pedestrian Facilities

Several areas along the northern half of the study corridor do not have sidewalks and either lack or have limited designated pedestrian crossing areas. The lack or limited availability of sidewalks and designated crossings make it difficult and potentially dangerous for pedestrians and other non-motorized corridor users to travel along and across SR 99 North.

Photo I-2:

Pedestrians walking on the shoulder near SR 99 North and N. 137th Street—a section without sidewalks

Signage Improvement Recommendations

The public has expressed a variety of concerns regarding inadequate signage along SR 99 North. The primary signage concerns are: the need for better signs clarifying legal uses of the business access and transit lane (located on northbound SR 99 North from

N. 115th Street to N. 145th Street); and improved signage on how to enter, exit, and cross SR 99 North.

Security and Law Enforcement

Several sections of SR 99 North experience a high level of criminal activity. The public has expressed concern about security while traveling on foot both along and across SR 99 North.

In addition to criminal activity, other law enforcement problems along the corridor include speeding, driving under the influence of alcohol, and illegal use of the business access and transit lane as a general-purpose travel lane. All of these problems contribute to the corridor's high accident rate.

Business Access

Many merchants with businesses located along the SR 99 North corridor are concerned about the potential impacts of recommended congestion and safety improvements on access to their businesses.