



Corridor Program

Congestion Relief & Bus Rapid Transit Projects

Appendix Y4

I-405/SR 167 Corridor Program Communication Plan

Washington State Department of Transportation

I-405/NE 6th St. to I-5 Widening and Express Toll Lanes Project

Request for Proposal

July 25, 2011



**Washington State
Department of Transportation**



I-405/SR 167 Corridor Program Communications Plan

Background

With the state Legislature's 2003 (nickel) funding at \$485 million, and 2005 (transportation partnership account/TPA) funding at \$972 million, nearly \$1.5 billion will be used to bring congestion relief improvements to the Interstate 405 corridor. Some of the projects scopes have changed as other financial resources have become available (such as American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Funding – ARRA). Still, WSDOT's General Engineering Consultant (GEC) team is charged with designing and constructing the following I-405 projects:

- I-5 to SR 169 Stage 1 Widening
- I-5 to SR 169 Stage 2 Widening
- Springbrook Creek Wetland & Habitat Mitigation Bank
- 112th Ave SE to SE 8th Street Widening
- NB NE 8th St to SR 520 Braided Crossing
- NE 10th St Bridge Crossing
- Kirkland Nickel Stage 1 Widening
- NE 195th to SR 527 Northbound auxiliary Lane
- NE 6th to I-5 Widening and Express Toll Lanes

The I-405 public information team coordinates with the I-405 project staff and WSDOT's communicators on a cohesive strategy for communicating about these projects. Each individual project has a specific public involvement plan (PIP), focused on the project and the environmental assessment (EA) process.

While gas tax revenue is significant, more resources will be needed to complete the estimated \$4.7 billion, 10- to 15-year implementation plan. Regional, state, national, and other grant sources could provide a piece of that additional funding. In addition, the project team continues to analyze express toll lanes as a corridor-wide option that could be self-funded and help fund future improvements.

Communications Goals

We will focus on meeting the following goals:

- Create high visibility and support for the I-405 projects as beneficial, incremental steps toward achieving the long-term project vision, or Master Plan, as determined by the community process.

- Increase understanding of the vital importance of the projects to the mobility, economic vitality, and environmental sustainability of the region and state, and the project’s relevance to Washington State’s transportation system.
- Maintain, strengthen, and broaden I-405 jurisdictional and grassroots partnerships.

Communications strategies

We will meet these goals by using the following strategies:

- Maximize the project-specific environmental assessments as opportunities to communicate directly with residents and businesses about the project details and benefits, and to reinforce the broader system-wide benefits.
- Support the governor’s direction as funded projects move forward and future funding packages are defined.
- Raise awareness of WSDOT’s Moving Washington strategies through I-405 communications tactics and project benefits.
- Proactively broaden the ally network, educate supporters about I-405 projects and the ultimate vision, and provide opportunities for people to actively participate as project messengers.
- Actively dialogue with non-supporters to gain their understanding and informed consent.
- Use proactive and creative media relations to promote key I-405 messages, particularly value and momentum messages.
- Use audience research to monitor public opinion, refine messaging, provide a platform to demonstrate continued strong support for improvements, and identify information needs for the construction phase.

Key messages

Project messages, to be incorporated in communications strategies and tools, will continue to be grouped into four overarching messaging categories.

Vision messages, focused on congestion relief, creating a more balanced transportation system and project innovations such as high occupancy toll (HOT) lanes, bus rapid transit (BRT), transportation demand management (TDM), and design-build (D-B) construction.

Regional benefits

- I-405 is an indispensable link in the transportation network around Lake Washington.
- I-405 provides a vital relief valve for the Alaskan Way Viaduct, I-5, and other arteries on the west side of the lake.

- I-405 improvements will help reduce some of the worst traffic congestion spots in the Puget Sound region – critical for protecting quality of life and economic opportunity.
- Without improvement, rush hour trips in 2020 are predicted to take about 40 percent longer than today.
- I-405 improvements help focus economic investment and population growth *within* the Urban Growth Boundary.

Multimodal benefits

- Improving I-405 helps ensure that a variety of transportation choices remain available and expand over time.
- I-405 improvements will help maintain travel reliability for high occupancy (HOV) lane users, 70 percent of whom commute in car- and vanpools.
- The long-range I-405 program could *double* the number of vanpools in the entire Puget Sound region.
- Transit service in the I-405 corridor will increase by 50 percent, as will the number of park-and-ride spaces (from 10,000 to 15,000).

Economic benefits

- *Value* messages, demonstrating how the project will help sustain and improve the economy while benefiting the environment.
- Eastside businesses have long been, and will continue to be, a primary engine of growth for Washington State.
- Improving I-405 – a principal route within the Urban Growth Boundary – helps keep economic growth robust and sustainable.
- Employment along the I-405 corridor will grow by 35 percent by 2020. That’s nearly 145,000 new jobs.
- Congestion relief will lead to travel time savings of \$569 million a year – allowing workers to be working instead of stuck in traffic.
- With no improvements, rush hour trips in 2020 will take about 40 percent longer than today.
- As a principal corridor for goods from the Port of Seattle, Sea-Tac International Airport, and Kent Valley warehouses, I-405 improvements will help maintain reliability for freight businesses.
- Twice as much freight is carried on I-405 than is moved through the Port of Seattle over the course of a year.

Mobility benefits

- Improving I-405 helps keep travel times predictable for workers, employers, businesses, and residents.
- Overall corridor congestion will be reduced by 20 percent and the number of accidents will decrease because the roadway will be safer.
- As a principal highway within the Urban Growth Boundary, improving I-405 helps the Eastside accommodate an estimated 35 percent population growth by 2020 without encouraging sprawl. That level of growth is like

adding two new cities the size of Bellevue and eight employers the size of Microsoft.

- I-405 is the *only* high-capacity north-south option on the Eastside, which highlights the need to improve its efficiency and reduce traffic on clogged local streets.

Environmental benefits

I-405 projects provide opportunities for environmental mitigation that likely would not have been done otherwise. Specifically, our approach includes:

- Minimizing the use of detention ponds.
- Restoring natural stream flow and removing stream blockages in several locations.
- Improving salmon habitat and fish passage.
- Approaching mitigation from a holistic watershed view.
- The I-405 projects will provide the opportunity to implement pilot projects, such as early environmental investments, that will serve as models for the region.
- A large portion of the I-405 project funding is being allocated to environmental mitigation.

I-405 improvements will help reduce traffic congestion, which will reduce emissions of carbon monoxide and other pollutants.

Cooperation messages that show how a landmark agreement has led to the right product to meet customers' needs.

Momentum messages, focused on how the gas tax revenue will kick things into high gear, and on other key milestones.

Target audiences

- Drivers, including commuters
- Neighborhoods
- Policymakers
- Transit agencies
- Truck drivers
- Visitors
- Voters

Parallel Paths

Given existing and potential funding sources, our communications plan must take into account dynamic and parallel paths – nickel improvement projects, adjacent projects, context sensitive solutions (CSS), TDM, and potential future funding.

Funded Construction Projects – The focus here is to implement a long-term effort to communicate the value and specifics of the nickel and TPA projects along the I-405 corridor. This constitutes the bulk of the communications effort and consists of a variety of tools to inform and educate members of the public and specific audiences, such as state and local elected and appointed officials, the news media, and directly affected residents and businesses.

Adjacent Projects – Projects along the I-405 corridor near the nickel and TPA improvement projects are being implemented by WSDOT and other agencies such as Sound Transit. The funded I-405 improvement projects must coordinate with these projects to appear seamless to the public. The public perception is that any project being constructed on I-405 comes from the same agency, and it's not the agency that's important – the public wants WSDOT to be accountable, maintain mobility, keep traffic moving, and limit inconveniences.

The CSS Process – Parallel to the EA process, CSS efforts will be developing with local communities, and along the entire I-405 corridor. The CSS process requires much interaction with local advisory committees, an aesthetic committee, and a WSDOT/FHWA (Federal Highway Administration) technical committee. CSS efforts must be maximized to complement other communications activities to achieve the greatest benefit and results.

TDM Maintenance of Traffic (MOT) Construction Mitigation Program – TDM is a key element of the I-405 Corridor Program as illustrated in the 2002 environmental impact statement (EIS). With each phase of projects, such as the nickels, TDM funds are reserved for MOT and construction mitigation so the traveling public has easy access to alternative travel modes to be part of the solution during construction.

Future Funding – The focus here is more short-term and ever-changing with politics and changes in leadership – our charge is to gather information and educate policy makers so that the I-405 program is adequately considered as regional, state, and national funding priorities are set forth. The Mini Action Plan for this effort consists of two main strategies:

- **Being informed and prepared.** The idea here is to understand the political funding process and make sure that I-405 is ready to meet requests that come at a moment's notice.
- **Informal briefings.** Certain key policy makers and elected officials need to be briefed informally on the I-405 program and its benefits. Newly-elected officials have requested briefings.

Key team members:

- Kim Henry, I-405/SR 167 Project Director
- Denise Cieri, I-405/SR 167 Deputy Project Director
- Amy Danberg, I-405 Program Communications Manager
- Steve Peer, I-405 Construction Communications Manager
- Jen Sandberg, I-405 Program Communications

To ensure the most effective communications during the project, a broad range of communication tools will be needed. These tools are organized into five areas as shown on

Communication Strategy Area	Tools
<p><u>Committee support</u> <i>Support project committees (executive, steering, funding and phasing, advisory) as the project moves forward with the \$4.7 billion implementation plan.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maps and other descriptive materials to support the process for matching project components to projected available revenue. • “At-a-glance” fact sheets about project components for use by committee members and during briefings with them.
<p><u>Public Info & Outreach</u> <i>Take advantage of the four project-specific environmental assessments (North Renton, South Renton, Bellevue, and Kirkland) to communicate directly with residents and businesses about details of the nickel projects, and to reinforce the broader vision.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce “I-405 Progress Report” folio describing the I-405 “nickel + TPA projects” and ultimate vision, and distribute through U.S. mail, newspaper(s), public buildings, and speakers bureau presentations. • Keep website updated with current info. • Schedule speakers bureau presentations by project team managers. • Update and repackage stakeholder/press briefing kit with revised fact sheets, Q&A, etc. • Hold neighborhood briefings/open houses/ informational meetings. • Send e-mails with updated project information and Web site links to employer transportation coordinators and other e-mail lists. • Prepare and distribute articles for municipal, employer, and association newsletters.
<p><u>Partnership Network</u> <i>Proactively broaden the ally network, educate allies about the nickel projects and the ultimate vision, and provide opportunities for them to actively participate as project messengers.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information to and coordinate with advocacy groups such as the Eastside Transportation Association, East King County Chambers of Commerce, etc. • Recruit major employers and prominent community leaders to participate as partners in the speakers bureau presentations.
<p><u>Media Relations</u> <i>Use proactive and creative media relations to promote key messages, particularly value and momentum messages.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold regular media briefings. • Use social media to keep drivers and stakeholders abreast of latest project and construction information. • Research, develop, and pitch a variety of story angles. • Visit editorial boards regularly as needed. • Coordinate closely with WSDOT’s and NW Region media relations efforts.
<p><u>Research</u> <i>Use audience research to monitor public opinion, refine messaging, provide a platform to demonstrate continued strong support for improvements, and identify information needs for the construction phase.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek input on messaging from opinion leaders. • Seek input from participants at EA meetings.

the following below.



**Washington State
Department of Transportation**