

Chapter One

Introduction

The SR 518 North Airport Expressway/SR 99 interchange to the I-5/I-405 Interchange Project (Proposed Project) proposes safety and mobility improvements to the eastbound SR 518 roadway between the North Airport Expressway/SR 99 interchange and the I-5/I-405 interchange. For the past six decades, these highways have been part of a network that has been serving the Puget Sound region and Sea-Tac International Airport. This transportation network has adequately served the regional needs of moving people and goods in a safe and efficient manner. In recent years, however, increased air travel, as well as residential and commercial growth, has resulted in the need for regional safety and mobility improvements.

1 When did planning for the Proposed Project begin?

For the past five years, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) has been identifying ways to improve safety and mobility along the SR 518 corridor from the SR 509/SR 518 interchange to the I-5/I-405 interchange. Planners forecast that air travel will grow considerably over the coming years, which will intensify traffic on SR 518. Therefore WSDOT identified and analyzed options for various safety and mobility improvements. The results of these analyses are presented in WSDOT's *SR 518 Route Development Plan* (June, 2002).

Did you know?

- SR 518 carries about 120,000 vehicles per day, including 80% of all airport trips.
 - As a result of airport traffic, SR 518 carries more traffic than the SR 520 Bridge, which carries 115,000 vehicles per day.
 - Airport passenger growth is projected to increase from 29 million annual passengers today to about 44 million by 2020, a 53% increase.
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2 What is contained in the SR 518 Route Development Plan?

The *Route Development Plan* identifies roadway improvements necessary to:

- Reasonably accommodate forecasted traffic growth;
- Improve traffic operations on the SR 518 corridor; and
- Provide adequate access to Sea-Tac International Airport.

The *Route Development Plan* is a long-range plan for the SR 518 corridor, setting forth the conceptual framework for future improvements.

The Proposed Project is just one in a series of projects that will increase safety and mobility in the corridor while providing important environmental benefits, such as improving overall water quality conditions in the project area.

Another project identified in the *Route Development Plan* is the proposed reconfiguration of the SR 518/SR 509 interchange. The city of Burien is currently working with WSDOT and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to move the interchange project forward.

The *Route Development Plan* allows local and regional governments to efficiently plan the implementation of specific improvement projects over a twenty-year planning period. Many of these partners are currently working with WSDOT on the Proposed Project.

3 What is the Proposed Project?

The Proposed Project will construct a new eastbound general-purpose lane to improve safety and mobility on SR 518 between Sea-Tac Airport's North Airport Expressway/SR 99 interchange and the I-5/I-405 interchange. Other features that are proposed along the SR

518 roadway include improved on-ramp and off-ramp connections and new retaining walls, noise barriers, and stormwater management facilities.

4 Who are WSDOT’s partners for the Proposed Project?

WSDOT is partnered with FHWA and the Port of Seattle. In addition, project partners are working closely with the cities of Tukwila, SeaTac, and Burien; King County; and Sound Transit to ensure that all current and planned projects within the region are coordinated.

5 What projects comprise the regional transportation network?

The Proposed Project is one component of the regional transportation network. Currently, seven individual projects are under way from Kirkland to Renton. **Exhibit 1-1** illustrates the vicinity of these important regional projects. WSDOT is also developing a plan to provide safety and capacity improvements to SR 167 and replacement of the Alaskan Way Viaduct.

Another important component is the regional transit system that is being constructed, in part, along SR 518. Sound Transit is constructing its Link Light Rail system, which will connect the University of Washington, downtown Seattle, and communities in between to Sea-Tac Airport.

6 How has the public been involved with the Proposed Project?

The public has been involved with the Proposed Project through an outreach process that included regular meetings with a Project Advisory Committee (PAC) comprised of local jurisdictions and affected government agencies, public open houses, outreach to commuters, and information provided through media and the project

**Exhibit 1-1
Projects within the Regional Transportation Network**



website at www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/sr518/. The public has been generally supportive of the Proposed Project, expressing a need for improved safety and mobility at the interchanges. The public and agencies were also concerned about the need for close coordination between all public projects in the area, including the Airport Master Plan, Sound Transit's Link Light Rail, city of SeaTac roadway improvements, the I-405 Project, and the SR 518 projects. A letter of concurrency from the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historical Preservation that no historical properties will be affected and other coordination with agencies and tribes are provided in **Appendix A**.

As part of this environmental assessment process, WSDOT has renewed involvement with the public through a variety of activities, including inviting citizens to participate in the project scoping process. Scoping meetings for the Proposed Project also included project information about Sound Transit's LINK Light Rail project and the I-405 improvement projects (see **Exhibit 1-1** for the location of these projects).

7 What is project scoping?

Project scoping is an integral part of the environmental process. It allows WSDOT—through meetings and public outreach—to identify the community's and affected agencies' issues regarding the Proposed Project.

Project scoping techniques used for the Proposed Project include the following:

- Providing opportunities for the public to learn about the Proposed Project in person at meetings held for this project and the I-405 and Sound Transit projects (which are also being implemented in the study area);
- Distributing print, electronic, and media publications, and posting updated information on the project website;

- Providing briefings at public local and regional jurisdictional meetings; and
- Coordinating the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) made up of jurisdictional and agency staff to ensure that project information could be integrated with other local information and projects.

The scoping meeting for the Proposed Project was combined with an informational open house that was held on January 26, 2005, at Highline High School. The scoping meeting covered the Proposed Project and the project that is being proposed at the SR 518/SR 509 interchange. An announcement for these projects was mailed to approximately 18,000 households adjacent to the SR 518 and I-405 corridors.

Approximately forty people were in attendance at the scoping meeting, and an additional 270 people received project information at other I-405 open houses. The following summarizes the public comments received on the Proposed Project:

- The public was generally supportive of the Proposed Project;
- Several citizens spoke about a desire to see other transportation options rather than increased pavement and were pleased to have information available about Sound Transit's plan to reach Sea-Tac Airport with its Link Light Rail project; and
- Many people agreed that the Proposed Project will increase safety and mobility.

Based on this input and support, WSDOT moved forward with development of the Proposed Project. During project development, WSDOT conducted a Value Engineering study. As part of the environmental assessment process, WSDOT will continue to share information with the public via its website and other outreach techniques.

The Project Advisory Committee, comprised of the following members, has met throughout the project:

- Federal Highway Administration
- Federal Aviation Administration
- Port of Seattle
- Cities of Burien, SeaTac, and Tukwila
- King County
- Sound Transit
- Puget Sound Regional Council
- Department of Ecology
- WSDOT

The committee worked together to coordinate projects and evaluate and advise WSDOT on environmental effects and design issues.

What is value engineering?

Value engineering is a proven effective tool for both continuous improvement and design enhancement. VE optimizes the allocating of limited funds without reducing the quality of a project.

8 Why is WSDOT preparing this Environmental Assessment?

Under the *National Environmental Policy Act* (NEPA), any federal agency that proposes to take an official action—including funding or providing a permit—is required to perform a series of environmental analyses to identify potential impacts of the Proposed Project, conveying the information to the public and project decision-makers so well informed decisions can be made. At the state level, Washington’s *State Environmental Policy Act* (SEPA) directs state and local decision-makers to consider the environmental consequences of their actions, requiring a similar environmental analysis.

Because the Proposed Project is being initiated by a state agency—WSDOT—and has federal funding, it must follow federal and state environmental regulations as dictated by NEPA and SEPA. The FHWA is the lead federal agency complying with NEPA. The WSDOT is the lead state agency complying with SEPA.

9 What are the next steps in this environmental process?

After this Environmental Assessment (EA) is published and circulated for public review and comment, the following activities will occur:

- After the 30-day public comment period has ended, it is anticipated that a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) will be prepared, approved by FHWA, and circulated (Summer 2006);
- If the Proposed Project is selected to move forward and project funding is available, final design and permitting will begin (mid-2006); and
- Construction is expected to take place in stages, with the entire construction phase lasting up to two years, beginning as early as 2007 and ending in 2009.

View a copy of the SR 518 EA at these locations:

Burien

- City Hall—415 SW 150th St
- Burien Library—14700 6th Ave SW
- Community Center—425 SW 144th St

SeaTac

- City Hall—4800 S 188th St
- Valley View Library—17850 Military Rd S

Tukwila

- City Hall—6200 Southcenter Blvd
 - Foster Library—4060 S 144th St
 - Community/Senior Center—12424 42nd Ave S
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10 Who will decide if the Proposed Project should move forward?

Ultimately, the decision will be made by FHWA and WSDOT. Their decision will be based on comments (on this document) from project partners, other state and federal agencies, affected tribes, and the public. In addition, they will use findings from this EA to aid them in their decision-making.

11 What information is contained in this environmental document?

This document explains the purpose and need for the Proposed Project (Chapter Two). Chapter Three discusses the proposed design of the project, and Chapter Four summarizes information regarding the existing transportation, community, and environmental conditions within the study area. Also presented are the Proposed Project's potential impacts and benefits to the community and the region.

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