

SR 167- 8th Street E Vicinity to 15th Street SW Vicinity Northbound HOT Lane Project

Visual Quality Technical Memorandum

What is the project and why is it needed?

The SR 167 – 8th Street E Vicinity to 15th Street SW Vicinity Northbound HOT Lane Project will be referred to as the Project throughout the rest of this technical memorandum.

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) plans to widen the State Route (SR) 167 roadway to construct a new northbound high-occupancy toll (HOT) lane from the vicinity of 8th Street E in Pacific (MP 10.2), Pierce County, Washington to the vicinity of 15th Street SW in Auburn (MP 14.26), King County, Washington. The construction of the HOT lane will require widening the roadway to the outside of the existing pavement between 6th Avenue N in Algona and 5th Avenue SW in Pacific. The rest of this project will be widened to the median. Ramp meters will be installed at the northbound on-ramps at the SR 167 interchanges with 8th Street E and Ellingson Road. All of the proposed widening work will occur within WSDOT right-of-way.

SR 167 is an important thoroughfare for cars, trucks, and transit in the Green River Valley. The additional capacity that this project will provide to SR 167 will relieve congestion and improve safety for commuters traveling northbound.

Also, during the NEPA environmental analysis for the SR 167 Stage 4 project, the WSDOT team determined through the Traffic Noise Impact Analysis – Technical Report (WSDOT 2008) that a noise wall is necessary to mitigate noise effects. The noise wall is an existing feature for this project.

The noise wall limits views of the highway and traffic, as well as reducing noise. The review of the noise wall effects on visual quality is documented in the Stage 4 technical memorandum and, based on the WSDOT/FHWA guidance, is that the improvements for the Stage 4 project clearly outweigh the minimal visual impact and that the overall conclusion is that there are no adverse visual quality effects.

What is the purpose of this visual quality memorandum?

This technical memorandum describes the existing conditions and potential range of effects to the visual environment that may be attributed to the construction and operation of the Project including potentially relocating a noise wall.

What studies does this analysis rely upon?

This analysis was based upon the Visual Quality document for the SR 167 – 8th Street E Vicinity to S 277th Street Vicinity, Southbound Hot Lane project (WSDOT 2008). The

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current Project is entirely within the study area evaluated by the WSDOT 2008 report and the proposed elements of the two projects are nearly identical.

What are the existing conditions?

The proposed project is located in the Green River Valley and crosses six municipalities and two counties including the cities of Auburn, Algona, and Pacific. The Green River Valley communities are connected by SR 167, which runs north and south. In addition, SR 18 provides an east-west route that links the Green River Valley to Interstate 5 in the Federal Way area.

The land use in the area includes low density residential, mixed residential and commercial, and commercial uses.

How were potential effects on visual quality identified and evaluated?

Potential effects were identified and analyzed based on the guidance provided in the WSDOT Environmental Procedures Manual (September 2007). When warranted the visual quality technical memo would identified key view points through photos and landscape characteristics based on the evaluation of the following defined technical visual elements:

- View Distance
- Viewer Position
- Vividness
- Intactness
- Unity

This project proposes no changes to the existing condition for any of the visual elements listed above.

What are the potential visual quality effects?

The only significant potential visual quality effect is due to a potential relocation of a noise wall proposed by the SR 167 – 8th Street E Vicinity to S 277th Street Vicinity, Southbound Hot Lane project. There are no significant proposed changes to the north-south extents of the noise wall from the previous project. These potential visual quality effects include changing the views looking from and toward the roadway.

How does the Project avoid, minimize, or mitigate for visual quality?

As part of the construction of the noise wall, the surface will be treated architecturally with texture and color provided modulation and relief that blend with the corridor character and themes of other existing noise walls. All construction will occur within existing WSDOT right-of-way. There were no direct wetland or stream impacts. There were wetland and stream buffer impacts, but these were minimal.

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If the noise wall is constructed, the contractor would revegetate the construction area on both sides of the noise wall if needed. On the east side of the noise wall, vegetation could be planted parallel to the wall that could potentially grow tall and soften the effects of the wall to the neighborhood viewer group.

What are the conclusions?

The only significant potential visual quality impact is associated with the potential relocation of a noise wall. This noise wall will be constructed to benefit the surrounding communities by decreasing the level of highway noise associated with the Project, as well as reduce the amount of light and glare from the road into the surrounding communities.

There are no visual quality impacts for this project, no further documentation is needed. If there are changes to the proposed project's design, the visual quality elements will be re-evaluated as needed.

References:

WSDOT, **Visual Quality Technical Report**. SR 167- 8th Street E Vic. to S 277th Street Vic. Southbound HOT Lane, Washington State Department of Transportation, 2008.