

## Chapter 2. Public Involvement

---

### What is the purpose of the public involvement that has been conducted to date?

Public involvement completed during this phase of the SR 302 Corridor Study focused on the following key objectives:

- Identify stakeholders and their interests, issues and concerns about SR 302;
- Understand the most effective communication methods for different stakeholders; and
- Share information and obtain community input about the Project and the Study from the outset.

Consistent with WSDOT guidance and environmental policies, WSDOT is committed to an open process that encourages two-way communication with interested parties. WSDOT strives to involve the public in transportation decision making and make transportation decisions based on the public's best interests. Developing and implementing an effective plan for collaboration with the public is critical to the success of WSDOT projects by providing an opportunity to understand and achieve

diverse community and transportation goals. WSDOT notes the following benefits of active collaboration with interested stakeholders and the public (WSDOT 2007a):

- Provides access to important information and ideas that might otherwise be overlooked;
- Puts WSDOT in a position to help solve problems and resolve conflicts;
- Creates a sense of community;
- Fosters greater acceptance of projects;
- Helps build and sustain a credible and trusting relationship between WSDOT and the public; and
- Ultimately leads to transportation improvements that better meet public needs and desires.

Improvements to SR 302 will be subject to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA). Early public outreach is also consistent with the requirements of these policies for public participation, and the guidance provided under both acts about how to conduct effective outreach to interested and affected parties. The clear intent of both NEPA and SEPA is to engage the public in identifying project issues, to publicly

disclose information to the public about project impacts, and to consider public comments and the community perspective in lead agency decision making.

## How was the public involvement conducted?

The public involvement conducted to date consists of two key elements: an extensive stakeholder assessment and communication with the community. These elements are described in the following sections.

### Stakeholder assessment

The stakeholder assessment included three key components: 1) identifying community stakeholders, individuals and groups and interviewing them about corridor-related issues and concerns; 2) providing briefings—short presentations about the Project—to community groups; and 3) researching regional media, public meeting locations, community organization newsletters, businesses willing to display posters and other effective ways to inform and engage community members in the Study. This community research resulted in the development of a comprehensive stakeholder database, including direct mail and electronic mail contacts and information about newsletter and media deadlines.

The WSDOT team met with 38 individuals and groups between July and December 2007. The assessment involved community residents of the Key Peninsula who use SR 302 daily, as well as those who use SR 302 but come from outside the Key Peninsula including Mason County, Gig Harbor, Tacoma and other locales. Starting with the July 2007 Key Peninsula Community Fair, the WSDOT team reached out to a variety of community, neighborhood and stakeholder groups including Tribal governments, utility and emergency service providers, transit providers, the city of Gig Harbor, Mason and Pierce counties, Key Peninsula Community Council, Key Peninsula Metropolitan Parks, Longbranch and Victor improvement clubs, local seniors, Key Peninsula schools, local historical society, local businesses, and community groups in geographical areas including Burley and Lake Holiday. A Stakeholder Assessment Summary has been prepared under a separate cover.

### Communication with the community about the Project and Study

A variety of tools were used to provide both one-way and two-way communication about the Project, and about the Study as it was being initiated.

**Key Messages.** Communication with the public and other stakeholders was initiated by the development and continued refinement of key messages. Key messages

were used to ensure clear and consistent communication about the Project, and used as the foundation for the development of all communication materials prepared in these initial efforts of the Study.

**Communication Materials.** News releases, newsletters and flyers were used for communicating with the public about the Study. A news release, newsletter and flyer were developed for each of the two public open houses conducted for this initial effort of the Study. These were graphically designed to attract attention and written in plain language to communicate about upcoming events. Communication materials were distributed to stakeholder database contacts and all postal customers in the Key Peninsula Area. Materials were also manually posted at Key Peninsula businesses. In addition, a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) sheet was developed for the second set of public meetings. Communication materials prepared for this phase of the Study are included in Appendix A of this report.

**SR 302 web site.** A web site was created at the initiation of the Study. The Web site was regularly reviewed and updated to reflect project progress and new information. The web site address is included on all communication materials provided to the public.

**Public Open Houses.** Public open houses were held at two times during this phase of the Study. The first was in September 2007. WSDOT offered two open house

sessions with the same presentations and work group format, to encourage as much participation and access to team members as possible. Nearly 200 people attended the meeting at Peninsula High School in Gig Harbor to learn about the Project and share their perspectives. Meeting objectives included sharing the study objectives, hearing concerns from the public about SR 302 and gathering initial information about traffic, safety, mobility to and other issues related to the preliminary traffic, engineering and environmental analysis. Meeting handouts included a meeting agenda, comment sheet and contact information card. Meeting participants were offered a presentation about the study purpose, environmental review process and anticipated schedule. Ten pre-assigned work groups invited responses from the public to three key questions:

- What concerns you most about SR 302?
- What solutions to SR 302 have you thought about or discussed with your neighbors?
- What do you think are the biggest challenges to improving SR 302?

The second meeting was held in December 2007 at two different locations. The purpose of the second set of meetings was to share the results of the preliminary environmental assessment and transportation analysis, and to present preliminary interchange and corridor alternatives. Meeting participants were presented with the

study process to date and asked to express their interest and opinions about formation of a Corridor Working Group for the next phase of the Study. The second set of meetings was organized in an open house format, with four information stations including Public and Study Process, Traffic, Interchange and Roadway Alternatives, and Environmental Constraints. Handout materials included a meeting agenda, comment sheet and FAQ summary. Meeting summaries from both sets of public meetings are included in Appendix A.

## What have we learned from public involvement completed to date?

A significant amount of information was collected from the community during the initial outreach efforts described in this Report. In addition to comments, opinions and ideas shared through face-to-face contact with groups and individuals, the team collected more global results about the best way to communicate with the public and various stakeholders, preferred methods for participation and key challenges faced by the Project. The community provided input to the process in a variety of ways – through stakeholder interviews, project briefings, public meetings, telephone calls, written comment sheets, emails and letters. Meeting summaries were developed for all stakeholder interviews, briefings and public meetings. The

following key findings illustrate common themes and provide a foundation for future public involvement activities.

### **The public and other stakeholders are interested in being involved and informed about this Study.**

As evidenced by the participation in stakeholder interviews, community briefings and high attendance at public meetings, SR 302 is clearly a topic of much interest and concern. Key Peninsula residents want to be involved and informed about this Study. Many expressed appreciation for the early opportunity to comment and for the information presented.

### **Effective outreach requires both direct (face-to-face contact) and indirect methods (newsletters, web site, etc.) to keep stakeholders up to speed.**

Stakeholders noted a variety of tools for disseminating information and engaging the public. Local and regional newspapers were noted by many as an effective way of obtaining community information. Public meetings, open houses and workshops are effective ways to become directly exposed to Study materials and interact with team members. Direct mail and email are also useful tools. Stakeholders said they want to be informed and noted, “The more WSDOT talks with the community, the better received the Project will be.”

**An extensive network of community organizations offers a conduit for information sharing.**

Community and neighborhood organizations such as the Key Peninsula Community Council, Metropolitan Parks District, Key Peninsula Business Association, Burley Community Club, Victor Improvement Club, Longbranch Improvement Club and many others provide regular and convenient opportunities to interact directly and indirectly with community members in different areas of the Key Peninsula.

**It is expected that controversy will arise when roadway alignment alternatives are defined.**

Stakeholders noted a significant challenge later in the process, when a decision is made about roadway alignment alternatives and selection of a recommended alignment. Some wondered about the decision-making process for choosing a recommended alignment. They expressed their concern that the recommended roadway alignment will cause direct community impacts, will result in emotional reactions from neighborhoods that are most directly affected and could pit community members against their neighbors.

**A stakeholder advisory committee could be a useful tool for guiding this Study.**

Some stakeholders thought an advisory committee would be a good tool for public involvement and identified themselves and others as potential candidates for consideration. Others expressed what they described as “meeting fatigue” from the extensive outreach conducted for recent development of the Key Peninsula Community Plan. Other stakeholders wondered if this Study might be efficiently advised through an existing stakeholder group such as the Key Peninsula Community Council.

**There are numerous safety concerns along the corridor.**

Concerns about sight distance, adequate shoulders, and steep banks were expressed by many. Intersection functionality and safety are also major concerns, particularly at the intersections of SR 302/118th, SR 302/SR 16, SR 302/Purdy Drive NW and SR 302/SR 3. Many noted the difficulty of safely accessing driveways, side roads and businesses along SR 302 and near the Purdy Bridge. One interviewee told the team about a bumper sticker that reads, “Pray for me, I drive SR 302.”

**Community members feel that congestion has increased significantly.**

It was suggested that in the last five years, morning and evening congestion has greatly increased on the Purdy

Bridge and at the intersections of SR 302/SR 16 and SR 302/Purdy Drive NW. One interviewee said, “I’ve got three words for you: traffic, traffic, traffic.”

### **There are concerns along the entire roadway but more concern is on the eastern half of SR 302.**

Many stakeholders pointed out that the majority of the congestion and safety issues are concentrated between Purdy and the signaled intersection of SR 302/Elgin-Clifton Road and Key Peninsula Highway. Once a traveler arrives at Key Peninsula Highway or heads northwest toward Allyn and Belfair, the traffic decreases rapidly and the roadway begins to feel more rural. “Focus on the area between Lake Kathryn and Purdy and avoid the environmental effects of building new road on 144th. There is no traffic out there, so no need for a new road.”

### **Immediate spot fixes are supported but not at the cost of a larger solution.**

It is expected that it will be some time before a Project alignment is identified and longer still for funding determinations and construction. There is also expectation among stakeholders that funding and construction will likely occur in phases, which could take many years. In the meantime, many community members feel there are several “spot fixes” that could be implemented. Many agreed that shorter-term improvements would help alleviate some immediate safety and congestion concerns.

Short-term spot fixes were recommended at intersections such as SR 302/118th, SR 302/SR 16, SR 302/Purdy Drive NW. One community member put it simply, “Many problems are generated between Lake Kathryn and the intersection of Purdy Bridge and Purdy Drive NW. Fix that section first.”

### **Some community members are distrustful.**

Some stakeholders expressed a general lack of trust with the transportation agency; others expressed apathy – that WSDOT “will do what it wants” regardless of community input. Some mentioned that it might be difficult for WSDOT to garner community trust as a result of a perceived lack of follow-through from the 1993 Study and from other projects. Many stakeholders questioned the need for yet another study and expressed skepticism about the agency’s ability to efficiently plan and construct needed improvements. They wondered why it was not completed in 1993, and what is different today that would result in a different outcome. Some noted they will “believe it when they see it.”

### **There is concern about Project funding and construction.**

Some stakeholders noted concern about WSDOT’s ability to obtain funding and construct improvements in a timely manner. Many questioned why it has taken WSDOT so long to improve SR 302. “We need improvements right

away; three years is too long to wait.” Others noted the long process experienced with the Belfair Bypass in Mason County and the increased costs associated with what they feel has been a drawn-out project.

## How can this information be used in the next steps?

### **Build on knowledge, understanding and relationships established in these initial outreach efforts.**

Through the stakeholder assessment, briefings, and public meetings, a significant amount of information has been learned about community members and their interests and concerns about SR 302. Audiences have included Key Peninsula residents and businesses; stakeholder organizations; the general traveling public; local and state elected officials; local, state and federal agencies; and the media.

Community members have shared their experiences traveling through and within the SR 302 corridor; have expressed their concerns about safety, mobility and increased congestion along the corridor; and have asked many questions about the scope and progress of the SR 302 Corridor Study.

An extensive network of community organizations has been documented, the richness and diversity of the Key

Peninsula community have been experienced, and an open dialogue has been initiated. This has created the foundation for future positive and open relations between WSDOT, the Key Peninsula community and adjacent communities and could help reduce distrust and skepticism felt by some in the community.

### **Continue proactive public involvement through a variety of outreach and involvement activities.**

Key Peninsula residents and community stakeholders obtain information in different ways, have different levels of understanding about the Study, and have varying levels of interest in participation. Public involvement in future phases of this Study will be successful by developing targeted strategies and tactics for each key audience.

An effective public involvement program is one that is reviewed and adjusted periodically to respond to emerging issues and changing conditions. A key element of future outreach should include continued evaluation and improvement to ensure broad community participation, Project understanding and eventual acceptance of a preferred Project alternative.

Continued use of both local and regional media, targeted distribution of Study materials – through email and direct mail, maintenance of the SR302 web site, and providing opportunities for direct contact and two-way dialogue with

interested stakeholders, all have their place in continuing effective community involvement.

### **Develop a process for including the community in the selection of corridor alternatives.**

WSDOT should continue to support the principles of informed consent, recognizing that some community members will be affected negatively by the ultimate selection of a preferred Project alternative, and that the department has the responsibility to communicate clearly about the problem, the potential solutions and the various methods and analyses used to evaluate potential solutions.

The most controversial part of the process is to come in the future – through the evaluation and eventual selection of a preferred alignment. A community working group or other advisory committee may be a useful tool for engaging affected parties in a process that is fair and includes all key interests as part of the planning and decision making process.

Key factors to consider in the formation of such a committee include ensuring representation from a broad range of community interests, identifying clear roles and responsibilities, and developing a well-defined work program that balances committee work with overall Study objectives.

### **Develop a process for informing and engaging state and local governments and other affected agencies.**

Local and state elected officials play a key role in fostering community support, and ultimately, helping to secure funding. These include local and state elected officials from the communities of Gig Harbor, and Mason, Kitsap and Pierce counties. Because of their wide interest in governing issues, it will be critical to keep elected officials updated and informed on study progress as well as to include them at critical decision-making points.

In addition, there is a need for an efficient process for frequent communication and consultation with affected agencies and other stakeholders. These include Kitsap, Pierce and Mason counties; Pierce Transit; Gig Harbor; and Tribal governments; as well as permitting agencies such as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) and the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology). Other local agency stakeholders include local school districts, Tacoma Power, Fire District 16, and Key Peninsula Metropolitan Parks District.

An efficient and effective consultant process will take into consideration the varying degrees of interest and responsibility these agencies bring to this Study; the challenges of consulting with several local and regional governments and integration with lead agency decision making.