

Appendix 5(a): Public Involvement Summary

As directed by the Legislature in ESSB 5352, WSDOT engaged the public to learn about and provide comment on an express toll lane study for the Eastside Corridor. In regards to public involvement, ESSB 5352 asked the department to:

Conduct public work sessions and open houses to provide information to citizens regarding implementation of high occupancy toll lanes and to solicit citizen views.

In response to this charge, WSDOT developed a robust public involvement program to reach drivers, businesses, and residents with an interest in the Eastside Corridor (I-405 and SR 167). Between June and December 2009, thousands of people participated in the Eastside Corridor express toll lane discussion.

WSDOT held open houses and community briefings at locations throughout the corridor and participated in information booths at regional summer festivals. To gain further public input, WSDOT encouraged people to e-mail comments or fill out an online comment form. Also conducted were four focus groups, an online survey, and a statistically valid phone survey.

What were the public involvement goals?

Based on the legislative charge, WSDOT's public involvement goals included:

- Educating the public about express toll lanes,
- Soliciting input and gauge public support for the idea of adding up to two express toll lanes to I-405, and
- Learning more about why some individuals do not support express toll lanes.

How did we involve the public?

WSDOT conducted two rounds of public involvement. The first round, between June and August, focused on an introduction to express toll lanes, benefits of express toll lanes and the range of study options that WSDOT would consider for the Eastside Corridor. WSDOT also conducted research to understand the public's attitude and awareness around express toll lanes on the Eastside Corridor.

The results of this research, specifically the statistically valid phone survey, will be used as a baseline to measure the public's level of support and awareness for express toll lanes on the Eastside Corridor. The second round of public involvement, September through December, focused on presenting the results of the traffic and revenue study.



Public Meetings

WSDOT hosted five public open houses throughout the I-405 and SR 167 corridors. WSDOT held the first series of open houses August 18-20, 2009 in Auburn, Bellevue and Renton. The purpose of these meetings was to introduce the study and identify public concerns. WSDOT held the second series of open houses November 3 and 5, 2009 in Kent and Kirkland. The purpose of these meetings was to present and gather public input on the findings of the traffic and revenue study.

Nearly 150 people attended the meetings and WSDOT received nearly 50 comments. The open houses proved to be a great venue to have one on one conversations with the public and really address their specific questions and concerns. Summaries of both rounds of open houses and materials presented at the meetings are included in Appendix 5(e).

Summer Festivals

WSDOT hosted information booths at summer festivals to reach out to communities up and down the Eastside Corridor. Representatives from the Eastside Corridor Tolling Study attended ten summer fairs and festivals between June and August 2009. Each event provided a unique opportunity for the project team to engage with the public, provide information on the Eastside Corridor Tolling Study and gather critical feedback from interested parties.

The WSDOT outreach booth included interactive elements, design visualizations, informational handouts and comment forms. Staff members discussed the project, answered questions and encouraged attendees to complete comment forms. WSDOT collected 282 comment forms at the following summer fairs and festivals:

- Puyallup Meeker Days
- Bellevue Strawberry Festival
- Boeing Safety Fairs (Kent and Renton)
- Mercer Island Summer Celebration
- Kent Cornucopia Days
- Renton River Days
- Tukwila Days
- Bothell River Festival
- Kirkland Farmer's Market

A full summary of summer festival outreach can be found in Appendix 5(f).

Business and Civic Outreach

Project team members engaged and briefed various business and community groups along the Eastside Corridor. WSDOT gave presentations to the Newcastle, Woodinville, Bellevue, and East King County chambers of commerce. WSDOT also presented to the Bellevue Chamber of Commerce Transportation Committee and the Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA) Suburban Cities Committee.

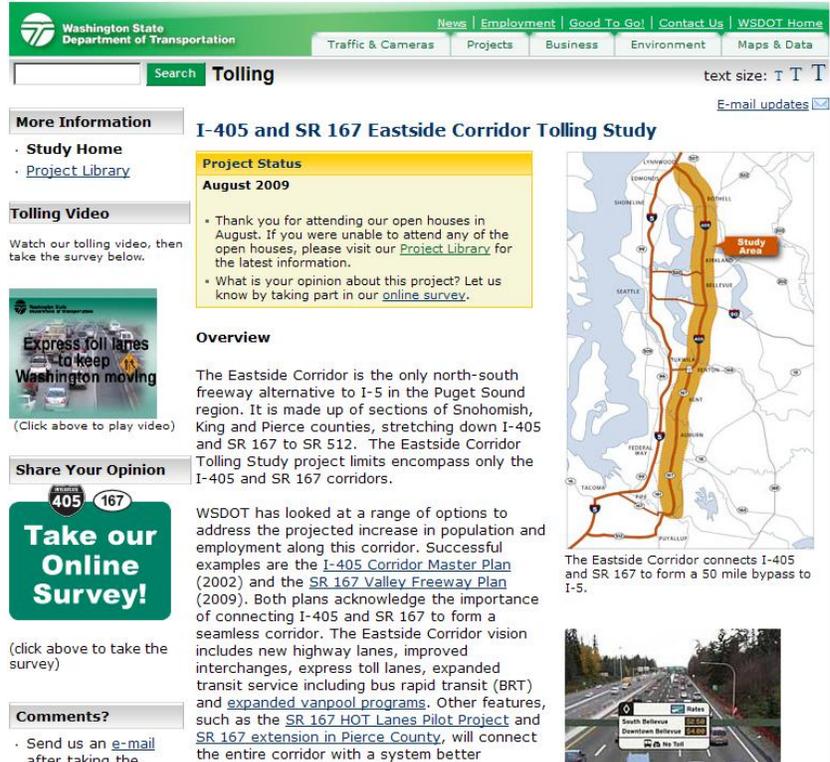
Through these presentations, WSDOT engaged hundreds of large and small businesses on the Eastside Corridor. A few of the businesses WSDOT spoke to include but are limited to Puget Sound Energy,

COSTCO, Boeing, Loud Technologies, Oracle, Inca Engineers Inc., Unigard Insurance, Pro Sports, Symetra, Allied Waste, T-Mobile, Sportworks, Precor, and King County Metro Rideshare.

A full listing of the Eastside Corridor Tolling Study briefings can be found in Appendix 5(h).

Web site

WSDOT created a project Web site (www.wsdot.wa.gov/Tolling/EastsideCorridor), linked from the WSDOT Toll Division home page and the existing I-405 Corridor Project page, to be the primary repository for information on the study. The Web site encouraged people to fill out the online survey or to submit comments via comment form or e-mail. A comprehensive project library housed all of the study materials, including open house information and summaries from all committee meetings. The site received more than 14,500 unique visitors and more than 20,066 page views between June and December 2009. WSDOT will continue to use this Web site to house the final Eastside Corridor Tolling study report and involve the public as additional project work moves forward.



What research tools were used to gauge public support and awareness?

WSDOT used three different types of research tools to gauge public support and awareness for express toll lanes. WSDOT will use the results from the focus groups, online survey and a statistically valid phone survey to help measure support for the Eastside Corridor express toll lanes as the study is compiled. In general, the results were in line with national trends at the start of express toll lane projects.

Focus Groups

WSDOT conducted four focus groups: two with I-405 users (conducted in Bellevue) and two with SR 167 users and HOT lane users (conducted in Puyallup). 30 people participated in the groups. During the focus groups, users of I-405 and SR 167 were asked various questions relating to tolling on the Eastside Corridor.

Those who used an express toll lane before – such as the SR 167 HOT lanes – supported the idea of adding express toll lanes on I-405. Other participants were more skeptical. Participants who used HOT lanes in the past stated they are willing to pay up to \$5.00 a segment on I-405 to travel faster, whereas those participants in the more skeptical groups were only willing to pay \$.50 to \$2.00 to travel faster. Appendix 5(d) includes a full report of the focus groups.

Online Survey

WSDOT hosted an online survey from August 4 through September 4, 2009. The purpose was to provide a formal way for people to provide input, without having to attend a meeting in person. The online survey included background information to provide context for the individuals choosing to comment. WSDOT publicized the survey with print and Web banner ads in select media outlets, mailings to residents of the Eastside Corridor, and e-mail distribution lists. More than 2,500 individuals completed the online survey.

Because online survey respondents “self-select,” by choosing to go online and take the survey, the results are insightful, but not considered statistically valid like a random sample phone survey. Thirty-six percent of our online respondents indicated strong support for Eastside Corridor express toll lanes, with 15% more stating they would probably support express toll lanes. Thirty two percent of respondents indicated possible support. This group represents the people who still have questions and need further information.

In general, WSDOT found that respondents who reported experiencing congestion on I-405 and SR 167 tended to be more supportive of express toll lanes on I-405. Also, respondents who have used the existing SR 167 HOT lanes were the most supportive group for the implementation of express toll lanes on I-405. More highlights from the online survey report are included in Appendix 5(b).

Phone Survey

WSDOT conducted a random sample statistically-valid telephone survey of 1,002 people in September 2009. The survey polled I-405 (600 respondents) and SR 167 users (400 respondents). The intent was to evaluate the validity of comments WSDOT was receiving and compare findings between the online survey and the statistically-valid phone survey. When asked to rate their support for express toll lanes on I-405, 29% percent expressed strong support, with another 19 % stated that would probably support Eastside Corridor express toll lanes. Twenty-six percent stated that they were opposed to Eastside Corridor express toll lanes. These results validated the online survey and will serve as a baseline to measure from as the project moves forward. A full report of the results of the phone survey is included in Appendix 5(c).

What were the key findings from the public involvement process?

- **People who understand the benefits of Eastside Corridor express toll lanes support them.**
 - Those who had positive experiences using express toll lanes or understood express toll lane benefits tended to support Eastside Corridor express toll lanes.
 - Those who hadn't used the SR 167 HOT lanes or who were unfamiliar with how express toll lanes work tended to be more skeptical about Eastside corridor express toll lanes.
- **The most common reason people support Eastside Corridor express toll lanes is congestion relief.**

- Those indicating support for Eastside Corridor express toll lanes on a comment form cited congestion relief as the primary reason.
- More than half of the online survey respondents said they would pay to use express toll lanes if they would receive a faster, more reliable trip.
- **People who do not support Eastside Corridor express toll lanes tend to:**
 - Need additional information to understand the benefits, or
 - Dislike tolling under most or all circumstances.
- **The most common concerns with Eastside Corridor express toll lanes were:**
 - Equity and fairness, preference for general purpose lanes, effects on transit and the environment, concerns about safety, and skepticism about express toll lane benefits.
- **Most people were opposed to changing the HOV requirement from 2+ to 3+ passengers.**
- **Overwhelmingly, people support re-investing toll revenue in the Eastside Corridor.**

A complete summary and analysis of all public comments is included in Appendix 5(g).

Public Involvement Conclusion and Recommendations

Attitudes and awareness towards express toll lanes and tolling in general result in various levels of support. The research and public involvement conducted thus far show that it is experience with express toll lanes that leads to supporting express toll lanes on I-405. In the future, if design and implementation of express toll lanes moves forward, WSDOT will make every effort to involve those who have experience using the SR 167 HOT lanes to act as advocates, to continue gaining valuable feedback and input, and provide accessible information to the public about express toll lanes on the Eastside Corridor.