CHAPTER 3

Developing the Alternatives

The I-405 Corridor EIS analyzed the range of alternatives for different methods of moving people and freight, as well as mitigation measures proposed for the corridor.

The Kirkland Nickel Project is a specific project that will provide transportation benefits for the section of I-405 extending from SR 520 north to SR 522. This environmental assessment is a focused, project-specific environmental review of two alternatives—the Build Alternative and the No Build Alternative.

How did we advance from the I-405 Corridor Program to the Kirkland Nickel Project?

In the EIS, decision-makers considered various modes of travel for making potential improvements. The range of options evaluated included single-occupant vehicles, carpools, transit, and rail alternatives, general locations for improvements, and how combinations of improvements could work together as a comprehensive system. The I-405 Corridor Program Environmental Process, shown at the right, outlines the overall process; details on the development of the Preferred Alternative and the Selected Alternative are described below.

Preferred Alternative

Once the Draft EIS was completed, a Preferred Alternative was recommended for analysis in the Final EIS. The Preferred Alternative was a compilation of highway, transit, local arterial, and other improvements within the 30-mile stretch of the I-405 Corridor and immediate vicinity. The details of the Preferred Alternative were included in the Final EIS, along with the analyses of five other alternatives.

Selected Alternative

With some modifications, the Preferred Alternative in the Final EIS became the Selected Alternative in the

THE I-405 CORRIDOR PROGRAM ENVIRONMENTAL PROCESS

Discipline Reports

A set of technical reports written to describe the natural and built environment to evaluate alternative methods for project design, construction and operation. Each discipline report describes the topic's affected environment, existing conditions, the proposed actions, and how effects will be avoided, minimized, or mitigated.

NEPA/SEPA Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

Identified the environmental effects of the proposed action and other alternatives proposed for the I-405 Corridor Program.

Preferred Alternative

The alternative selected from among five alternatives analyzed in the EIS. The details of the Preferred Alternative analysis, as well as the analysis of the other alternatives are included in the Final EIS.

Selected Alternative

The alternative selected and approved by FHWA and FTA as documented in the Record of Decision.

Record of Decision (ROD)

The final step in the EIS process. A concise document that identifies the decision (selected alternative), and mitigation measures adopted for the Selected Alternative.

Kirkland Nickel Project

A specific set of project improvements contained in the Selected Alternative that focuses on the Kirkland section of the I-405 Corridor.

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Record of Decision (ROD). The ROD identified the basis for the decision to advance the Selected Alternative, and explained the adopted means to avoid, minimize, and compensate for environmental effects.

In both the EIS and the ROD, WSDOT specified that the improvements cited in the Selected Alternative would be re-examined prior to implementation to determine the best combinations for phased construction. WSDOT continues to examine these recommendations within the constraints of the available budget while maintaining good engineering design.

Where is the Kirkland Nickel Project area?

The project area begins just north of the SR 520 interchange and extends north almost to the SR 522 interchange. While most project construction will take place within the existing I-405 right of way, there are few locations, such as at the NE 116th Street interchange where construction will occur beyond it.

It is expected to take 20 years or more to implement the Selected Alternative for the entire I-405 Corridor Program. To maintain momentum, smaller-scale projects have been prioritized that can be implemented with approved funding. The Kirkland Nickel Project is one of these projects, and serves as a first step toward completing the Selected Alternative.

How was the Kirkland Nickel Project developed?

Using the Selected Alternative as the master plan, WSDOT developed relatively low cost, congestion relief roadway improvements and began to define the Kirkland Nickel Project with the following features in mind:

- Improving the worst congestion choke points[1] along I-405. i.e., the "Kirkland Crawl;"
- Improving safety;
- Increasing travel speeds in Kirkland during peak commuter hours;
- Facilitating freight movement;
- Implementing meaningful environmental improvements;
- Providing a benefit return of several times the investment costs through reduced travel time, and increased freight speeds.

[1] An area of highway with inadequate capacity or a point or area of traffic congestion.

Using professional engineering and planning judgment with the scrutiny of outside experts, the design of the Kirkland Nickel Project began to take shape. For example, team members determined that a relatively low-cost lane addition in Kirkland would provide some traffic relief for one of the corridor's worst bottlenecks. Throughout the planning process, reviews were conducted to ensure that methods to avoid or minimize potential effects were evaluated and incorporated into the project. The environmental review process for the Kirkland Nickel Project will be completed in three primary stages, shown to the right.

THE KIRKLAND NICKEL PROJECT ENVIRONMENTAL PROCESS

Discipline Reports

Each of the 21 discipline reports describes the topic's affected environment, existing conditions, the proposed actions, and how effects will be avoided, minimized, or mitigated.

Environmental Assessment (EA)

A concise document prepared in compliance with NEPA that briefly discusses the purpose and need for an action, alternatives to the action, and provides sufficient evidence and analysis of impacts to determine whether to prepare an EIS or a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

F O N S I

A FONSI presents the reasons why an action will not have a significant effect on the environment and, therefore, does not require the preparation of an EIS. Based on analyses and project feedback received to date, we anticipate preparing a FONSI for the Kirkland Nickel Project.

What alternatives are studied in this environmental assessment?

Two alternatives were evaluated:

- A **Build Alternative**, which will add northbound and southbound lanes to the Kirkland Nickel section of the I-405 Corridor and improve the NE 116th Street interchange; and
- A **No Build Alternative**, which would make no transportation improvements to I-405 in the Kirkland area.

The project description for the Build Alternative is presented in Chapter 4.

What is the No Build Alternative?

A No Build Alternative was evaluated to establish a baseline for comparing the effects associated with the Build Alternative. The No Build Alternative maintains the status quo, meaning only routine activities such as road maintenance, repair, and safety improvements would take place over the next 20 years. This alternative does not include improvements that would increase roadway capacity, reduce congestion, or improve safety meaningfully. For these reasons, it does not satisfy the project's purpose.

What environmental issues influenced the project design?

Throughout the development of the Kirkland Nickel Project design, numerous design refinements were proposed to avoid or minimize effects to the environment. For example, areas where construction will be allowed were modified several

times to limit contact with streams and wetlands. In some situations, retaining walls around culverts (headwalls) will be installed on culverts to avoid encroachment into streams and surrounding areas. Stormwater detention ponds (see Chapter 4, Description of the Project), also were relocated to avoid wetlands.

Project Scoping Meeting, January 27, 2004

Why is the Kirkland Nickel Project being evaluated in this environmental assessment?

This EA goes beyond the analysis in the EIS, offering a more in-depth evaluation of the effects that may occur as a result of this project. Using this evaluation, WSDOT will determine whether an EIS or a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) will be prepared. The EA does not re-examine corridor-level alternatives, effects, or other measures that were already analyzed in the EIS.

How has the public been involved?

WSDOT has involved the public in the Kirkland Nickel Project through a wide range of activities such as:

- Inviting citizens to participate in the project scoping and development process;
- Conducting public open houses, producing newsletters, presentations at neighborhood meetings, etc.;
- Other outreach efforts such as Executive, Steering and Advisory committee meetings.

What is project scoping?

A scoping meeting is designed to:

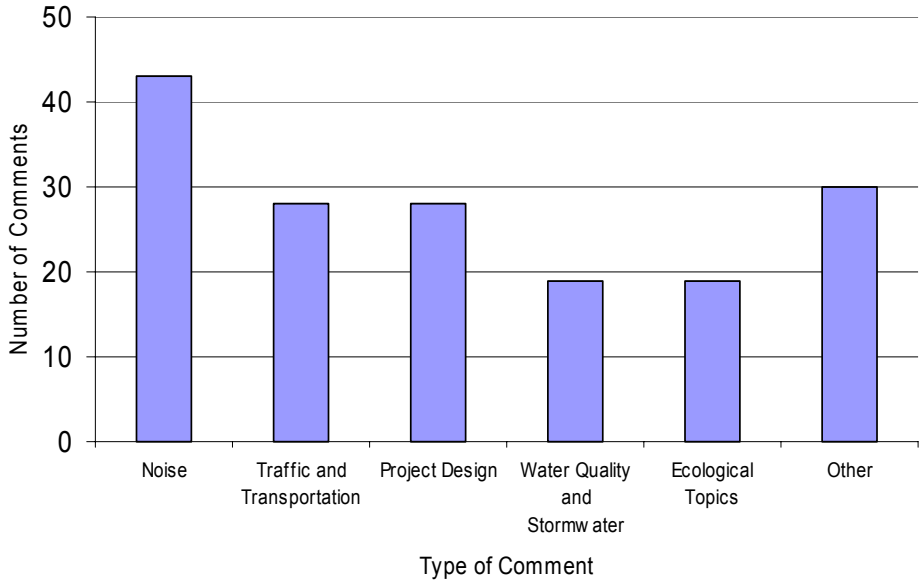
- Inform the public and agencies of proposed actions and alternatives;
- Serve as a forum to gather comments to help identify potential environmental impacts;
- Ensure that the environmental documents consider reasonable alternatives; and
- Help identify issues or concerns to promote a focus on items important to the local community and to agencies.

Project Scoping and Development

More than 100 citizens attended the Kirkland Nickel Project scoping meeting on January 27, 2004. They were invited to submit written and verbal comments to WSDOT during a public comment period. On that same day, WSDOT met with cities and agencies that have jurisdiction in the project area to identify and incorporate their concerns and comments.

Following these meetings, WSDOT categorized and compiled the comments into the Kirkland Nickel Project Scoping Report. The comments addressed topics such as noise, water quality, stormwater management, and asked about the purpose and need for the project (see Exhibit 3-1). Commenters who provided a mailing address received a copy of the scoping report.

Exhibit 3-1
Scoping Comments for the Kirkland Nickel Project



During the comment period, which took place from January 11 to March 1, 2004, WSDOT actively communicated with citizens in the form of letters, emails, and phone conversations.

Kirkland Nickel Project Outreach

Kirkland Charette:
September 9, 2002

Scoping Meeting with Resource Agencies and Jurisdictions:
January 27, 2004

Public Scoping Open House:
January 27, 2004

Environmental Kick-off:
January 28, 2004

Kirkland Advisory Committee Meeting:
Initial: February 4, 2004
Monthly thereafter

Neighborhood Meetings:
March – September 2004

Kirkland Nickel Project Open House
September 23, 2004

Public Outreach

Since the Kirkland Nickel Project received funding in July 2003, WSDOT has worked closely with the public, elected officials, local agencies, tribes, and regulators. WSDOT has provided information about the Kirkland Nickel Project to the public—through neighborhood meetings, open house events, and visits to community facilities and businesses. For example, project team members conducted extensive outreach efforts to minority and low-income populations in the area. They contacted municipal agencies and private organizations to identify and locate special groups and to learn about their transportation needs. Some of these organizations included the Kirkland Senior Center, area food banks, public health facilities, and libraries, among others.

Other Outreach Efforts

Several standing committees have met regularly to provide ongoing dialogue and coordination for the project. These groups include:

How WSDOT communicates with the public

Speaker's Bureau – Formal presentations by WSDOT personnel to community organizations.

Environmental Outreach – Field studies put I-405 environmental team members in touch with neighbors. For example, almost all the citizens who made comments about noise concerns were contacted and, where feasible, noise monitoring was conducted at their residences.

Project Website – The I-405 Project Team Website, at www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/I-405 was designed as a resource for the public, and has been updated regularly.

Newsletters/Project Updates – Newsletter mailings and email updates offer an ideal opportunity to inform the public on project progress.

Return Mail Postcard – Mailings included a return postcard offering an opportunity to comment on the project and to request a visit by I-405 Project Team members at organization meetings. Individual postcards were distributed to libraries, multi-family apartment/ condominium associations, and special housing establishments.

Committees

- The **I-405 Executive Committee**, comprised of executives from the FHWA, FTA, WSDOT, King County, and Sound Transit, as well as members from the Washington State Transportation Commission and elected officials from cities along the I-405 Corridor, provided monthly to quarterly input on policy matters.
- A **Kirkland Advisory Committee**, made up of citizens, business people, elected officials, partnering agencies, WSDOT, and city staff, was effective in reaching Kirkland neighborhoods by engaging the community in design, environmental, and aesthetic issues. This group continues to meet on a monthly basis.
- The **I-405 Steering Committee**, consisting of senior staff from the local, regional, state, and federal agencies having jurisdiction within the Kirkland Nickel Project area, is responsible for providing technical and policy guidance. The Steering Committee meets regularly to provide valuable feedback on technical feasibility, environmental acceptability, costs, and performance.
- A **Multi-agency Permitting (MAP) Team**, comprised of eight senior environmental regulators from WSDOT, the Department of Ecology, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the US Army Corps of Engineers, and King County, consider issues pertaining to project permitting. WSDOT and the MAP Team meet regularly to make project permitting decisions.

How have government agencies been involved?

Government agencies have played major roles in the development of the Kirkland Nickel Project. WSDOT has involved governmental agencies through regular meetings and other means to address issues on an as-needed basis. Examples of these methods are:

- Congressional and legislative briefings in late June and early July 2004. These briefings were conducted to inform Washington State legislators within the I-405 Corridor study area and US Congress members from the Washington State delegation;

- Meetings with tribal representatives to discuss cultural resource investigations proposed for the project;
- Sessions with resource agency staff to explain design-build concepts;
- Briefings and site visits with the MAP Team;
- Sessions to review stormwater management strategies with representatives from the cities of Kirkland and Bothell;
- Sessions with King County, Kirkland, and Bothell to coordinate wetlands mitigation strategies and site selection;
- Scoping meetings with agencies to discuss traffic, air, noise, endangered species, water, wetlands, and mitigation strategies;
- Discussions with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries on ESA issues; and
- Wetland confirmation meetings with the US Army Corps of Engineers.