



Eastside Corridor Tolling Study

January 2010

Prepared for the 2010 Washington State Legislature

Executive Summary

In May 2009, the Washington State Legislature directed the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to conduct a traffic and revenue study including potential funding for future improvements and high occupancy toll (HOT) or express toll lanes on I-405. The Legislature directed WSDOT to undertake the following activities as part of the study:

- Develop a plan to operate up to two express toll lanes in each direction on I-405
- Confer with the mayors and city councils for jurisdictions impacted by express toll lanes
- Engage the public to solicit their viewpoints and identify concerns

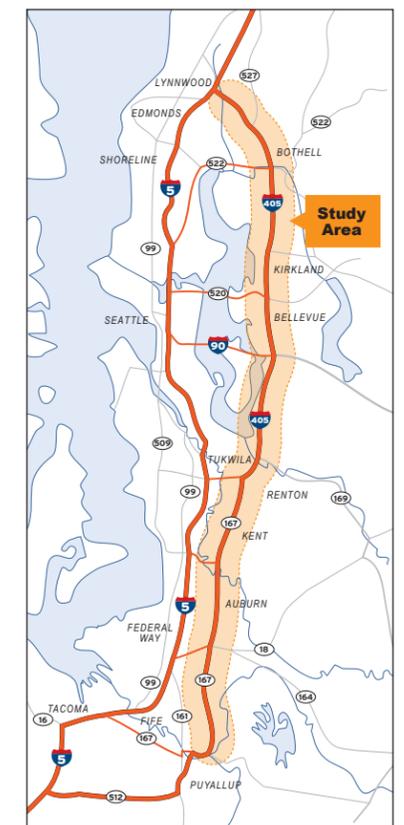
Overall findings

The study's findings were developed through:

- Extensive public involvement and outreach
- Close coordination with our advisory committees, which included Eastside Corridor mayors and other elected officials and local agency officials and staff
- Traffic and revenue modeling of five different study options

Backed by study results and public support, our advisory committees **support moving forward with implementation of Eastside Corridor express toll lanes, beginning with currently funded projects.** This approach allows WSDOT to gain traffic and revenue experience to lower the perceived risks and costs of financing future express toll lane projects.

Eastside Corridor



The 50+ mile Eastside Corridor connects I-405, SR 167, and SR 512, and is one of two north-south corridors in the Puget Sound region. It is expected to serve 1.5 million daily trips by 2030. But today, traffic is so heavy that even the HOV lanes are congested, offering motorists little value during peak-hour travel times.

Option 4, Phase 1



The Eastside Corridor Tolling Study reviews five options that incrementally build a continuous express toll lane system. Option 1 includes currently-funded projects and serves as phase 1 of our proposed implementation strategy.

Option 4, Phase 2



The Executive Advisory Group supports moving forward with study option 4 to construct a 40+ mile express toll lane system from the King/Pierce County line to Lynnwood. Moving forward with phase 1 funded projects in the north allows WSDOT to gain traffic and revenue experience with express toll lanes.

Next steps

In order to move forward with this strategy, *the following actions* are needed:

- Legislative authorization to implement tolls on I-405
- Federal approval for WSDOT to operate I-405 as a tolled facility
- Legislative authorization to allocate currently unallocated Eastside Corridor construction savings to fill the \$67 million funding gap for Eastside Corridor express toll lane funded projects
- Legislative designation of SR 167 as a permanent eligible toll facility extended south to Puyallup
- Legislative request that WSDOT prepare a more detailed traffic and revenue study and finance plan for Eastside Corridor express toll lane projects

How do I get more information?

The complete report and all report appendices can be found on our Web site at www.wsdot.wa.gov/Tolling/EastsideCorridor/Report

You may also contact:

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Implementation strategy

- **The EAG supports implementation of study option 4**, which constructs a 40+ mile express toll lane system from the King/Pierce County line on SR 167 to Lynnwood at the I-405/I-5 interchange. This option includes a two-lane express toll lane system on I-405 between the I-405 SR 167 and SR 522 interchanges.
- **The EAG recommends beginning now with the funded projects in the north end of the Eastside Corridor to allow WSDOT to gain traffic and revenue experience** with with express toll lanes, thereby lowering perceived risks and the cost of financing future express toll lane projects.
- Designation of the Eastside Corridor as an eligible toll facility in 2010 supports an earlier start on projects on the south end of the corridor for study option 4.

Eastside Corridor express toll lanes have merit

- Traffic and revenue analyses indicated **more people and vehicles can be moved through the corridor** with express toll lanes, compared to adding general purpose lanes.
- Express toll lanes **provide additional revenue**, which could help fund additional improvements in the corridor.
- **Implementation of express toll lanes on I-405 between SR 520 and I-5 with current funding** would provide traffic and revenue information to assist in the financing of a more extensive Eastside Corridor express toll system.

Express toll lanes are successful nationally and locally

Eight express toll lane or HOT lane systems are working across the nation, and another 30 are in the early phases of study or implementation.

- Study results prove that express toll lanes manage congestion and improve travel, efficiently moving many more people through the system.
- Survey data shows that public approval ratings increase over time as people use the toll lanes and understand their benefits.



Future vision for Eastside Corridor express toll lane system

Eastside Corridor advisory committees support express toll lanes

WSDOT established the Executive Advisory Group (EAG), comprised of eastside elected officials, and the Interagency Working Group (IWG), comprised of technical and policy staff reporting to EAG members. The committees met throughout the study, advised WSDOT on its work, and developed a set of implementation principles that are focused on optimizing performance and managing congestion. The **committees support** implementing express toll lanes on the Eastside Corridor.

Eastside Corridor express toll lane implementation principles

- *Performance – Optimize freeway performance*
- *Funding – Leverage toll revenue to maximize corridor improvements*
- *Implementation – Develop a 10-year strategy for a 40+-mile system (study option 4)*
- *Public Outreach – Improve understanding before implementation*

Public outreach findings

- The more information people are given to understand the benefits of Eastside Corridor express toll lanes, the more they support them.
- The most common reason people support Eastside Corridor express toll lanes is congestion relief.
- Overwhelmingly, people support re-investing toll revenue in the Eastside Corridor.
- People who do not support Eastside Corridor express toll lanes either need additional information to understand the benefits, or would dislike tolling under any circumstance.
- The most common concerns were equity and fairness, preference for general purpose lanes, effects on transit and the environment, safety, and skepticism about express toll lane benefits.
- People were concerned with changing the high occupancy vehicle (HOV) requirement from two or more (2+) to three or more (3+) people.



WSDOT staff speak with citizens at Kent Open House about the Eastside Corridor Tolling Study

Public outreach by the numbers:

- *WSDOT mailed 220,000 postcards to Eastside Corridor households to advertise the online survey and open houses*
- *Thousands of people learned about the study and input opportunities through WSDOT's e-mail listserve*
- *Hundreds of people spoke to Eastside Corridor staff at 10 different summer fairs*
- *Over 1,300 people submitted written comments or sent emails to the Eastside Corridor study*
- *More than 2,500 people took our Web-based survey*
- *1,000 people participated in a random-sample telephone survey*
- *WSDOT conducted four different focus groups of Eastside Corridor users*
- *WSDOT briefed over 30 different Eastside Corridor civic, business, and community groups*

Express toll lane study options

With input from the IWG and EAG, WSDOT developed five study options that include incremental improvements to ultimately complete a two-lane I-405 express toll lane system connected to a one-lane SR 167 HOT lane system. Study option 1 includes funded projects, and the remaining study options contain unfunded improvements that incrementally build a complete and continuous Eastside Corridor express toll lane system.

Traffic and revenue study findings

- Traffic performance (the number of vehicles and people moving at free-flowing speeds of 45 mph to 60 mph in all lanes) improves with each subsequent study option as the system becomes more robust.
- Express toll lanes allow for more efficient use of all lanes (better traffic performance), when compared with just adding general purpose lanes.
- In the year 2020, an average toll per mile for the study options is estimated to range from 40 cents to 74 cents per mile (2008 dollars). The average toll per mile for study option 1, in the year 2013, is estimated to be 23 cents per mile (2008 dollars).
- The traffic and revenue study used the HOV 3+ designation for toll-free use of express toll lanes.
- An HOV 2+ toll-free designation significantly increases tolls due to less space available for those who wish to pay a toll to use the express toll lanes. Setting a maximum toll cap, and/or using a HOV 2+ toll-free designation, will reduce toll revenue collections in the future.

Express toll lanes financing findings

- Tolls can provide significant contributions towards the cost of project construction.
- Without local operating experience, bonding against express toll lane revenue is considered a risky investment as it is a relatively new concept in traffic and tolling operations. Forecasting toll revenue is also complicated by its sensitivity to traffic volumes.
- Assuming tolling begins with the completion of the funded projects on I-405 in the north end of the Eastside Corridor; net toll revenue will provide significant funding for completion of the south end of I-405.