CHAPTER 1

Summary

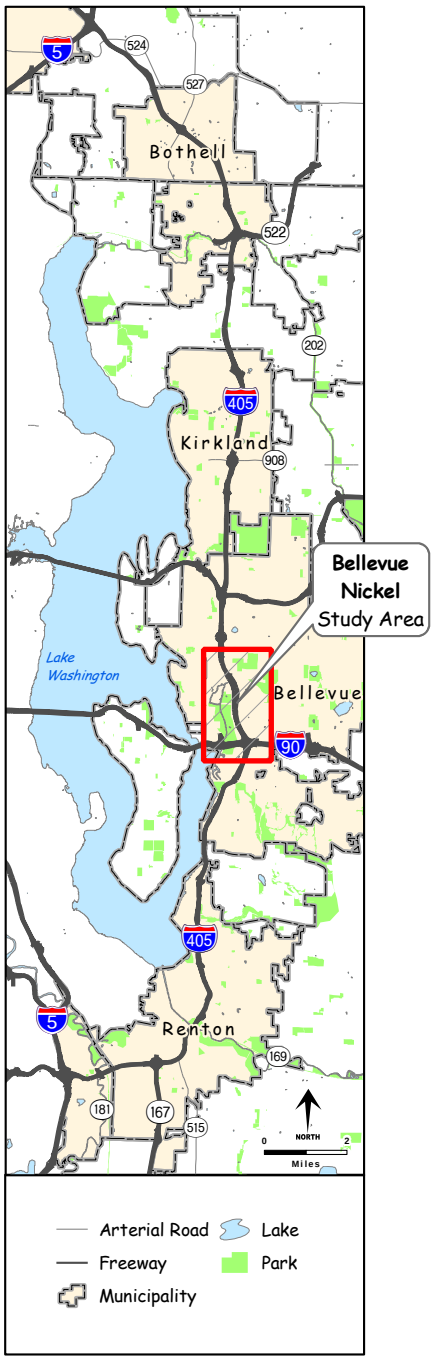
How will the Bellevue Nickel Improvement Project improve the quality of life for the people of Washington State?

The Bellevue Nickel Improvement Project will initially move Washington travelers through the currently congested Interstate 405 (I-405) corridor at speeds as much as 15 miles per hour faster than present conditions in morning and evening commutes. The project's expanded capacity will allow more people to use the roadway during congested periods. Its design features will also improve safety to enable Washington travelers to pass along this section of I-405 highway.

Reduced traffic congestion, improved travel speed, and safety improvements will be the most obvious improvements from the Bellevue Nickel Improvement Project for most people, but other benefits will also result from its design, construction, and operation:

- Through the mitigation process, we will build a larger, more functional wetland area at Kelsey Creek Park than the area affected by the project.
- We will create about 500 linear feet of new stream channel west of I-405 within the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) right of way.
- Water quality in the area will improve overall from new stormwater drainage facilities and upgrades to a number of existing drainage structures and systems.
- We will construct a new noise barrier along the eastern edge of I-405 near the Interstate 90 (I-90) interchange, which will shield nearby residents from highway noise.
- We will blend the new structures introduced by the project into the visual environment by adding surface treatments to retaining walls, widened bridges, freeway lighting, and signage. Community input guided the design of these elements.
- New jobs will flow into the Central Puget Sound area from project construction activities, and tax revenues will ripple

I-405 Project Area



I-405 Project Area (shown in greater detail on page 1-3).

through to local jurisdictions such as the City of Bellevue and King County.

What part of I-405 will we improve and what will those improvements look like?

The Bellevue Nickel Improvement Project will extend along a 2-mile section of I-405 between I-90 and Southeast 8th Street in the City of Bellevue. Project limits appear on Exhibit 1-1.

We will add one new general-purpose lane in each direction along I-405. The project will also extend the existing outside southbound high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane north from I-90 to Southeast 8th Street. We will shift approximately 0.5 mile of the southbound roadway to the east into the freeway median and construct a new Wilburton Tunnel just east of the existing tunnel to carry the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad (BNSF) over the realigned and expanded roadway. We will insure the uninterrupted flow of freight throughout the construction process.

We will also add new stormwater drainage facilities and upgrade a number of existing drainage structures and systems. Other activities include construction of a new noise barrier and creation of new wetlands and streams in the study area to replace the loss of these resources from the project.

This will be one of the first projects completed under the I-405 Corridor Program. We plan to start construction on the Bellevue Nickel Improvement Project in spring 2007 and complete the project in fall 2009. We will construct the project under a design-build contract. A design-build contract provides the contractors flexibility to offer innovative and cost-effective alternatives to deliver the project while complying with all WSDOT design standards, performance measures, and activities to avoid or minimize effects to the environment will be met. The design-builder will determine specifics of the project such as construction phasing, how the construction will occur, and location of staging areas.

How will the project affect the environment?

We have mentioned above many of the positive environmental effects of the Bellevue Nickel Improvement Project. From the outset, our planners and engineers have considered the consequences of our work on the environment and have avoided and minimized negative effects wherever possible.

Exhibit 1-1. Project Vicinity Map

Source: WSDOT, 2005, King County, 2004 | \\SEAW405\405gis\project\bellevue\map_docs\project_vicinity\Bellevue_Project_Vicinity.mxd | Last Updated : 01-16-06

We have studied 19 environmental aspects in great detail, and we have included complete copies of these formal studies in Appendices D through V on the CD that accompanies this report. For many of those elements, environmental effects were positive, and the project will have no effect on some of the others. In Chapter 5 we summarize what we learned from these studies and focus our discussion on areas with specific environmental effects.

For example, we have designed the project so that all major improvements will be constructed within the existing right of way. We have also shifted the roadway away from sensitive streams and wetlands wherever possible to minimize environmental effects.

When we consider all its aspects, we are confident that the Bellevue Nickel Improvement Project will improve mobility within the study area and the entire I-405 corridor.

Public participation in one of our workshops

Did the public have input on the project?

Since 2003, we have worked closely with the public, elected officials, local/state/federal agencies, and tribes. We will continue to meet with those groups as we move towards the construction phase of the project.

How can you get involved?

We will continue to provide the public with numerous opportunities to comment on the proposed project and interact with members of our environmental and design teams through such activities as:

- Open houses
- Newsletters
- Presentations at neighborhood meetings

We will hold a formal public hearing on this document on February 7, 2006, from 4 to 7 p.m. at the International Middle School. The hearing provides an opportunity to gather formal comments on the project and to learn about the environmental aspects of the project.