



## I-5 Marvin Rd to Mounts Rd Planning and Environmental Linkages

### Executive Advisory Group Meeting #1 Summary

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#### Meeting purpose

The purpose of the first Executive Advisory Group (EAG) meeting was to:

- Establish EAG roles and responsibilities.
- Provide a study overview.
- Solicit input on Purpose and Need statement.
- Present the Conceptual Range of Alternatives for early input.

**WSDOT study team:** Ashley Carle, Gaius Sanoy, George Mazur, Hillary Pope, Hunter Henderson, JoAnn Schueler, Lucy Temple, Victoria Book, John Perlic (Parametrix), Kirk Wilcox (Parametrix), Sharese Graham (SCJ Alliance), Colleen Gants (PRR), Emma Dorazio (PRR), Lauren Wheeler (PRR)

#### Meeting Opening, Purpose, and Goals

The WSDOT study team began the presentation by welcoming everyone and providing Zoom Meeting best practices. The study team led introductions, followed by an overview of the meeting purpose to review and gather feedback on the Purpose and Need for the project. Zoom Meeting polls and open discussions were used throughout the meeting to gauge understanding and address questions and comments.

The study team shared that the goals of the meeting were to have the EAG actively participate and understand how the PEL process is organized. The outcomes of the meeting were to gain familiarity with and input on the draft Purpose and Need and range of alternatives, awareness of the evaluation process and to ask the EAG for additional data that the study team has not yet considered.

The roles and responsibilities of the EAG are to represent government entities, Tribal Nations, agencies and stakeholders in the study area, provide data and input on direction of the PEL Study, advise on alternatives and performance metrics and help build consensus and support for alternative(s) selection at the end of the process.

The study team provided an overview of the advisory structure throughout the PEL process. Advisory groups are asked to provide permitting, resources, and other technical guidance throughout the PEL Study. Advisory groups include an Agency Coordination Group, a Technical Advisory Group, and the Executive Advisory Group. In addition to the advisory groups, WSDOT is engaging community-based organizations to share project information and gather community input through briefings and interviews. Project updates and public review periods are hosted on a project study webpage (I-5 Marvin Rd to Mounts Rd Planning and Environmental Linkages webpage) and shared through a project email list (WSDOT listserv sign-up page). A Draft PEL Report will be shared through the project webpage and in an online open house for public review in June 2023.

In response to feedback from City of Tumwater Mayor Debbie Sullivan, the project team will include Intercity Transit in future Executive Advisory Group activities. They are currently only serving on the Technical Advisory Group.



## **Project Background and Desired Outcomes**

The study team presented the project background and components of the I-5 Marvin Rd. to Mounts Rd. Planning and Environmental Linkages Study.

The project started in 2020 with a longer corridor study between Tumwater (Exit 99) to Mounts Road (Exit 116) to develop initial strategies for improving the regional transportation system. In 2021, the WA State Legislature provided funding to accelerate plans along I-5 for congestion relief and environmental improvements on I-5 between the Marvin and Mounts Road interchanges through the Nisqually River Delta. Travel demand along the corridor is expected to increase in the corridor from population, employment, and economic growth. This vital segment of I-5 connects Thurston and Pierce counties and provides access to Joint Base Lewis-McChord. The roadway travels through the Nisqually River estuary, traditional land of the Nisqually Indian Tribe, and habitat for federally listed threatened species of Puget Sound Steelhead. WSDOT is working closely with the Nisqually Indian Tribe under a Memorandum of Understanding.

In 2022, WSDOT completed the I-5 Tumwater to Mounts Road Planning and Environmental Linkages Study (referred to as the "Corridor PEL") which identified the need to do this next phase, a Focused PEL, to study I-5 from Marvin Road to Mounts Road (Exit 111 to Exit 116). The Focused PEL will consider additional technical analyses and stakeholder input to arrive at a final purpose and need and preferred alternative(s), to advance into the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) environmental review beginning in 2023.

The study team shared the project study area and existing conditions related to the range of alternatives, such as addressing flood risk, improving mobility through the corridor between Mounts and Marvin Roads, and enhancing the ecosystem at the I-5 Nisqually Delta crossing. There will be a public review period for the Purpose and Need from January 17 to January 31, 2023. The project will culminate in a Draft PEL Report with another public review period through an online open house June 2023.

Additional outreach activities include sending out the EAG #1 meeting summary and hosting the three additional convenings of the ACG, TAG, and EAG between February, March, and April.

The study team shared a chart that outlined the goals of the four advisory group meetings.

1. Share the project background and desired outcomes, review of the conceptual Purpose and Need, review of conceptual design alternatives, and an introduction to the alternative's evaluation process and request for data.
2. Review Meeting 1 to include questions and comments received, a consensus discussion on Final Purpose and Need, and review of level 1 alternatives evaluation criteria.
3. Review Meeting 2 and new information from questions received during Meeting 2, a stakeholder review of level 1 alternative evaluation results, and a stakeholder review of level 2 alternatives evaluation criteria.
4. Review Meeting 3 and new information from questions received in Meeting 3, a stakeholder review of level 2 alternatives evaluation results and questions and comments received, and end with a consensus discussion on evaluation results and alternatives to advance to NEPA.



### **Funding Directive**

The WA State Legislature appropriated \$5 million to “conduct preliminary engineering to develop alternatives and complete NEPA review for a proposal to provide congestion relief on I-5 between Tumwater and Mounts Rd and restore the Nisqually River Delta at the existing freeway crossing.”

In 2021, the WA State Legislature provided initial implementation funding to accelerate work along I-5 between the Marvin and Mounts Road interchanges through the Nisqually River Delta. This funding supports preliminary engineering, design, and right of way acquisition to address flood risk, increase capacity, and enhance the Nisqually Delta ecosystem.

### **Desired Outcomes**

The study team shared desired outcomes of the focused PEL Study to formally adopt the Purpose and Need, Preliminary Screening of Alternatives, Elimination of Unreasonable Alternatives, and Programmatic Mitigation into the NEPA process. WSDOT is using PEL authority 23 USC 168 to achieve the outcomes.

The study team highlighted the need for early and often input from the community and advisory group members. This PEL process will help to identify the NEPA strategy (Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Assessment). NEPA is anticipated to begin in summer 2023.

Following the project background and desired outcomes, the study team requested feedback from the EAG via a poll.

**Poll question #1:** How is your level of understanding for the I-5 Marvin Rd. to Mounts Rd. PEL Study thus far?

- a) Great – I have read the first PEL and fully understand the direction and next steps. (5/12 or 42%)
- b) Pretty good, but I still have a few questions. (7/12 or 58%)
- c) I have questions about the project. (0/12 or 0%)

Charles Markham, representing Joint Base Lewis McChord, asked for a link to the [Corridor PEL](#) study. City of Tumwater Mayor Debbie Sullivan requested further study of Exit 99, acknowledging that this corridor segment falls outside of the Focused PEL.

### **Study Area and Logical Termini**

The study team shared a map of the PEL Study project area between Marvin Road (Exit 111) and Mounts Road (Exit 116).

### **Existing Conditions**

The study team shared information on existing natural and built conditions identified in the PEL Study area so far. The study team will continue to research existing conditions along the corridor to help inform evaluation criteria. The EAG was reminded that a list of existing conditions datasets was sent as part of the meeting materials to review in advance of the meeting and requested the EAG review the list and share additional data sources the project should consider. Draft Methodology Memos that correspond to the disciplines presented during



the meeting are available for review upon request. Send to Ashley Carle, Study Lead, at [Ashley.Carle@wsdot.wa.gov](mailto:Ashley.Carle@wsdot.wa.gov).

### Natural Environment

The study team anticipates design challenges due to existing stormwater and water quality conditions along the corridor. The Nisqually River delta sits at a low point and the team is looking at a variety of alternatives to design for stormwater along the corridor. The study team is aware of protected resources as well as the industrial chemical 6PPD-quinone in stormwater runoff. The study team will work with this group and the design team to come up with design solutions.

The study team is mapping wetlands and other surface waters to include freshwater and estuarine throughout the corridor. Additionally, the study team is conducting extensive studies of aquatic resources and fish use, as well as working with the Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually Wildlife Refuge to conduct additional wildlife studies and existing conditions.

The study team is studying floodplains and sea level rise to include flood hazard areas in Nisqually River, McAllister Creek and Red Salmon Creek. WSDOT is using existing geology and soil information and doesn't anticipate a need for additional geological borings until the next phase of the project when a geological footprint has been established.

### Built Environment

The study team will look at visual impacts using the viewpoints, including those from the Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually Wildlife Refuge. WSDOT will study the area within a half-mile of the Olympia maintenance area to analyze air quality, greenhouse gas emissions and energy.

There is a high probability for finding cultural and historic resources and are aware of several known sites already. The study team is conducting Tribal coordination and plans to initiate "information consultation" during this PEL Study to ensure early feedback and comprehensive study area information.

WSDOT will conduct noise studies along the corridor, specifically along the southern end where more residential neighborhoods are located. The Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually Wildlife Refuge will also be considered as part of the noise study. The study team is aware of known hazardous sites within one mile of the PEL Study area and will include them in this study.

The land use varies a lot throughout the corridor and the study team will do a comprehensive study of the area to include farmlands and section 4(f) and 6(f) resources, the Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually Wildlife Refuge was noted primarily as a 6(f) resource. Sharon Love, representing the Federal Highway Administration, noted that section 4(f) is a regulation that requires that USDOT projects avoid impacts to Parks, Recreation, Wildlife Refuges, and Historic sites.

The study team is conducting socioeconomic and environmental justice studies to include outreach to EJ populations. The study team will ensure project information is shared equitably and in accessible formats.

Ahmer Nizam, WSDOT Environmental Services Office Director requested additional information about how PEL analysis will account for new Washington State Department of Ecology



guidance on climate change and greenhouse gas emission reduction. WSDOT is considering how this guidance will influence the screening criteria in collaboration with the Environmental Services Department, is coordinating with Jonathan Olds, and can share methodology reports with interested EAG participants.

EAG members also participated in a conversation about corridor segments outside of the PEL termini. City of Tumwater Mayor Debbie Sullivan noted projected growth and truck traffic development at Exit 99. Section 3, as identified in the Corridor PEL, is the focus of this I-5 Marvin to Mounts Rd PEL Study as is the subsequent NEPA documentation that will occur after the completion of this study. This section of I-5 requires a higher level NEPA analysis than the other two sections which is why it has been started first. Once the PEL Report is complete, WSDOT will advance Sections 1 and 2, concurrently with Section 3. The transportation alternatives all relate to each other and will be studied together.

### **Purpose and Need Overview**

The study team developed a Draft Purpose and Need statement to receive feedback on during the Purpose and Need discussion. In advance of the discussion, the study team provided an overview of a Purpose and Need statement, a fundamental building block of a NEPA document (Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement). The Purpose and Need determines the range of alternatives considered in the NEPA document and limits. It can also limit the range of alternative because an agency can dismiss without detailed study, to include alternatives suggested that either do not meet the purpose and need or are outside of the boundaries of the purpose and need. The study team reminded the EAG that participating agencies are required to provide comments “on the areas within the special expertise or jurisdiction of the agency.”

### **Conceptual PEL Purpose & Need**

The study team presented the Conceptual Purpose statements in four categories. The EAG was requested to provide comments on each of the categories:

1. Enhance mobility on I-5 for all travel modes and provide support for the regional HOV network.
2. Improve local and mainline I-5 system resiliency.
3. Enable environmental restoration and ecosystem resiliency at the I-5 crossing of the Nisqually River Delta area.
4. Support economic vitality through reliable freight movement and access to major employers.

### **Category 1: Enhance Mobility Needs**

The study team shared that the daily traffic volumes on the I-5 corridor have increased from 111,000 vehicles per day (2012) to 125,000 vehicles per day (2019). This is an annual growth of 1.5%. The traffic volume dropped in 2020 to 106,000 vehicles per day, when there was less driving due to Covid. More recent information shows traffic volumes have rebounded to 119,000 vehicles per day (2021) and 125,000 (2022).

Future data projects 2045 traffic volumes will be 20 to 30 percent higher than today, or 150,000 to 160,000 vehicles per day. The study team is accommodating these future projections as part of the planning in this study. Additionally, the study team shared awareness for the I-5 JBLM



Corridor South project, expected to be completed in 2024. That project will widen I-5 and transition from four to three lanes near Mounts Road, the north end and the PEL Study area.

Congestion relief is a main component of the Purpose and Need. There is increased congestion at Mounts Road that extends southbound to Gravelly Road, more than seven miles.

The study team is considering all modes to include Intercity Transit bus service between Olympia, Lakewood, and Tacoma, Amtrak Cascades passenger rails services, as well as regional active transportation connection between Thurston and Pierce County. The study team will also study a shared use path trail facility which does not currently exist along I-5 in this area.

#### Category 2: System Resiliency Needs

The system resiliency needs address the risk of I-5 infrastructure failures from climate change and sea level rise impacts, Nisqually River channel migration happening south of two truss bridges across the Nisqually River, flooding vulnerability, northbound bridge age (85 years) and Sufficiency Rating (48 out of 100) and substandard vertical and lateral vehicle clearance from truss design.

Additional effects of I-5 infrastructure failures include long detours from lane reductions and closures and increased congestion on arterial streets.

#### Category 3: Environmental Restoration and Ecosystem Resiliency Needs

The study team described that I-5 was historically built on soil fill. Environmental restoration of natural process and functions is needed to maintain habitat for salmon and other species and to restore natural tidal and river flow. The study team shared that design alternatives will include options to address removing different amounts of fill through the area and opening channels for natural process to occur. The study team added commitments from a meeting held with the Nisqually Indian Tribe which was to add meeting Treaty Rights of the Nisqually Indian Tribe.

The study team discussed the need to study ecosystem resiliency from climate change to address sea level rise effects on freshwater and saltwater mixing zones and extreme river flow events from the other side of the Nisqually River.

#### Category 4: Economic Vitality Needs

The study team discussed the need to maintain river navigability corridor to support commercial fishing operations for the Nisqually Indian Tribe. Additional economic vitality needs include I-5 as being a Truck Freight Economic Corridor and access to and from regional Port Districts. The I-5 corridor is part of the Strategic Highway Network and supports the operational viability of JBLM and Washington State National Guard. The corridor in this study also provides necessary access to destinations at Marvin Road interchange to include Hawk's Prairie Business District and Lacey Gateway Town Center.

The ACG and TAG provided the following comments on the draft purpose and need thus far:

- Provide clarity on how Environmental Justice will be established on this project.
- Include transit connectivity and mobility, to include commuter rail extension.
- Include support for salmon recovery efforts and recovery of Southern Region killer whales and Honor Treaty Right Obligations to the Nisqually Indian Tribe.





Following the review of the Draft Purpose and Need and the feedback gathered in prior meetings, the study team requested feedback from the EAG. A second poll was conducted to solicit feedback.

**Poll question #2:** After reviewing the conceptual Purpose and Need, does it include everything you expected?

- a) Yes, the Purpose and Need meets my expectations and my organization's preferences. (11/11 or 100%)
- b) The Purpose and Need includes some of what I expected, but not all. (0/11 or 0%)
- c) No, I would like to provide input to help shape it. (0/11 or 0%)

Additionally, EAG member Charles Markham, representing Joint Base Lewis McChord, requested the project team add seismic improvements system resiliency needs.

The study team reminded the EAG that meeting materials and request for comment on the Purpose and Need will be shared after the meeting as well. The study team will be collecting feedback on the Purpose and Need through February 8, 2023.

### Range of Alternatives

The WSDOT team described WSDOT's Range of Alternatives and request for feedback on the initial list. See slides for details; this summary will include EAG comments:

- Alternative 1 - Operations Improvements – no capacity or additional lanes
- Alternative 2 – Widen I-5 for HOV lanes (Design Options)—Bridge Replacement; widening to the inside; 14' shared use path
- Alternative 3 - Widen I-5 for GP lanes (Design Options)—Bridge Replacement; one lane in each direction; 14' shared use path
  - The study team shared the Nisqually existing flood overflows along I-5 in the project area and considered design options that align with Alternatives 2 and 3:
    - Design Option A [Widen for HOV lanes (Alt 2) or GP lanes (Alt 3)]: 3,000' of elevated structure.
    - Design Option B [Widen for HOV lanes (Alt 2) or GP lanes (Alt 3)]: Extends the bridge section to I-5 south; 6,000' of structure (over 1 mile) allowing the Nisqually to move as desired. McAllister Creek would be closer to original pre-I-5 construction alignments.
    - Design Option C [Widen for HOV lanes (Alt 2) or GP lanes (Alt 3)]: Involves I-5 on structure across the whole valley. Challenge is that I-5 is higher through the Nisqually interchange, requiring ramp structure reconfiguration.
    - Design Option D [Widen for HOV lanes (Alt 2) or GP lanes (Alt 3)]: High Level Long Span Bridge. No way to connect from a high-level bridge to the local road connections.
- Alternative 4 - Convert I-5 lanes from GP to HOV Lanes; no additional lanes; includes shared use path. Bridge maintenance and channel hardening improvements.



- Alternative 5 - Local Improvements in the area; also identified in the other PEL study; 3 projects in Yelm. Decided that this alternative will be removed as the improvements are already funded.

In meetings this month with the ACG and TAG, the project team gathered the following feedback on the initial range of alternatives:

- Look for the design that has the least impacts to wetlands and State waters, while also accounting for connecting and restoring historical aquatic ecosystems.
- Consider restoration plans as part of the study. An advisory group member made specific mention to restore an area of McAllister Creek.
- Consider how designs impact Billy Frank Estuary, the Medicine Creek Treaty National Memorial and a Douglas Fir tree near the I-5 slope.
- Identify local city improvements that are funded for design and construction. Examples given included a shared use trail and roundabout projects in the City of Yelm.

Following the review of the initial range of alternatives and the feedback from the ACG and TAG, the study team shared a third poll to solicit feedback from the EAG.

**Poll question #3:** After reviewing the conceptual range of alternatives, does it include everything you expected?

- a) Yes, the range of alternatives meets my expectations and my organization's preferences. (13/13 or 100%)
- b) The range of alternatives includes some of what I expected, but not all. (0/13 or 0%)
- c) No, I would like to provide an additional alternative or component to an alternative. (0/13 or 0%)

The study team shared that there will be opportunity for further review of the initial range of alternatives in February and March.

### **Alternatives Evaluation Process**

The study team re-shared a slide to provide an overview of the PEL process and four concurrence points. Today was focused on Purpose & Need which will be finalized in the next meeting.

### **Next steps**

The WSDOT team committed to the following:

- Distributing meeting materials for review and feedback, including the PDF presentation.
- Sending additional request for review and comment of Purpose and Need and conceptual range of alternatives.
- Reconvening the EAG on February 21 to review Meeting #1 summary, share new information from meeting #1 questions, reach consensus on Final Purpose and Need, and consider Level 1 Alternatives Evaluation Criteria.

***The meeting adjourned at 2:12 p.m.***