



I-5 Marvin Rd to Mounts Rd Planning and Environmental Linkages Agency Coordination Group Meeting #5 Summary

Meeting purpose

The purpose of the Agency Coordination Group (ACG) meeting was to:

- Review Proposed Preferred Alternative with Bridge Options
- Review Proposed NEPA Strategy
- Prepare for Draft PEL Report public review
- Celebrate participation in PEL process

Meeting logistics

May 15, 2023, 10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.
Virtual Meeting

Attendees

ACG Participants

- Brad Beach, Nisqually Indian Tribe
- Caroline Corcoran, Washington State Department of Ecology
- Cindy Callahan, Federal Highway Administration
- Dan Sacks, Joint Base Lewis McChord
- David Troutt, Nisqually Indian Tribe
- Dennis Wardlaw, Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation
- Glynnis Nakai, Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge
- Joe Cushman, Nisqually Indian Tribe
- Marty Chaney, Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Matthew Pahs, Federal Highway Administration
- Penny Kelley, Washington State Department of Ecology
- Portia Leigh, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Sharon Love, Federal Highway Administration
- Shaun Dinubilo, Squaxin Island Tribe of Indians
- Susan Sturges, Environmental Protection Agency

WSDOT Study Team

- Ashley Carle
- Emma Dorazio
- Hayley Nolan
- Jenifer Young
- John Perlic
- Kirk Wilcox
- Lucy Temple
- Rachel Durham
- Sharese Graham

Meeting Opening, Purpose and Goals

The I-5 Marvin Rd. to Mounts Rd. Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study Agency Coordination Group (ACG) met for the fifth time on Monday, May 15, 2023. The WSDOT study team began the presentation by welcoming participants, reviewing the agenda, and sharing best practices and guidance for engaging using Zoom features during the meeting.

The study team convened the ACG to receive input, facilitate active participation, and build an understanding of the PEL process among local agency representatives. In the fifth ACG meeting, participants reviewed the Proposed Preferred Alternative with Bridge Options and the Proposed NEPA Strategy and walked through the Draft PEL Report outline.

The responsibilities of the ACG include:

- Representing agencies and resources in the study area



- Providing data and input on direction of study
- Advising on range of alternatives and alternatives evaluation criteria
- Helping to build consensus and support for alternative(s) selection

Schedule and study process

The team reviewed the study schedule and status. The study is on track with the planned schedule, working to reach concurrence point number four by July, which will focus on the final PEL Report.

Outreach and coordination summary

Over the course of the PEL study, the study team shared information and gathered input from the public. Community engagement channels included:

- Online open house with two public comment periods
- Project email
- WSDOT blog
- Social media
- Community briefings and interviews
- Interviews with community-based organizations

Through these channels, the study team heard about the following community priorities:

- Address any environmental effects from the project
- Be compatible with high-capacity transit, including rail
- Include a separated shared-use path
- Consider induced demand from additional capacity
- Keep I-5 open during construction
- Consider improved/new alternate routes around I-5
- Preserve access to the Nisqually interchange/exit 114
- Maintain access through the corridor for people getting to work
- Consider potential increases in northbound traffic due to issues with affordable housing
- Mitigate construction impacts for roadway users and project area neighbors
- Share information about the upcoming changes to the corridor as design progresses
- Consider requests for improved transit in Thurston County and along this corridor

Moving into the NEPA process, which is anticipated to begin in September 2023, WSDOT will continue to engage community members. NEPA engagement efforts will include additional convenings of the ACG, TAG, and EAG, online open houses, and ongoing tribal consultation.

Discussion

Marty Chaney (Natural Resources Conservation Service) asked whether the study team will be planning specific engagement strategies for community members who will be impacted by construction. The study team reviewed notification strategies for NEPA.

Detailed Alternatives Evaluation Results

The study team reviewed the results of the Level 2 Alternatives Evaluation and changes since to the criteria ratings and results since Meeting 4. In the prior meeting, based on the results of the



Level 2 Alternatives Evaluation, ACG, TAG, and EAG members shared the most support for Alternative 2 and Design Options B and C.

The study team reached Concurrence Point #3 the week of May 8, which focuses on identifying alternatives to advance into NEPA, in partnership with the Federal Highway Administration. The study team is seeking agreement on the Purpose and Need, Range of Alternatives, and the Preferred Alternative with the Nisqually Tribal Council this month.

Based on the Alternative Evaluation results and advisory group feedback, the study team will be including the final Preferred Alternative in the Final Report. The Preferred Alternative includes Alternative 2 with Bridge Options A – C and a shared-use path for the full length of the project, north of I-5:

- Alternative 2 includes a widened I-5 with managed/HOV lanes, which will provide operational flexibility, maintain consistency with adjacent sections of I-5, and maintain flexibility for compatibility with the upcoming I-5 Border to Border Master Plan and PEL.
- Bridge Options will be refined during NEPA, and the Preferred Alternative may be a hybrid of the Bridge Options studied in the PEL.
- The shared use path will be a minimum of 14 feet wide, will include rest and view areas, and will provide access to local streets.

Discussion

- Marty Chaney (Natural Resources Conservation Service) asked about the shared use path access point on the north end of the corridor. The shared use path will follow along I-5 up to the Mounts Road Interchange vicinity, where it will either connect to local roadways at the interchange itself or just before. The study team will continue to refine the design of the shared use path during NEPA.
- Glynnis Nakai (Billy Frank Jr Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge) asked whether there will be access to the Billy Frank Jr Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge from the pathway. People using the shared use path can access the refuge from the Nisqually interchange area but will not have direct access from the path to the refuge.

Proposed NEPA strategy

The study team reviewed the roadmap for the NEPA process. During the PEL study, the study team conducted field work, gathered data, and engaged community members to understand the potential for environmental benefits and impacts and inform the recommendation for the proposed NEPA strategy.

Some key findings from this analysis include:

- Construction, in particular the removal of fill, could cause periods of water quality impacts, but the project has the potential to provide significant water quality benefits incorporating stormwater runoff treatment.
- The project would result in both temporary and permanent wetland impacts. Benefits to wetlands include creating 20 or more new acres of wetland and creating an opportunity for distributary channels to return to more natural flow patterns.
- This project could result in changes to flood levels in the immediate vicinity. Overall, the project would support I-5 resiliency to climate change and to the effects of channel migration.



- Changes to I-5 could result in visual quality impacts for viewers in the natural areas, nearby residents, and roadway users. Improved views to the Billy Frank Jr Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge for I-5 users could provide a potential visual quality benefit.
- The study team will conduct additional surveying to understand the impacts to the Medicine Creek Treaty National Memorial Site during NEPA. Reconnection of historic stream channels and associated habitat would help restore a traditional cultural landscape and would also benefit tribal treaty fishing.
- The project could result in land use impacts for farmlands and Section 4(f) and 6(f) lands. The study team will aim to identify mitigation opportunities to minimize impacts. The Preferred Alternative is anticipated to fit within the existing right-of-way (ROW).
- While construction and changes to I-5 could create hardships for businesses in the project area, reduced congestion and improved transit travel times will improve outcomes for Environmental Justice (EJ) populations along the project corridor.

Based on the information available and input from key informants, the study team is recommending an Environmental Assessment (EA) as the proposed NEPA strategy. This recommendation aligns with the project’s potential environmental effects, environmental benefits, and lack of public controversy. The NEPA process will include additional public scoping to provide opportunities for the community and agency partners to continue informing the environmental review process.

Discussion

- Penny Kelley (Washington State Department of Ecology) asked whether the shared use path could be considered mitigation for visual quality impacts. The study team will explore this suggestion.
- Penny Kelley also invited the study team to consider any potential mitigation strategies needed for permitting processes, like Shoreline Permitting and the Coastal Zone Management Act. The study team shared appreciation for this comment and will continue collaborating with partner agencies to identify necessary permits during NEPA.
- Shaun Dinubilo (Squaxin Island Tribe of Indians) noted that cultural resource surveying can be destructive, and that cultural resource investigation should proceed mitigation and surveying coordination. The study team will assess the need for surveying critically, in partnership with tribes, to avoid further impact to cultural resources.
- Susan Sturges (Environmental Protection Agency) asked whether the Environmental Assessment will engage community members in the development of mitigation strategies for EJ communities spanning the entire period of construction. The stages of construction, identification of construction impacts, and potential mitigation strategies will be further determined during the NEPA process.

Draft PEL Report

The study team provided an outline of the I-5 Marvin Road to Mounts Road Draft PEL Report, which will be available for public review between June 1-30. The Report will include the following sections.

Report section	Description
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1. Introduction and Purpose and Need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describes PEL requirements and streamlined connection to NEPA • Provides contextual background and study area definition • Defines the project purpose and related needs • Provides a summary of current corridor conditions in the Existing and Future Baseline Conditions Report
2. Agency and Public Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describes PEL outreach process with partners • Tribal Consultation • Agency Coordination Group • Technical Advisory Group • Executive Advisory Group • CBOs and Special Interest Groups • Highlights community engagement findings
3. Alternatives Description	<p>Summarizes a range of reasonable alternatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternative 1 — Operations Improvements (Bridge Options A, B, C) • Alternative 2 — Widen I-5 for managed/HOV lanes (Bridge Options A, B, C, D) • Alternative 3 — Widen I-5 for GP Lanes (Bridge Options A, B, C, D) • Alternative 4 — Convert I-5 Lanes from GP to HOV Lanes (Bridge Options A, B, C)
4. Alternatives Evaluation Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defines alternatives evaluation criteria • Explains results for initial and detailed evaluations and reasons for eliminating alternatives/options • Initial evaluation results <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Eliminated Alternative 1, Alternative 4, and Design Option D • Detailed evaluation results <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identified Alternative 2—widen for managed/HOV lanes was the highest performing alternative
5. Recommended Alternative and Bridge Options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies Alternative 2 (widening for managed/HOV lanes) as the Preferred Alternative based on alternatives evaluation results <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Improves travel times and reduces congestion for general purpose and HOV travel ○ Performs high in 'Access to Opportunity' evaluation criteria • Recommends Bridge Options A, B, and C for advancement to NEPA
6. Environmental Resource Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documents existing conditions of the study area for each environmental discipline • Describes potential environmental effects and benefits that will be studied in detail during NEPA review
7. Next Steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies anticipated federal, state, and local permits that will be required during NEPA review • Outlines recommended coordination process with partners • Recommends NEPA strategy



Appendices will include:

- A. *PEL Questionnaire*
- B. *Existing Environmental Conditions Memos*
- C. *Coordination and Public Participation Summary*
- D. *FHWA Concurrence and Support Letters*

Reflections and next steps

Before closing the meeting, the study team invited participants to share what they are looking forward to in NEPA. One participant shared general excitement about the project and interest in the upcoming technical studies.

The study team shared the following next steps:

- Post meeting materials for review
- Online Open House June 1-30
- Publish Final Report in July
- Begin NEPA in September

The meeting adjourned at 10:56 a.m.