



## I-5 Marvin Rd to Mounts Rd Planning and Environmental Linkages Executive Advisory Group Meeting #3 Summary

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### Meeting purpose

- Confirm Level 1 Alternatives Evaluation Criteria
- Review and gather input on Level 1 Alternatives Evaluation Results
- Review and gather input on Level 2 Alternatives Evaluation Criteria

### Meeting logistics

March 21, 2023, 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Virtual Meeting

### Attendees

#### *EAG Participants*

- Christine Wolf, NW Seaport Alliance
- Dan Sacks, Joint Base Lewis McChord
- Darryl Abe, Joint Base Lewis McChord
- David Troutt, Nisqually Indian Tribe
- Jen Tetatzin, Pierce County
- Liana Lui, Federal Highway Administration
- Marc Daily, Thurston Regional Planning Council
- Mayor Debbie Sullivan, City of Tumwater
- Mayor Joe DePinto, City of Yelm
- Mayor Ronald Frederick, City of DuPont
- Melissa McFadden, Pierce County
- Mike Griffus, Pierce Transit
- Peter Stackpole, Intercity Transit
- Ralph Rizzo, Federal Highway Administration
- Sharon Love, Federal Highway Administration

#### *WSDOT Project team*

- Ahmer Nizam, WSDOT
- Ashley Carle, WSDOT
- Emma Dorazio, PRR
- Gaius Sanoy, WSDOT
- George Mazur, WSDOT
- JoAnn Schueler, WSDOT
- John Perlic, Parametrix
- Kirk Wilcox, WSDOT
- Lauren Wheeler, PRR
- Lucy Temple, WSDOT
- Rachel Durham, Parametrix
- Sharese Graham, SCJ Alliance
- Victoria Book, WSDOT

### Meeting Opening, Purpose and Goals

The I-5 Marvin Rd. to Mounts Rd. Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study Executive Advisory Group (EAG) met for the third time on Tuesday, March 21, 2023. The WSDOT study team began the presentation by welcoming participants, reviewing the agenda, and leading the EAG through introductions. The study team provided best practices and guidance for engaging using Zoom features during the meeting.

The study team convened the EAG to receive input, facilitate active participation, and build an understanding of the PEL process among local agency executives. In the third EAG meeting, participants will confirm Level 1 Alternatives Evaluation Criteria and share input on Level 1 Alternatives Evaluation Results and Level 2 Alternatives Evaluation Approach.

The responsibilities of the EAG 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 Approach
- 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. The team reached FHWA concurrence point number two in early March, which focused on the Purpose and Need Statement. Concurrence point number three will focus on Alternatives Evaluation in TAG Meetings 3 and 4. Concurrence point number four, planned for July, will focus on the final PEL Report.

The study team provided a recap of Meeting 1, held on January 30, 2023, and Meeting 2, held on February 21, 2023. During Meetings 1 and 2, the study team shared the project background and desired outcomes of the study, advisory groups reached consensus on the Purpose and Need and Range of Alternatives and existing data sources, and participants shared feedback on the Alternatives Evaluation Process and the Level 1 Alternatives Evaluation Criteria.

### **Public comment on alternatives**

Between February 15 and March 1, 2023, the study team received more than 250 comments on the proposed alternatives from the WSDOT project website, the project email, the WSDOT blog, social media, and during community briefings and interviews.

The study team provided a summary of the feedback received via public comment:

- Concern about understanding the environmental effects of the project
- High-Capacity Transit (HCT) compatibility, including rail
- Need for a separated shared-use path
- Induced demand from additional capacity
- Need to keep I-5 open during construction
- Need for improved/new alternate routes around I-5
- Importance of the Nisqually interchange/exit 114
- Suggestion of freight-only lane

### *Discussion*

Mayor Ronald Frederick (City of DuPont) commented in support of the public feedback.

### **Updates to Level 1 Alternatives Evaluation Criteria**

Based on the feedback shared by the EAG, Agency Coordination Group (ACG), and Technical Advisory Group (TAG) during meeting series 1 and 2, the study team made the following changes to the Level 1 Alternatives Evaluation Criteria:

- Separating congestion relief criteria into two, which now read as follows:
  - Provides congestion relief for general purpose (GP) vehicles/trucks
  - Provides congestion relief for transit and High Occupancy Vehicles (HOV)
- Removing the bridge strike risk criteria, as all alternatives include replacement of the Nisqually River truss bridges.
- Adding criteria to measure negative impact on emergency response times.
- Updating language in the economic vitality criteria to measure outcomes for multimodal access to *opportunities*, rather than employment alone.



The study team previewed how the changes to the criteria will appear in the evaluation matrix and requested input from the EAG. The study team shared a poll to ask if EAG members were satisfied with the updated Level 1 Alternatives Evaluation Criteria.

***Poll #1: Do you support the updated Evaluation Criteria?***

- a) Yes (10/10 or 100%)
- b) No (0/0 or 0%)

**Initial Alternatives Evaluation results**

John Perlic reviewed the features of Alternatives 1-4 and Bridge Options A-D.

Mayor Ronald Frederick asked whether, in the case that Design Option D is selected, the study team has considered connecting Mounts Rd, which currently dead ends, to the Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge access road. The study team noted that access to the Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge will be maintained via local roadways. The study team shared appreciation for the idea but noted the solution would require a new bridge across the Nisqually River.

Enhance mobility and connectivity

*Evaluation Summary*

- Alternatives 2 and 3 provide added capacity for HOV/transit and General Purpose/trucks and rated high-moderate compared to Alternative 1 (rated low) and Alternative 4 (rated low-moderate)
- Alternative 2 rates slightly higher than Alternative 3 (4 high ratings compared to 3 high ratings)

System resiliency

*Evaluation Summary*

- Design options with longer bridges (C and D) remove the risk of erosion and channel migration from the entire Nisqually River Delta area compared to only a portion of the area with shorter bridges (A and B).
- All new structures will be built to current seismic code.
- The study team will report back on the question regarding tsunami activity and resilience.

Environmental restoration and ecosystem resiliency

*Evaluation Summary*

- Design options with longer bridges (Options C and D) would provide environmental restoration of the entire Nisqually River Delta area, compared to only a portion of the area with shorter bridges (Options A and B).
- Design Options B - D would address impacts associated with flood events in all overflow channels, while Design Option A would address impacts associated with flood events in some overflow channels.



### *Discussion*

Mayor Ronald Frederick asked if evaluation of environmental restoration and ecosystem resiliency criteria considers glacial melt and extreme events like lahar flows. The study team will consider snow melt, sea level rise, and other complex weather and climate interactions during NEPA modeling. All bridge design options will open more channels for flooding and other extreme weather and climate events. David Troutt (Nisqually Indian Tribe) noted that a lahar is not likely to clear the Alder Reservoir on its way to the Nisqually River basin.

### Economic vitality

#### *Evaluation Summary*

- Freight reliability and delay is lowest with Alternative 3.
- Alternatives 2 and 3 would improve access to jobs and recreation opportunities for active transportation users, HOV, transit, and GP traffic.
- Design Option D removes the Nisqually interchange, which removes direct I-5 access to adjacent businesses.

### Equitable outcomes

#### *Evaluation Summary*

- All alternatives would have minimal displacements or impacts since the footprint is expected to be within the existing WSDOT right-of-way.
- Design Option D may require business displacements in the Nisqually interchange area.
- Alternatives 2 and 3 are expected to decrease emergency response times due to reduced congestion.
- Option D closes the Nisqually Interchange, resulting in increased emergency response times to and from this area.
- All alternatives address the impacts associated with extreme river flood events, minimizing impacts to Environmental Justice populations.

### Relative Cost

#### *Evaluation Summary*

- Design Option A has the shortest elevated structure and lowest cost compared to Design Option D with the longest elevated structure and the highest cost.

### *Discussion*

Mayor Debbie Sullivan (City of Tumwater) acknowledged that costs estimated during early planning often increase greatly during engineering and design and asked how the project team plans to acknowledge this lack of certainty in the Final PEL Report. The project team will develop thoughtful messaging in the Final PEL Report to communicate that the planning level costs are subject to change.

### Summary

The study team presented the following summary of the initial Alternatives Evaluation results:

- Alternatives 2 and 3 rate highest overall with more high ratings than Alternatives 1 and 4

- Alternatives 1 and 4 rate lowest overall with Alternative 1 rated slightly lower than Alternative 4
- Options B and C rate higher overall than Options A and D
- Option D rates low in the Support Equitable Outcomes and Relative Cost of Alternatives categories.

#### *Discussion*

- Dan Sacks (JBLM) asked whether the addition of a HOV or a general purpose lane (GP) would provide a greater overall benefit to total traffic flow. The study team noted that the addition of an HOV lane would mean greater throughput in terms of moving more people in fewer vehicles compared to a GP lane. However, there are pros and cons to both options.
- Mayor Ronald Frederick asked whether the study team had considered an alternative that adds both a GP lane and a HOV lane. The study team noted that, while this alternative is possible, it is not currently in the array of alternatives considered for the Focused PEL.
- Dan Sacks referenced the recent [JBLM Corridor project](#) and noted that, despite community preference for GP lanes compared to HOV lanes, WSDOT ultimately elected to build an HOV lane. The study team noted that once lanes are constructed, the department can switch the lane designations. Lane designations are influenced by regional and national goals, which currently favor the establishment of a core HOV network, a focus on moving people and goods instead of vehicles, and greenhouse gas emission reductions. The study team will follow up with more detailed evaluation results after the meeting.
- Mayor Debbie Sullivan noted that prioritization of HOV lanes must be paired with funding and support for local transportation agencies. The study team appreciated this comment and noted that the decision to designate a new lane for GP or HOV will incorporate consideration of TRPC planning, state, regional, and national goals, and other corridor priorities.
- Mayor Ronald Frederick commented that, without an additional GP lane, the improvements on I-5 may quickly be outpaced by demand. Mike Griffus (Pierce Transit) and David Troutt (Nisqually Indian Tribe) commented to express support for investment in corridor expansion.

The study team reviewed the poll results taken during ACG Meeting 3 and TAG Meeting 3 to measure support for project alternatives and design options. Participants shared majority support for Alternatives 2 and 3 and Design Options B and C. Following this review, the study team asked the EAG to participate in the same series of polls. EAG polls responses are listed below.

#### ***Poll #2: Which Alternative(s) do you support advancing into the next round of evaluation?***

- a) Alternative 1 – Operations Improvements (1/11 or 9%)
- b) Alternative 2 – Widen I-5 for HOV lanes (7/11 or 64%)
- c) Alternative 3 – Widen I-5 for General Purpose lanes (6/11 or 55%)



- d) Alternative 4 – Convert I-5 lanes from General Purpose to HOV (1/11 or 9%)

**Poll #3: Which bridge option(s) do you support advancing into the next round of evaluation?**

- a) Option A – 3,000 ft (2/11 or 18%)
- b) Option B – 6,000 ft (5/11 or 45%)
- c) Option C – 12,000 ft (10/11 or 91%)
- d) Option D – 14,000 ft (2/11 or 18%)

**Level 2 Alternatives Evaluation Criteria**

For Level 2 analysis, the study team will use the same evaluation criteria with an expanded rating scale from 3 to 5 colors. The study team will consider adding criteria to the Detailed Evaluation based on comments and feedback on the Draft Initial Alternatives Evaluation results. The study team will also add quantitative analysis results to several of the evaluation criteria and look at existing conditions of all resources in the corridor that have the potential to be impacted. Finally, the team will review existing conditions in the corridor for all resources potentially affected, including but not limited to:

- Cultural/historic
- Wetlands, endangered species act listed species
- Floodways, sea level rise
- Socioeconomics and environmental justice
- Property acquisition (full and partial)
- Parklands and recreation

Based on feedback from prior meetings, we'll also consider separating our analysis of active transportation and public transportation improvements, how the removal of the Nisqually interchange may impact future transit operations, the combined impact of king tides and heavy rains on flooding, and fill removal impacts on water salinity levels.

*Discussion*

- Christine Wolf (NW Seaport Alliance) asked the study team to evaluate congestion improvements for truck traffic separately from public transportation and person throughput.
- Marc Daily (TRPC) expressed support for evaluating active transportation, public transportation, commercial driving improvements, and person throughput separately. Marc Daily also noted that TRPC planning assumes that the city of Yelm bypass and roundabouts will be completed before improvements on I-5. If these improvements are delayed past the improvement timeline for I-5, transportation modeling may no longer be accurate. The study team expressed appreciation for the comment.

**Next steps**

The study team shared the following next steps:

- WSDOT to post meeting materials for review
- EAG to respond to a follow up poll to confirm support for advancing alternatives into detailed evaluation
- EAG to review and share comments on detailed Level 2 Alternatives Evaluation Criteria
- WSDOT to share updated evaluation criteria and results before April meeting



The next EAG meeting is April 19, 2023. During EAG Meeting 4, the study team will present the result of Level 2 Alternatives Evaluation and facilitate a conversation about which alternatives will move into the final PEL.

***The meeting adjourned at 2:13 p.m.***