

**PUGET SOUND GATEWAY PROGRAM  
– PHASE 1 OF THE SR 167  
COMPLETION PROJECT**

**NEPA Re-Evaluation Public Comment  
Summary**

**Prepared for**  
Federal Highway Administration  
Washington State Department of Transportation

**Prepared by**  
SR 167 Project Team

March 2019

## **Re-Evaluation Comments and Responses**

**Comment:**

I have some questions regarding fill location off of Levey Rd.

**Response:**

WSDOT responded via personal phone call to address these questions.

**Comment:**

How many times will you delay and redefine this project? I've seen overpasses carpool lots and interchanges added, removed and redesigned with every version of this project. What is this Version 3.2.1 numbers running off that never end. When the Gas Tax funding passed at least 8 years ago we had a timeline to start construction 2010 the intersection at Meridian to our relief would be starting soon. Now again it's been redefined like Lucy grabbing the "T" up football again! The Piece of this project that needs to be completed is Meridian to Valley we have 2 freight companies FedEx and UPS relocated to Valley Ave. with SR-167 traffic volume at 35 MPH. On Fridays the traffic has backup in the south turn lane from Meridian past the location of the new Valley intersection in Fife but still no relief until 2035? In this latest Version changes to scale down and streamline I agree it should have started here now put the shovel to the ground starting at Meridian and work North!

**Response:**

Thank you for your comment. The SR 167 Completion Project will build the last segment of State Route 167, which has been planned since the late 1950s, so your concern about delay is understandable. The Puget Sound Gateway Program, which is comprised of both the SR 167 Completion Project and the SR 509 Completion Project, received funding from the Washington State Legislature for environmental studies, preliminary design, and right of way in previous funding packages in 1991, 2003 and 2005. It was not until the 2015 Connecting Washington transportation package that the Legislature provided funding for construction. Since Connecting Washington funding comes from the gas tax, funding is provided over a 16-year timeline as the gas tax revenue is generated. The Stage 1 portion of the project will build the highway from SR 509 to Interstate 5 to serve the trips to the Port of Tacoma and the Tidelands area, supporting economic growth. This work will begin in 2019 and be complete by 2026. The Stage 2 portion of the project will build the highway between Puyallup and I-5 and our current schedule shows this work beginning in 2026 and being completed by 2030. However, the Legislature directed WSDOT to explore the possibility of compressing the delivery schedule for both the SR 509 and SR 167 projects and we recently submitted a *Benefits of Program Acceleration* report to them for consideration. If the Legislature takes action to accelerate the schedule, Stage 2 could be delivered up to three years earlier.

Regarding the intersection at Meridian and Valley Avenue, our traffic modeling shows that, once Stage 2 of the SR 167 Completion Project is completed, the intersection will experience improved traffic flow.

**Comment:**

Hello, I am very much a fan of the current plans with SR 167 that you have posted here. However, I do not support having all lanes of the new highway being tolled. I believe only half should be.

Thank you for taking the time to read my comment.

**Response:**

Thank you for your comment. Tolling all lanes of the new highway is necessary for a few different reasons. The 2015 Connecting Washington revenue package provided the majority of the funds for the Puget Sound Gateway Program from the gas tax, however the state Legislature intended for a portion of the overall funding to come from toll revenue. Tolling on SR 167 is expected to raise a portion (approximately \$95 million) of the total estimated \$1 billion needed to construct the project.

In addition to generating revenue to help pay for the project, WSDOT needs to toll SR 167 and SR 509 to manage traffic. Without tolling, WSDOT will not be able to manage traffic flow where these corridors connect to I-5. Traffic forecasting shows that both SR 167 and SR 509 would become extremely congested without tolling. Tolling half the lanes also would not raise the revenue necessary to meet the legislative intent to raise \$95 million from tolling.

Toll revenue will be used to pay for maintenance, operations, and could be used for future improvements on this segment of the SR 167 corridor.

**Comment:**

I am an urban planner living in the Tacoma area, and frequently study parcels in the Sumner and Puyallup valleys. I use the 167 corridor to reach these areas from Tacoma. I would like to encourage WSDOT to design left turns to permit flashing yellow arrows. For example, the left turn from SR-99 to the new bridge over I-5, as well as the left turn onto southbound 167 from Valley Ave (if there are plans to signalize that movement at all). I would also like to encourage WSDOT to make the Stage 1 off-ramp from southbound I-5 to northbound 167 a double left turn. The graphics suggest that there will only be one left turn lane for this important movement. It may also be wise to adjust the route number for the extension of 167 between SR-161 and I-5, since the cardinal directions will be the opposite of the actual direction. Thank you for your time.

**Response:**

Thank you for these suggestions. WSDOT is currently in the process of designing all five interchanges to determine the optimal geometric configuration of these interchanges. The current design for the I-5/SR 167 interchange is a Diverging Diamond, which is more efficient and safer than traditional designs. There are over 60 of these interchanges across the nation, and the first one in Washington State is currently being constructed on I-5 in Lacey (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5qLxIXamhgY&feature=youtu.be>). With a Diverging Diamond design, southbound I-5 to northbound SR 167 is controlled by a traffic signal, but it is very efficient because the signal does not have a separate phase (cycle) for left turns. In addition, we are in the process of comparing traffic operations of signals and roundabouts at several intersections along the corridor. To minimize driver confusion the signing for the new segment of highway will match the existing signing along the remainder of SR 167.

**Comment:**

NO MORE TOLLS !!! thank you

**Response:**

Thank you for your comment. The Washington State Legislature's intent is that toll revenue from this facility be used to pay back bonds for construction, to maintain and operate the facility, and to manage traffic to provide reliable speeds. While the Washington state gas tax still provides most of this project's funding, revenue from gas tax is falling due to increases in electric vehicles and fuel-efficient hybrids, causing the Legislature to look for alternative funding mechanisms. Additionally, current revenue from the gas tax is primarily used to pay back bonds for completed projects. Without tolls, the SR 167 project could not be constructed based on current federal and state gas taxes.

**Comment:**

I can't wait. Build it now. Sorry to see the loss of HOV lanes but the priority is to build ASAP.

**Response:**

Thank you for your comment. The construction timeline for this project is constrained by the funding schedule put forth in the 2015 Connecting Washington revenue package. The project is currently on an 11-year design and construction timeline. However, the Washington State Legislature directed WSDOT to explore the possibility of compressing the delivery schedule for both the SR 509 and SR 167 projects and we recently submitted a *Benefits of Program Acceleration* report to them for consideration. If the Legislature takes action to accelerate the schedule, Stage 2 could be delivered up to three years earlier. The HOV lanes are not included because there was insufficient funding to build three lanes in each direction at this time. Our modeling shows that tolling on the facility will manage traffic and help provide reliable speeds.

**Comment:**

This is explained as “improvements”, however it appears to be a large scale-back from the initial plan...plus new tolling. I am extremely opposed to this new scaled-down plan, and even more extremely opposed to the tolling addition.

Living in Tacoma for the last 20 years, I have been in the thick of the terrible traffic (I5) that has been occurring because an original road plan was not built to factor in growth in the first place. This new revised plan for 167 is taking away all of the room for expected growth in the south sound. We have sat through enough construction traffic on hwy 16/15 and I do not wish to do the same thing on 167 in 10 years because it was not built to accommodate growth. Please, keep the original number of lanes with HOV lanes and NO TOLLING!!!! Get it done right the first time!

**Response:**

Thank you for your comments. When the SR 167 Completion Project started acquiring property for the future highway in 2000, we acquired enough property to build three lanes in each direction. While the plans for Phase 1 have been reduced to two lanes in each direction, this right of way acquisition makes it possible to potentially widen the highway in the future, if additional funding is obtained. That being said, one of the main benefits of tolling this new segment of highway is that tolling will be used to “manage” the traffic volume using the highway. If volumes are getting too high and starting to cause unreasonable congestion, the toll rate can be increased during those peak hours to decrease volumes and ease congestion. This management tool is intended to minimize the need for future expansion.

The Phase 2 elements of HOV lanes and additional interchange ramps would double the cost of the project, for which there is no funding. The decision to reduce the project to two lanes in each direction for Phase 1 was the result of WSDOT's Practical Solutions process, wherein local stakeholders helped define the most critical elements of the project to use the funding provided by the Legislature most efficiently.

We understand that congestion and ongoing construction are issues on Interstate 5 through Tacoma and Fife. The Legislature made a significant investment in that corridor, and building those improvements while maintaining reliability for 200,000 cars per day has been challenging. The good news is that we are just beginning the last project as part of this HOV program which will build the new southbound I-5 Puyallup River Bridge.

Tolls are needed on this facility to pay back bonds for construction, maintain and operate the facility, and manage traffic to help provide reliable speeds. While the Washington state gas tax still provides most of this project's funding, new fuel standards are reducing revenue, causing the Legislature to look for alternative funding mechanisms. Additionally, current revenue from the gas tax is primarily used to pay back bonds for completed projects. Without tolls, the SR 167 project could not be constructed based on current federal and state gas taxes.

**Comment:**

Although I can appreciate the i5/167 connector, I think your recent study is extremely inaccurate. Your literature states 167 is a viable route between Puyallup and Kent. However, the main body of the freeway is vastly undersized. The new HOV lanes completed last year did nothing to relieve traffic congestion. Congestion was pushed further south into summer and Puyallup. Now, with an extension to bring traffic and commerce from i5 your want to add more traffic to 167? This is not sustainable. More and more people moving to south Puget sound and pierce county is choking 167 as it is. Now you want to add freight, semis, and more passenger vehicles?!? Aside from that, I doubt you've traversed meridian at the Puyallup river. It's a congested nightmare. And with this extension you want to make this a major on/off ramp area? WSDOT has proven themselves incapable of designing and engineering viable solutions to our congested traffic. With this extension planned to be completed in 2036 you really think 4 lanes (2 each way) will be a viable corridor from Puyallup to Tacoma? 167 as a 4 lane highway as it is can't sustain the vehicle traffic as it is. I don't think your survey and analysis thoroughly anticipated higher vehicle traffic 20 years from now. I would recommend a re-evaluation if the needs of the local Puyallup community, the needs of 167 as a whole, and the anticipated traffic 20 years from now. You are setting yourself up for another failure and total embarrassment.

**Response:**

Thank you for your comment. One purpose of the SR 167 Completion Project is to improve traffic flow by providing a reliable freight route that keeps trucks off local streets. The analysis WSDOT completed to assess the effects of the SR 167 Completion Project on traffic congestion, which extends to 2045 and assumes high growth in traffic volumes, shows improvements in traffic flow and reduced congestion. The Meridian interchange with SR 167 has been planned since the 1980s, and is anticipated in the City of Puyallup's Comprehensive Plan. In concert with other interchanges, the SR 167 Completion Project will improve congestion in the Puyallup area.

While the plans for Phase 1 have been reduced to two lanes in each direction, there is room for future widening of the highway under a Phase 2 if additional funding is obtained. The decision to reduce to two lanes in each direction was the result of WSDOT's Practical Solutions process, wherein local stakeholders helped define the most critical elements of the project to use the funding provided by the Legislature most efficiently.

In addition, there is \$30 million funded under a separate project for WSDOT to add a HOV lane to northbound SR 167 from Puyallup to Pacific in 2021. There are plans for a southbound lane in this section, but it is unfunded at this time.

**Comment:**

I see no problems with the plan and have waited many years to see this happen. I just wish it could be done without tolling. We're paying for this with taxpayers' gas tax money along with the grants, and tolling just seems so unnecessary. When is the predicted end date for tolling?

**Response:**

Thank you for your comment. The Legislature is responsible for determining which roadways are tolled in Washington. Construction bonds can be as long as 30 years. Once the bonds have been paid a determination will need to be made whether to continue tolling to pay for operations and maintenance costs of the highway, to continue to manage traffic, and/or to add additional interchange ramps. Tolling is necessary on this project for a few different reasons. The 2015 Connecting Washington revenue package intended toll revenue to finance \$95 million as part of the SR 167 Completion Project's funding plan. Tolling also will manage traffic volumes on the 24 lane miles of new roadway, which will help with speed reliability.

**Comment:**

Please end all tolls, 167, narrows bridge, 405, 99 tunnel, and the floating bridge. Find some other way to pay for your projects. I know that you keep collecting tolls long after the project have been paid for. End all Tolls.

**Response:**

Thank you for your comment. The 2015 Connecting Washington revenue package intended toll revenue as part of the SR 167 Completion Project's funding plan. Tolls are needed on this facility in order to pay back bonds for construction, maintain and operate the facility, and manage traffic to help provide reliable speeds. While the Washington state gas tax still provides most of this project's funding, new fuel standards are reducing revenue, causing the Legislature to look for alternative funding mechanisms. Additionally, current revenue from the gas tax is primarily used to pay back bonds for completed projects.

The Legislature is responsible for determining which roadways are tolled in Washington. For the last decade, the Legislature has directed WSDOT to use tolling to generate needed revenue for transportation improvements, and enhances mobility in some of state's most congested corridors. Toll revenues are used to fund capital investments and to cover ongoing operation and maintenance costs for toll facilities. Without tolls, many of these projects could not have been constructed based on current federal and state gas taxes.

As our region grows, tolling will continue to be a crucial tool in building a transportation system that can support the forecasted population and jobs growth, creating corridors where transit times are more reliable and providing drivers with choices for how to best manage their commutes.