

# Public Open House Highlights

The virtual open house for the Planning and Environmental Linkages Study was open from March 14 through March 28<sup>th</sup>. Eighty-seven public comments were received via the online comment form, and three comment letters were received.

The following bullets summarize some of the common themes and highlights from the public comments. Public comments will be used in our next step of NEPA review.

## **Support for multimodal opportunities, including rail and public transit, and traffic demand management (TDM)**

- Many comments supported multimodal options and requested more effort be focused on increasing multimodal opportunities, including rail and public transit.
- Several comments suggested traffic demand management (TDM) strategies, such as encouraging employers to offer staggered work schedules, increased telework, etc.

RESPONSE: The Corridor Study, which was completed from 2018-2020 and fed into the PEL Study, looked at over 150 ideas for improving congestion on this section of I-5. The strategies that were further assessed fit into ten scenario categories. These scenarios included land use, transit, and TDM. More information on the Corridor Study is here:

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/83988afb1ef04ece85035b9b6155811e> .

The purpose of the PEL Study was to further assess strategies that will be moved forward to the NEPA phase with WSDOT as the NEPA lead agency. Land use, transit, and TDM are not included in the PEL Study because WSDOT would not be the NEPA lead agency for these scenarios. However, these scenarios are being moved forward by WSDOT partners in the study area.

WSDOT remains committed to improving multimodal transportation, including biking, rail, and transit, and we will continue working with our partners on this, as well as supporting land use decisions and TDM that encourage a reduction in vehicles on our state highways.

In 2022, the Washington State legislature appropriated \$250,000 of the multimodal transportation account solely for Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC) to conduct a study examining options for multimodal high-capacity transportation to serve travelers on the I-5 corridor between central Thurston County (Olympia area) and Pierce County.

## **Environmental Concerns**

- Several public comments voiced concerns over environmental impacts associated with the existing highway system and proposed strategies. These include concerns about impacts of infrastructure and stormwater on public waterways, including Capitol Lake and the Nisqually River.

RESPONSE: WSDOT remains committed to meeting or exceeding regulatory environmental standards. Moving these strategies into the NEPA phase will help us identify potential environmental impacts and evaluate alternatives to avoid, minimize, and mitigate for environmental impacts. Environmental impacts to be assessed include but are not limited to impacts related to: wetlands, streams, fish passage, stormwater, endangered species, historic and cultural resources, environmental justice populations, public facilities, noise, and air quality.

## **Truck Traffic Concerns**

- Several comments voiced concerns over truck traffic on this corridor, including concerns about freight volume and safety.
- Several comments suggested requiring trucks to adhere to a lower speed limit than passenger vehicles.
- Several comments suggested a truck bypass in this corridor.

RESPONSE: According to Washington state law, any vehicle towing a trailer, or other vehicle or combination over 10,000 pounds, may not be driven in the left-hand lane of limited-access roadways that have three or more lanes in one direction, excluding HOV lanes. Commercial vehicles over 10,000 pounds are also prohibited from HOV lanes.

At this time, WSDOT does not have data to demonstrate that lower truck speed limits on this corridor would improve safety or congestion.

## **Relocating Interstate 5**

- Several comments suggested relocating I-5; for example, to bypass the Nisqually Delta crossing.

RESPONSE: Alternative alignments of I-5 were considered during the Corridor Study. Due to cost and other constraints, these strategies were not considered practical solutions and were omitted from further consideration.

More information on the Corridor Study is here:

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/83988afb1ef04ece85035b9b6155811e> .

## **Suggesting Additional Strategies**

- Several comments suggested additional strategies within the study area. Some of these strategies were considered in the Corridor Study, while others were not considered. Appendix F of the Corridor Study includes a full list of ideas considered.  
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/83988afb1ef04ece85035b9b6155811e>
- The purpose of the PEL Study was to take the strategies developed in the Corridor Study and conduct additional modeling and analysis of those strategies to further refine strategies to move forward for NEPA review. The Corridor Study included extensive public outreach and participation and looked at nearly 150 ideas based on that effort.
- The strategies selected to move forward were chosen based on data and modeling that showed both a need for the strategy and a benefit from the strategy toward the Corridor Study goals.
- Additionally, the strategies moved forward to the PEL Study are strategies for which WSDOT would be the NEPA lead agency. Other strategies are being moved forward by our partner agencies, such as local jurisdictions and transit authorities. We will continue working with our partners to support strategies that contribute to the Corridor Study goals but for which WSDOT is not the lead agency.