

I-5 Master Plan Future Phases and Funding Plan Legislative Report

December 1, 2024

Amended January 23, 2025



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Opening Letter

Dear Transportation Committee Members:

As directed by **Engrossed Substitute House Bill 1125, Sec. 219, Subsection 9**, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is submitting the **I-5 Master Plan Future Phases and Funding Plan Legislative Report**. In Spring 2022, the Washington State Legislature passed the historic Move Ahead Washington transportation package, which included **\$40 million** intended for a comprehensive I-5 Master Plan that develops a modern vision for a safe, sound, and smart north-south transportation corridor. WSDOT's June 2023 I-5 Master Plan Interim Report outlined the approach for that plan.

With the \$13.5 million allocated over the last two biennia, WSDOT completed key work activities, including the identification of strategic corridor opportunities, launching and advancing the Master Plan process, initiating steps to launch an emerging technology pilot project to progress HOV systemwide performance planning, and working towards progressing the seismic vulnerability analysis in the Puget Sound region. As directed, this report outlines future phases for the I-5 Master Plan and the following funding plan for the remaining \$26.5 million:

- **2025 – 2027 biennium: \$16 million.** These funds are essential to drive the next phase of work, including extensive community engagement and tribal and agency coordination throughout the 277-mile-long corridor spanning nine counties. This engagement, extensive technical analysis, and coordination with Cascadia High-Speed Rail, Amtrak Cascades, and air mobility planning will inform the safety, equity, mobility, and resiliency benefits identified for the corridor under the I-5 Master Plan.
- **2027 – 2029 biennium: \$10.5 million.** These funds will complete the I-5 Master Plan and begin project development to accelerate the implementation and advancement of projects to ensure the I-5 corridor remains a resilient backbone of Washington's transportation network.

WSDOT established the Cascadia High-Speed Rail and I-5 Program to shape and implement a vision for an integrated, multimodal transportation system for western Washington and its connections throughout the British Columbia/Washington/Oregon megaregion. Under the Cascadia Program, the **I-5 Master Plan** will inform future I-5 investment decisions that meet the demands of future growth, are equitable and resilient, move people and goods safely and efficiently, connect communities, leverage emerging technologies, and support a thriving economy. Once completed, the **I-5 Master Plan** will provide the Legislature with an actionable, comprehensive strategy to prioritize and deliver improvements to the I-5 system. The vision will be informed by technical, data-driven analysis and robust community, tribal, and agency engagement, centering vulnerable populations and overburdened communities throughout western Washington.

We appreciate the Legislature's support and look forward to continuing our work with you and the Governor's Office as we advance the Cascadia Program and the I-5 Master Plan and continue to partner with Washington communities on key transportation priorities.

Sincerely,

Julie Meredith, PE

Assistant Secretary, Urban Mobility, Access and Megaprograms, WSDOT

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List of Abbreviations

FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
I-5	Interstate-5
INFRA	Infrastructure for Rebuilding America
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
PEL	Planning and Environmental Linkages Study
PSRC	Puget Sound Regional Council
TRPC	Thurston Regional Planning Council
WSDOT	Washington State Department of Transportation

Executive Summary

Introduction

Interstate 5 (I-5) is the primary north-south route in Washington's transportation system, powering statewide and regional economies, linking international markets to Washington ports, and connecting people to jobs, goods, and each other. Built in the 1960s, it spans 277 miles, travels through nine counties, and passes through an area that is home to about 70 percent of the state's population.

Washington is expecting tremendous growth in the next 30 years, with over two million new people moving to the state and three to four million people moving to the Cascadia megaregion, which includes the Vancouver, British Columbia, and Portland, Oregon metro areas. I-5 today is vulnerable both to seismic events and the impacts of a changing climate, with major maintenance and preservation needs, and is heavily congested.

This **I-5 Master Plan Future Phases and Funding Plan Legislative Report** outlines the work and funding needed to complete the **I-5 Master Plan**, which will provide the Legislature with an

actionable, comprehensive strategy to prioritize and deliver improvements to the I-5 system. This report builds on the June 2023 I-5 Master Plan Interim Report, which recommended the creation of a Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) study for I-5, providing the necessary framework for a border-to-border I-5 Master Plan. The vision for a modern I-5 system will be informed by technical, data-driven analysis and robust community, tribal, and agency engagement throughout western Washington and will build on the feedback received during the I-5 Listening Sessions¹.

This report outlines work to date as part of the I-5 Program and includes recommendations for future phases and a funding plan through 2029, as directed by **ESHB 1125, Sec. 219**.



Figure 1. Northbound I-5 congestion near SeaTac

¹ I-5 Listening Sessions Feedback Summary. <https://wsdot.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2023-07/I-5-PlanningStudy-ListeningSessionsFeedbackSummary.pdf>

Work to Date

WSDOT received Move Ahead Washington funding in the 2022 legislative session and began initial planning and data collection. To date, the I-5 Program has conducted over 90 listening sessions with 137 agency and jurisdictional partners, tribes, and community organizations, including those representing vulnerable populations and overburdened communities; completed six legislative studies and reports; and initiated the I-5 Master Plan/PEL Study process.

Recommendations for Future Phases and Funding Plan

The I-5 Master Plan will provide an actionable, prioritized list of strategies, policies, and projects to support investments and financial strategies that can leverage federal grant opportunities to advance projects and improvements in the I-5 corridor.

In March 2022, the Move Ahead Washington transportation package included an intended \$40 million for WSDOT to develop a modern vision for I-5 through the creation of a comprehensive, border-to-border Master Plan and related initiatives. \$13.5 million of this amount was used over the last two biennia.

As directed, this report outlines future phases for the I-5 Master Plan, as described above, and the following funding plan for the remaining \$26.5 million:

- **2025 – 2027 biennium: \$16 million.** These funds are essential to drive the next phases of the Program, including extensive community, tribal, and agency engagement throughout the corridor, detailed technical analysis, and project evaluation.
- **2027 – 2029 biennium: \$10.5 million.** These funds will complete the I-5 Master Plan and begin Program development to accelerate the implementation and advancement of projects to ensure the I-5 corridor remains a resilient backbone of Washington’s transportation network for decades to come.

Introduction

Creating a Modern I-5

Interstate 5 (I-5) is the primary north-south route in Washington’s transportation system, powering statewide and regional economies, linking international markets to Washington ports, and connecting people to jobs, goods, and each other. It spans 277 miles, travels through nine counties (Whatcom, Skagit, Snohomish, King, Pierce, Thurston, Lewis, Cowlitz, and Clark), and is the only north-south interstate to traverse the entire state. I-5 is a key component of both the National Highway System and Washington’s Highways of Statewide Significance. The corridor passes through an area that is home to about 70 percent of the state’s population.

Washington is expecting tremendous growth in the next 30 years, with over two million new people moving to the state and three million people moving to the Cascadia megaregion, which includes the Vancouver, British Columbia, and Portland, Oregon metro areas. I-5 today is vulnerable both to seismic events and the impacts of a changing climate, facing maintenance and preservation delays, and is heavily congested.

The **I-5 Master Plan Future Phases and Funding Plan Legislative Report** outlines the work and funding needed to complete the **I-5 Master Plan**, which will provide the Legislature with an actionable, comprehensive strategy to prioritize and deliver improvements to the I-5 system.

The I-5 Master Plan will be informed by data-driven, technical analysis and robust community, tribal, and agency engagement throughout western Washington.

This legislative report outlines work to date as part of the I-5 Program and includes recommendations for future phases and a funding plan through 2029, as directed by **ESHB 1125, Sec. 219**. Continuing this work in collaboration with our agency and jurisdictional partners, tribes, communities, and the public will result in an actionable I-5 Master Plan that will benefit western Washington and the people and goods that move on the system every day.



Figure 2. Findings from Legislative Report – I-5 Strategic Corridor Opportunities, December 2023

Work to Date

Advancing Toward an I-5 Vision

The I-5 Master Plan PEL Study evolved from the work conducted by the I-5 System Partnership (Partnership) in 2018 and 2019, representing a diverse group of interested parties. The Partnership established a set of goals and strategies to support future generations and help meet the challenges of continued growth while protecting the state’s economy, environment, and communities.

In Spring 2022, the Washington State Legislature initiated the Move Ahead Washington transportation funding package. In part, Move Ahead Washington recommended the development of a PEL study for I-5, providing the framework for a border-to-border I-5 Master Plan PEL Study. WSDOT then began initial planning and data collection and launched the I-5 Master Plan process earlier this year. As shown in Figure 3, the I-5 Program has completed six legislative studies and reports and initiated the master planning/PEL study process to advance toward a vision for I-5.

What is PEL?

PEL studies use a collaborative and integrated approach to transportation decision making that considers environmental, community, and economic benefits and impacts early in the transportation planning process. PEL uses information, analysis, and products developed during planning to inform environmental review. PEL is a bridge (or “link”) between planning and environmental studies.

- Improves information sharing, creates efficiencies, builds better communication.
- Initiates early consultation and collaboration with FHWA and other agencies, tribes, and stakeholders.
- Results in better environmental outcomes, expedited permit decisions, and accelerated project delivery.

Figure 3. Key milestones and accomplishments to date

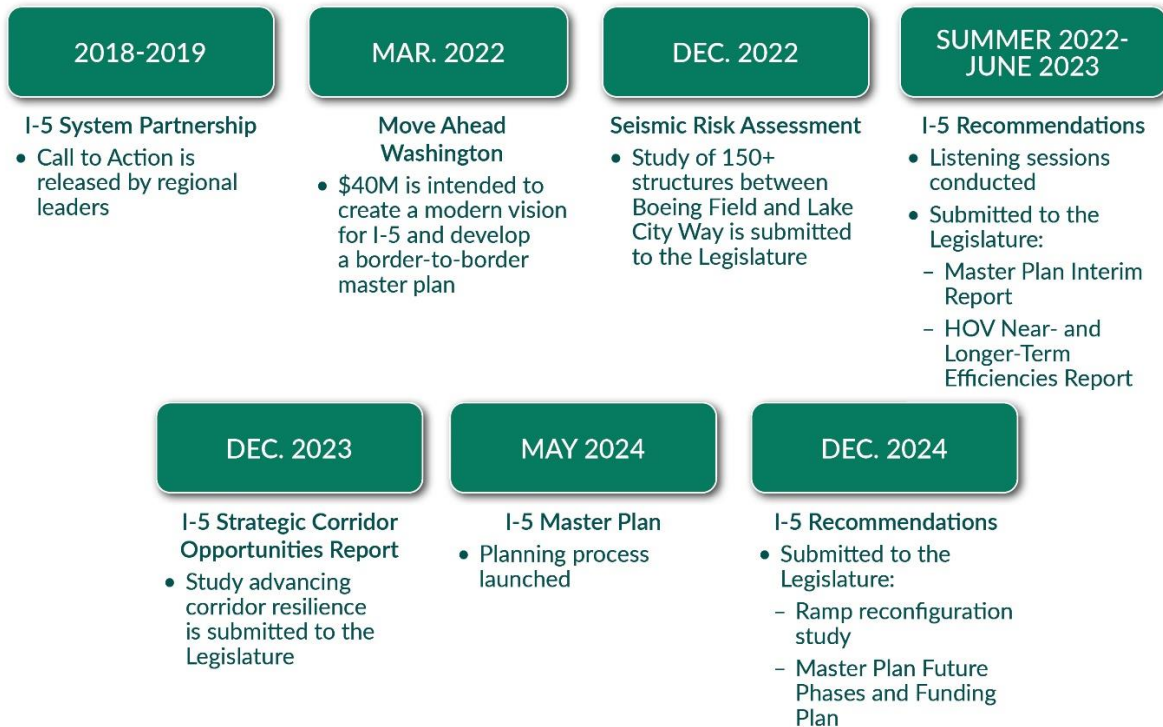


Figure 4 provides an overview of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Concurrence Points and I-5 Master Plan process.

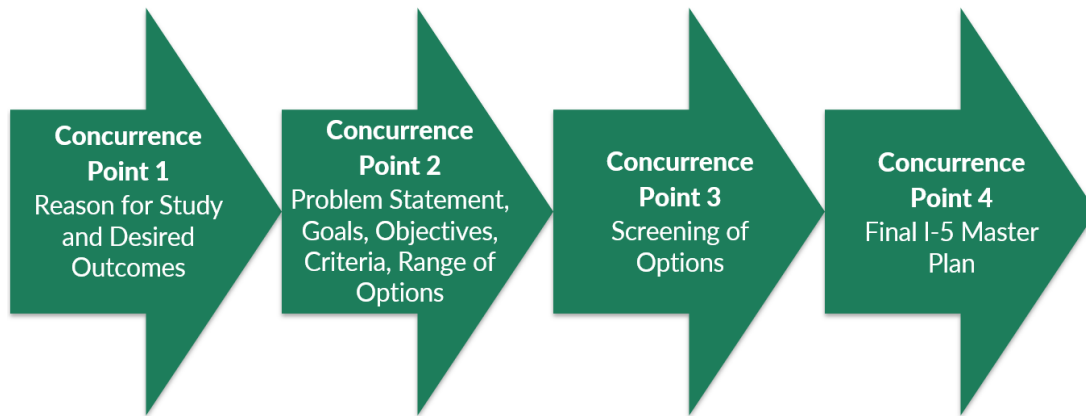


Figure 4. FHWA Concurrence Points and I-5 Master Plan Process

In addition, the team accomplished the following key activities and milestones for the I-5 Master Plan over the last three months:

- October 2024: The FHWA granted concurrence on the Reason and Desired Outcomes for the I-5 Master Plan PEL Study.
- November 2024: I-5 Program Team identified strategies to advance seismic resilience for 150 structures between Lake City Way and Boeing Field in the Puget Sound area.
- Ongoing: Active coordination with high-speed rail and other planning efforts.

Appendix A includes a summary of work completed through 2024.

Near-term next steps (Dec. 2024-Jun. 2025)

Between December 2024 and June 2025 (the start of the next biennium), the I-5 Program will advance the following I-5 Master Plan activities that will set the foundation for future I-5 Master Plan community engagement and technical work during 2025-2028:

- Initiate steps to launch an emerging technology pilot project to advance HOV systemwide performance planning.
- Initiate and charter I-5 Master Plan PEL Study committees and begin committee work to review the summary of existing conditions and the initial Problem Statement for the I-5 Master Plan PEL Study.
- Begin the community engagement process and plan for a first round of community engagement focused on existing environmental and baseline transportation conditions and an initial draft Problem Statement.

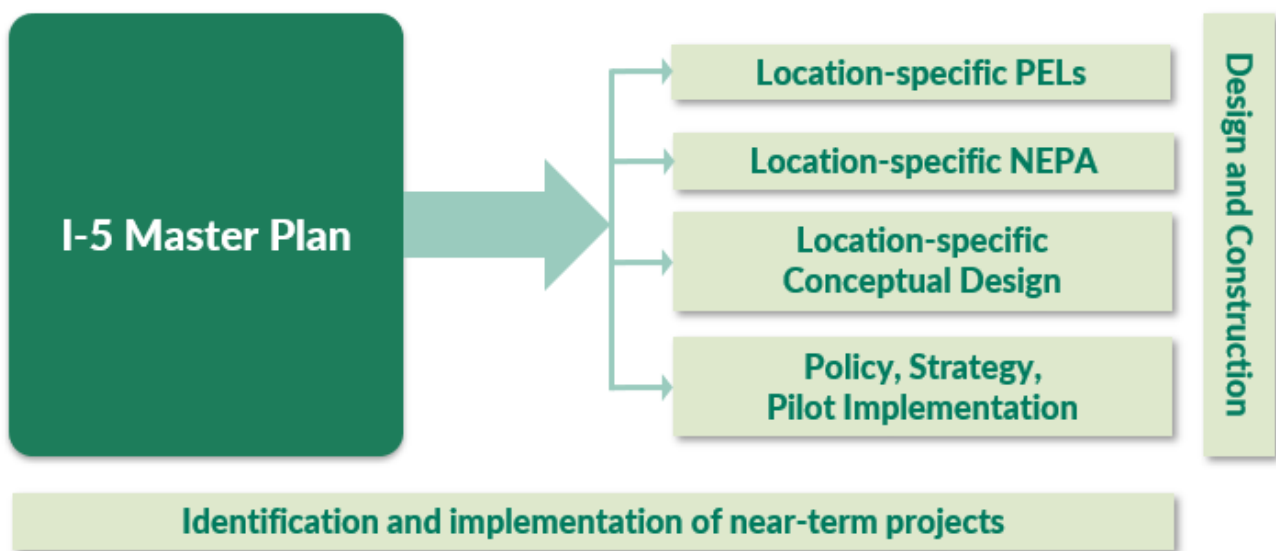
- Complete a visual database and report summary of existing environmental and baseline transportation conditions in the I-5 corridor.
- Develop a needs assessment and gaps analysis that compares existing conditions with planned projects in the corridor.
- Develop an initial draft Problem Statement.
- Begin to develop an initial list of multimodal policies, strategies, and projects for screening through the I-5 Master Plan PEL Study process.
- Establish a screening approach for evaluating how well the multimodal policies, strategies, and projects advance the future vision of I-5. This work includes developing an evaluation process and goals, objectives, criteria, and key performance indicators. The evaluation will occur in 2025 – 2027.

Recommendations for I-5 Program Future Phases and Funding Plan

Transforming the Vision into Action

The I-5 Master Plan is crucial to modernizing the I-5 system, ensuring it meets the demands of future growth, is equitable and resilient, moves people and goods safely and efficiently, connects communities, and supports a thriving economy. Developing the I-5 Master Plan is a critical step before the Program can begin location-specific PELs, NEPA, design, and construction, as illustrated in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Moving from the I-5 Master Plan to Implementation



I-5 provides an essential service for communities across Washington. As climate change impacts accelerate, existing transportation infrastructure is increasingly exposed to short- and long-term risks. The Washington State Integrated Climate Response Strategy identifies that state agencies must consider how new infrastructure can account for projected climate impacts while balancing the needs of communities and the natural environment.

The I-5 Master Plan will provide:

- A transparent, actionable investment decision document that identifies near-, mid-, and long-term multimodal investment priorities informed by robust community, tribal, and agency engagement and data-driven technical analysis.
- A plan including strategies, policies, and projects that accomplish the following:
 - Move people and goods safely and efficiently through the state.
 - Provide travel options.
 - Perform after a seismic event and other natural disasters.

- Prepare Washington for transformational advances in transportation.
- A funding and implementation strategy for near-, mid-, and long-term corridor projects that meet WSDOT goals, support communities and the economy, and leverage funding opportunities, including Federal Discretionary Grant programs.
- An equitable engagement process that is accountable to federal and state diversity, equity and inclusion policies and goals, and is informed by corridor communities, especially underrepresented, overburdened, and underserved groups.
- Strengthened partnerships with agencies and jurisdictions.
- A process consistent with WSDOT vision, mission, and values, WSDOT Urban Mobility, Access & Megaprograms strategic goals, and the FHWA PEL process for similar studies that follow the 23 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 450 PEL authority to maximize future funding potential.

The following sections outline actions recommended over the next two biennia (2025-2027 and 2027-2029) to develop the vision for I-5, along with an estimated funding plan to accomplish those actions.

Recommendations for I-5 Program Future Phases (2025-2029)

2025 – 2027 Biennium Recommended I-5 Program Actions: \$16 million

Continue Development of the I-5 Master Plan: \$14 million

Key foundational activities:

- **Equity-Centered Community Engagement, Agency Coordination, and Tribal Consultation:** Conduct thorough community engagement, agency coordination, and tribal consultation to ensure diverse input and alignment with equity goals. Community engagement is foundational to all the following activities and steps and will inform Master Plan development and outcomes.
- **Visioning and Analysis:** Conduct visioning and analysis to address multimodal needs within the Cascadia megaregion including integration of potential high-speed rail and air mobility opportunities.
- **FHWA PEL Concurrence:** Secure FHWA approval at critical milestones to validate the plan’s alignment with federal standards and ensure the plan is set up for a smooth transition to environmental analysis and project development.
- **Climate Vulnerability Assessment** and coordination with a statewide vulnerability assessment.
- **Emerging Technologies:** Explore emerging technology solutions within the transportation environment, such as smart and connected infrastructure, new modes of transportation, material technology, incident detection/response, resiliency, traveler information, vehicle or pedestrian detection or classification, congestion management, advanced air mobility, automated vehicles, big data management and analytics, communication and connectivity technologies, cybersecurity, electrification, traffic signals, safety, or personal mobility.

- **Comprehensive Funding Strategy:** Begin development of a detailed strategy to continue to secure federal funding for near-, mid-, and long-term corridor improvements.

Key I-5 Master Plan steps:

- **Finalize Problem Statement:** Refine and formalize the Problem Statement to clearly define the issues and objectives of the Master Plan.
- **Goals, Objectives, and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):** Establish and use clear goals, objectives, and KPIs to guide project evaluation and measurement of success.
- **Policy/Strategy/Project Evaluation and Scenario Planning:** Assess potential policies, strategies, and projects according to the goals, objectives, and KPIs to determine near-, mid-, and long-term priorities. Evaluate different futures (e.g., funding availability, high-speed rail, transit implementation, technology advances, greenhouse gas emissions) through scenario planning to prioritize the policies, strategies, and projects that provide the most flexibility and greatest ability to meet regional and state goals.
- **Level of Magnitude Cost Estimation:** Develop preliminary cost estimates for planning purposes, ensuring a realistic financial framework for project implementation.
- **Prioritized Project List and Action Plan:** Bundle projects into actionable phases (near-, mid-, and long-term) and develop a detailed action plan for logical project implementation.
- **Draft Master Plan:** Prepare a comprehensive draft I-5 Master Plan Report.
- **Initial Program Development:** Begin the initial development of policies, strategies, and projects based on the Master Plan’s initial recommendations.

Advance Seismic Vulnerability Analyses: \$2 million

WSDOT is conducting a seismic vulnerability analysis on an initial package of structures between Lake City Way and Boeing Field. As directed by the Legislature and summarized in the December 2023 I-5 Strategic Corridor Opportunities Report and building on the December 2022 Seismic Report and Funding Request, this analysis begins a broader effort to evaluate over 150 structures along a vital stretch of I-5, spanning from Lake City Way to Boeing Field in the Puget Sound area. The I-5 Program will continue to seek funding to advance seismic resilience for the entire I-5 corridor, including exploring future opportunities through FHWA’s PROTECT grant program.



Figure 6. I-5 Northbound blocked by a landslide in Whatcom County

2027 – 2029 Biennium Recommended I-5 Program Actions: \$10.5 million

Complete the I-5 Master Plan and Begin Program Development: \$10.5 million

WSDOT plans to complete the I-5 Master Plan and begin plan implementation. Once the I-5 Master Plan is complete, the following types of Program development activities could move forward depending on funding:

- Focused PEL studies for specific geographic areas of the I-5 corridor.
- Location-specific NEPA analysis for specific areas of the I-5 corridor.
- Location-specific initial project development for key areas of the I-5 corridor.
- Policy, strategy, and innovative and emerging technology pilot project initiation.

I-5 Program Future Phases (2025-2029) Funding Plan

In March 2022, the Move Ahead Washington transportation package included an intended \$40 million for WSDOT to develop a modern vision for I-5 through the creation of a comprehensive, border-to-border Master Plan and related initiatives. \$13.5 million of this amount was used over the last two biennia.

As directed, this report outlines future phases for the I-5 Master Plan, as described above, and the following funding plan for the remaining \$26.5 million:

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- **2027 – 2029 biennium: \$10.5 million.** These funds will complete the I-5 Master Plan and begin Program development to accelerate the implementation and advancement of projects to ensure the I-5 corridor remains a resilient backbone of Washington’s transportation network for decades to come.

**Appendix A:
I-5 Program Work Completed To Date**



Appendix A: I-5 Program Work Completed to Date

Table A-1. Summary of I-5 Program Work, 2022-2024

Date	I-5 Activities	Description	Outcomes
12/1/2022	Seismic Risk Assessment	SSB 5975, Section 209 directed WSDOT to submit a recommended approach and funding request to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess the seismic risk of I-5 from Lake City Way to Boeing Field. Recommend future work to mitigate seismic risk on this segment of I-5, including estimated costs. 	Risk assessment of 150+ structures. Packaging and phasing plan to conduct I-5 seismic vulnerability analysis.
6/30/2023	Listening Sessions and Summary Report	SSB 5975, Section 209 (3) directed WSDOT to conduct partner listening sessions to inform the I-5 Master Plan Interim Report.	Informed the I-5 Master Plan scope of work, FHWA Concurrence Point 1, and will inform the communications and engagement plan.
6/30/2023	I-5 Master Plan Interim Report	SSB 5975, Section 209 (3) directed WSDOT to submit an interim report with recommendations for an I-5 Master Plan approach.	Informed the I-5 Master Plan scope of work.
6/30/2023	I-5 Near-Term and Longer-Term HOV Lane Recommendations	SSB 5975, Section 209 (4) directed WSDOT to recommend near- and longer-term actions to improve HOV lane systemwide performance and identify steps to convert HOV lanes to different managed lane operating concepts.	Informed the I-5 Master Plan scope of work.
12/1/2023	I-5 Strategic Corridor Opportunities Report	ESHB 1125, Sec. 219, directed WSDOT to identify strategic corridors and ways to advance and fund resilience investments on the I-5 corridor.	Informs potential grant opportunities in the federal grant cycle.

Date	I-5 Activities	Description	Outcomes
Beginning 5/2024	I-5 Master Plan PEL Study	WSDOT initiated and advanced the I-5 Master Plan PEL Study. The Master Plan will be an action plan for improving the I-5 system for years to come.	Provided foundational activities such as collecting and analyzing data and receiving the first FHWA concurrence. These activities set the stage for completing the I-5 Master Plan over the next several years.
10/16/2024	Packaging and Phasing Memo - Advancing Seismic Vulnerability Analysis	The memo includes recommendations to advance four structures packages into a seismic vulnerability analysis based on scoring criteria and other strategic considerations.	Informs future grant opportunities and the Program's future phases and funding plan.
12/1/2024	I-5 Ramp Reconfiguration Study	ESHB 1125, Sec. 219 directed WSDOT to conduct an I-5 ramp reconfiguration study in Seattle's downtown and University District areas in coordination and partnership with the City of Seattle, informed by I-5 lid stakeholders.	Serves as a building block for future work conducted during WSDOT's I-5 Master Plan and the City of Seattle's planning efforts to lid I-5 in the downtown area.
12/1/2024	I-5 Program Future Phases and Funding Plan	ESHB 1125, Sec. 219, directed WSDOT to submit a report with recommendations for future phases and a funding request for work planned through 2029.	Advance Move Ahead Washington investments. Funding would support I-5 Master Plan completion and implementation to advance a multimodal, safer, and resilient corridor that addresses current and future transportation needs.