



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

Meeting purpose

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

- 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 Approach

Meeting logistics

March 13, 2023, 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Virtual Meeting

Attendees

ACG Participants

- Bonnie Shorin, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- Brad Beach, Nisqually Indian Tribe
- Carl Smith, US Coast Guard
- Dennis Wardlaw, Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation
- Glynnis Nakai, Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge
- Marty Chaney, Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Noll Steinweg, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Penny Kelley, Washington State Department of Ecology
- Portia Leigh, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Sharon Love, Federal Highway Administration
- Susan Buis, US Army Corp of Engineers
- Susan Sturges, Environmental Protection Agency

WSDOT Project team

- Ashley Carle, WSDOT Project Team Leadership
- George Mazur, WSDOT Project Team Leadership
- John Perlic, Parametrix Project Team Leadership
- Victoria Book, WSDOT
- Rachel Durham, Parametrix
- Kyle Cornwell, WSDOT
- Erinn Ellig, Parametrix
- Sharese Graham, SCJ Alliance
- Hayley Nolan, PRR
- Tad Schwager, Parametrix
- Paul Fendt, Parametrix
- Lucy Temple, WSDOT
- Lauren Wheeler, PRR
- Kirk Wilcox, Parametrix
- Josh Wozniak, Parametrix

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 third time on Monday, March 13, 2023. The WSDOT study team began the presentation by welcoming participants, reviewing the agenda, and leading the ACG through introductions. The study team provided 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 third ACG meeting, participants confirmed Level 1 Alternatives Evaluation Criteria and shared input on Level 1 Alternatives Evaluation Results and Level 2 Alternatives Evaluation approach.

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. 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 ACG 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 11, 2023, and Meeting 2, held on February 13, 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 public 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 feedback and topics received via public comment:

- Concern about 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 lanes



Updates to Level 1 Alternatives Evaluation Criteria

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

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

Discussion

- Susan Sturges (Environmental Protection Agency) asked to clarify what Alternative 4 means by converting GP lanes (plural) to HOV lanes.
 - John Perlic (Parametrix) responded that one lane in each direction (northbound and southbound) would be converted, so two lanes total.
- Marty Chaney (Natural Resources Conservation Services) asked if the criteria for seismic activity includes activity from tsunamis. There is evidence of tsunamis in many of these deltas.
 - The team has not considered tsunami risk or impact at this point and will look into it.
 - Group members shared these resources in the chat:
 - A publication on seismic landslides and tsunamis risk in Puget Sound: https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/19658/noaa_19658_DS1.pdf
 - UW used to have a Paleo seismology department with good information, both local and West Coast.
- Carl Smith (U.S. Coast Guard) shared that while projects like this often focuses on the surface area use of the bridge, there is a community of mariners and people who use the waterway underneath the bridge. Carl emphasized the importance of including waterway navigation effects to the criteria.
 - The study team responded that 'River navigability' is included under the economic vitality criteria.

Following discussion, the study team shared a poll to ask if ACG members were satisfied with the updated Level 1 Alternatives Evaluation Criteria.

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

- a) Yes (6/8 or 75%)
- b) No (2/8 or 25%)

The US Coast Guard and Natural Resources Conservation Service noted no. Carl Smith (US Coast Guard) requested that the study team include the effects of waterway navigability under the bridge. Ashley Carle responded that 'river navigability' is listed under the "Support economic vitality" project purpose category.



Initial Alternatives Evaluation results

John Perlic presented a table that displayed Alternatives 1-4 and Bridge Options A-D and what features they include.

John then shared the Draft Initial Alternatives Evaluation Results. The table shows scores for each of the Alternatives and Bridge Options organized by Project Purpose Categories. The scores are defined by higher performing (dark green), mid-performing (standard green), and lower performing (light green). See the meeting slide deck for tables.

Penny Kelley (Department of Ecology) commented that the color on the evaluation matrix don't match the colors in the key. John appreciated the comment and agreed. The study team will update the table to be more accurate before the TAG meeting.

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)

Discussion

- Marty Chaney (Natural Resources Conservation Service) asked if the section furthest west on Option C would be held on fill or pilings.
 - The study team shared that WSDOT would remove fill all the way to the western edge of Option C (referencing the map on slide 29). Pilings and a low structure will support the bridge. It would be about 25 feet high, with clearance under the bridge, for most of the length of the structure. Then it would extend higher and closer to the west where it would tie in to the existing I-5 structure.
- Penny Kelley (WA State Dept of Ecology) asked what influenced the low performing score for Option D in Alternatives 2 and 3 in the 'improves mobility' and 'complements local and tribal planning' categories. There aren't many arterial roadways in that area.
 - The team said Option D would remove the existing Nisqually interchange which would negatively impact access to local business, Lacey, Nisqually Tribe reservation area, and the wildlife refuge.
 - Glynnis Nakai (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge) noted in the chat that the Nisqually exit receives a lot of traffic especially on and off I-5 to adjacent neighborhoods, refuge, and businesses.



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 follow up and report back on the question regarding tsunami activity and resilience.

Discussion

- Penny Kelley (WA State Dept of Ecology) commented that design options with longer bridges (C and D) would allow the channel to migrate. There's the risk of migration, but also the fact that we want the channels to migrate.
 - The study team responded that yes, the larger bridges would allow the channel room to migrate without impacting the I-5 structure.

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, C, and 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

- Marty Chaney (Natural Resources Conservation Service) asked if modeling has been done to assess how far salinity would travel up the delta without I-5 in place to hold it back.
 - The team has not looked at effects on salinity yet. We will study salinity during the environmental phase.

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.



- All Alternatives would improve navigability for all users, including the Nisqually Indian Tribe.

Discussion

- Carl Smith (US Coast Guard) asked if all the bridge options are comparable in how navigable they are and the clearance under the bridge.
 - The study team has not yet determined the exact clearance for bridge options. Options A, B, and C would have more clearance than the existing structure today. Option D would have 120-10 feet of clearance. Horizontal clearance between spans would be comparable to the span lengths that exist today.

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.

Discussion

- Glynnis Nakai asked the team if the footprint refers to I-5 itself, not habitat downstream of I-5, which the team confirmed. Glynnis said even with Design Option B, opening up that channel could impact maintenance and parking for the wildlife refuge. The impacts wouldn't only be on the refuge, but would extend to commercial areas, maintenance and buildings. I am concerned about the section 'between B and D' (referring to the map on slide 33). Removing fill and existing structure opens the area up for risk of erosion, flood runoff, specifically in relation to the refuge. I am in support of opening space for the river to flow naturally, but I'm conflicted because of potential impacts to the refuge.
 - The team agreed an additional conversation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Nisqually Tribe, and WSDOT to discuss impacts to the wildlife refuge will be beneficial.
- Marty Chaney asked how salinity will change on the west and east sides of the bridge.
 - The team will analyze salinity during the environmental phase.
 - Sharese Graham (SCJ Alliance) added that we will make sure that the team includes salinity as part of the modeling plan. We are balancing knowing the information we need to study and not studying too much before we select a preferred alternative.
- If there are negative impacts to residents and farmers because of salinity, would WSDOT provide any forms of mitigation?



- If our environmental study identifies this kind of impact, WSDOT will determine mitigation options.
- Glynnis Nakai asked for the team to share comments received from the public.
 - The study team will remove the names from the comments and send them her.

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.

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

- a) Alternative 1 – Operations Improvements (1/8 or 13%)
- b) Alternative 2 – Widen I-5 for HOV lanes (8/8 or 100%)
- c) Alternative 3 – Widen I-5 for General Purpose lanes (6/8 or 75%)
- d) Alternative 4 – Convert I-5 lanes from General Purpose to HOV (2/8 or 25%)

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

- a) Design option A – 3,000 ft (3/9 or 33%)
- b) Design option B – 6,000 ft (7/9 or 78%)
- c) Design option C – 12,000 ft (9/9 or 100%)
- d) Design option D – 14,000 ft, high span (5/9 or 56%)

Coast Guard voted for all alternatives to move forward. *Discussion*

- Kirk Wilcox (Parametrix) reminded the group that Option B includes a new bridge and partial fill removal at the McAllister Creek crossing, which could also be included in Option A.
- Susan Sturges shared that she was struggling to commit to supporting any of the options. She understands the scoring of low-mid-high performing, but just sees shades of green in the table, which makes it difficult to decipher what the difference is between scoring results. She was reluctant to commit to anything without knowing the details how the study team determined these scores. From a NEPA perspective and induced demand, she thought it may make sense to carry forward certain alternatives to study in more detail.
 - The study team will send ACG members another opportunity to share input on Alternatives screening. The purpose of the polls in the meeting are to gather an initial reaction from the group.



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 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

Next steps

The study team shared the following next steps:

- WSDOT to post meeting materials for review
- ACG to review and share comments on detailed Level 2 Alternatives Evaluation Criteria
- ACG will receive a follow up poll to confirm support for advancing alternatives into detailed evaluation
- WSDOT to share updated evaluation criteria and results before the next meet in April
- WSDOT to coordinate a meeting with Glynnis Nakai, Eric Grossman, and David Troutt. Glynnis is interested in different design options that will allow the river to flow while protecting infrastructure for the Refuge
- WSDOT to send a copy of the public comments to Glynnis Nakai.

The next ACG meeting is April 17, 2023. During ACG Meeting 4, the project 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 2:40 p.m.