



I-5 Marvin Rd to Mounts Rd Corridor Improvements Project - NEPA Executive Advisory Group Meeting #1 Summary

WSDOT held the first Executive Advisory Group (EAG) meeting for the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) phase of the project on Wednesday, August 7, 2024, from 1-3 p.m.

Meeting agenda

The agenda for the EAG meeting was to:

- Provide a recap of the PEL Study.
- Present an overview of the NEPA process.
- Present initial Build Alternatives.
- Share information about upcoming engagement opportunities

WSDOT study team in attendance: Alex Atchison, Sharese Graham, Aimee Hill, Mark Steingrebe, Aleceia Tilley, Kirk Wilcox, Hayley Nolan, Morgan Calder, Whitney White

Meeting opening and goals

The WSDOT study team began the presentation by welcoming everyone and providing Zoom Meeting best practices. The study team led introductions, followed by an overview of the meeting goals and the responsibilities of the advisory groups during the project. The project team shared a project schedule and highlighted advisory group milestones. Zoom Meeting polls and open discussions were used throughout the meeting to gauge understanding and address questions and comments.

Poll question: How familiar are you with the NEPA Environmental Assessment process?

- a) Very familiar (8/22 or 36%)
- b) Somewhat familiar (12/22 or 55%)
- c) Not familiar (3/22 or 14%)
- d) Familiar with NEPA but not the EA process (0/22 or 0%)
- e) I'm not sure (0/22 or 0%)

The study team shared that the goals of the meeting were to have the EAG actively participate and understand the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) Environmental Assessment (EA) process. The outcomes of the meeting were to gain awareness of the project changes since the completion of the Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study and to ask the EAG to provide input on the scope of the EA.

The roles and responsibilities of the EAG are to represent agency and resources in the study area, identify any issues of concern regarding the project's environmental or socioeconomic impacts, provide timely input on unresolved issues, and share input on future project permitting requirements.

The study team provided an overview of the NEPA schedule. The NEPA process was initiated in July 2024 and the team expects to publish the EA within a year. The team will have regular touchpoints with the advisory groups and the public throughout the process. The EAG is anticipated to meet five times during the study period and can expect regular updates between meetings. The next meeting will be in January 2025 to review the discipline reports.

Recap of the PEL process

The study team presented an overview of the I-5 Marvin Road to Mounts Road PEL Study.



WSDOT and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) conducted the I-5 Marvin Road to Mounts Road PEL Study to identify long-term solutions for I-5 between the Marvin Road and Mounts Road interchanges. The PEL development process built upon existing plans for the corridor and included four concurrence points consistent with FHWA processes. The PEL considered additional technical analyses and community input to arrive at a final purpose and need and recommended alternatives to study in the environmental review phase. Agreement from the Nisqually Tribal Council was given through a signed resolution that supports advancing a single alternative into the NEPA EA.

The Purpose and Need of the project include:

- Enhancing mobility and connectivity on I-5 for passenger vehicles, freight, transit, and active modes and provide support for increased person and freight throughput.
- Improving local and mainline I-5 system resiliency.
- Enabling environmental restoration and ecosystem resiliency at the I-5 crossing of the Nisqually River Delta area.
- Supporting economic vitality through reliable and efficient freight movement and access to major employers.

The PEL then evaluated a set of four alternatives based on the Purpose and Need statement. A shared-use path was a common element to all four alternatives. Four bridge options lengths were evaluated for Alternatives 2 and 3, and three bridge options were evaluated for Alternatives 1 and 4. In the initial Evaluation, Alternative 1 and 4 and bridge Option 4 were determined to be unreasonable and not recommended for advancement to a Detailed Evaluation. Alternative 2, Widen I-5 for HOV lanes, performed the highest in the Detailed Evaluation because it adds capacity for transit vehicles and was more consistent with WSDOT policies and improved multimodal access to opportunities. For this reason, Alternative 2 is moving forward into the NEPA process.

Build Alternative

The study team shared information about the build alternative for NEPA and facilitated Q&A throughout the presentation.

The proposed improvements for the build alternative include:

- Widening I-5 by adding one high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane in each direction.
- Replacing existing bridges and constructing new bridges across the Nisqually Delta.
- Constructing a new crossing of the BNSF Railway railroad tracks.
- Realigning McAllister Creek.
- Building a shared-use path adjacent to I-5.
- Eliminating two existing fish passage barriers under I-5 in the Red Salmon Creek drainage.
- Installing facilities to treat stormwater runoff from I-5 within the study area.
- Supporting habitat improvements.

WSDOT has continued evaluation of design options for several components of the project since the conclusion of the PEL Study. Based on this continued evaluation, several options have been recommended to not advance into the NEPA phase. Design refinements have been made on



bridge length options, shared-use path connections, the McAllister Creek realignment, and the I-5 crossing of the BNSF Railway tracks east of the Nisqually River.

Three bridge length options were evaluated in the Nisqually River delta area. These were identified as Options A, B, and C in the PEL Study. All bridge options included additional bridge length to cross the BNSF Rail track. Each of the bridge length options would have different impacts to the natural environment, as well as impacts during construction:

- Bridge Length Option A (3,000 feet) would replace the existing truss bridges over the Nisqually River and extend east over the north overflow channel.
- Bridge Length Option B (6,000 feet) would also replace the Nisqually River bridges and would fully span the Nisqually River and its overflow channels
- Bridge Length Option C (12,000 feet) would extend the bridge an additional 6,000 feet to the west beyond Option B. This option would also include a new elevated I-5 interchange at Exit 114.

WSDOT is not carrying forward the 3,000-foot Bridge Length (Option A) into the NEPA analysis, since this option would not fully span the Nisqually River's historical channels and would not restore the natural water flow in the delta as much as the 6,000- and 12,000-foot options. It would also be less effective in meeting the project needs of improving I-5 system resiliency and enabling environmental restoration and ecosystem resiliency

A shared-use path was recommended in the PEL Study. The shared-use path would provide a 6.2-mile continuous facility for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other users from the Marvin Road interchange vicinity (Exit 111) to the Center Drive interchange vicinity (Exit 118). The path would be located north of the southbound I-5 travel lanes, would have a minimum width of 14 feet, and would be separated from traffic by a concrete barrier. The PEL considered many different options for the northern shared-use path alignment:

- Option A: Weigh Station Alignment
- Option B: Southbound I-5 Shoulder Alignment
- Option C: Sound Transit Right-of-Way Alignment would continue the path primarily within ST right-of-way, adjacent to the JBLM Eagle's Pride golf course.
- Option D: Golf Course Maintenance Road Alignment
- Option E: DuPont Local Streets Alignment
- Option F: Connection from South Terminus

Options D and E have been dropped from consideration following consultation with the City of DuPont. These options were determined to be too circuitous, to have too much impact on local residential streets, and because they do not provide a direct connection to the city center and park and ride.

Questions and Comments:

- Bill Iyall, Cowlitz Indian Tribe – How about non-motorized transportation alternatives?
 - All alternatives included in the PEL included a shared-use path.
- Bill Iyall – With reference to BNSF, is there a conversation about improving the dangerous curve?
 - We are early in the design process, but we have already been coordinating with BNSF on this project to start discussing all potential designs.
- Bill Iyall – We are looking at all the high-speed rail options, so consider that dialogue moving forward.

- We have also had conversations with WSDOT Rail and Sound Transit to make sure our design does not preclude their plans.
- Mayor Andy Ryder, City of Lacey – Are there any plans for a shared-use path to go down through Thurston County? We are looking for future connections in Lacey. This will be a higher speed use of the trail. You may need an electric bike to get up that hill. We don't want to miss a planning opportunity to set aside right-of-way to continue this path and future crossings in our transportation network.
 - WSDOT is not planning to extend the shared-use path as part of this project. There are other projects looking at options to extend the path.
- Melissa McFadden, Pierce County – Pierce County is working to finalize an agreement with WSDOT to construct a path right near your project limits, so there might be an opportunity to provide an important connection near DuPont Road.
- Bill Iyall – The Cowlitz Tribe owns a property on Dupont Road and a dead-end road links into a bunch of trails. This is a historic site for the Cowlitz and Nisqually tribes. It is the old Girl Scouts facility on Center Drive.

The study team continued to share more information on flood modeling results. All build alternatives show good performance with flood reduction. There are minor changes downstream, with few increases in surface water elevation. Upstream shows considerable drops in water surface elevation. Velocity increases are shown in the McAllister Creek channel where there is currently no water flow. Overall, the modeling shows great benefits in flood reduction in a 100-year flood event. The team is currently working on smaller flood event modeling.

The project also proposes realigning McAllister Creek where it crosses below I-5 to improve water quality and habitat. The team is working with the Nisqually Tribe and the Long Live the Kings group to coordinate restoration in the area.

WSDOT studied two options for the I-5 crossing of the BNSF rail line. The existing BNSF bridges over I-5 are not long enough to accommodate the proposed I-5 HOV lanes and the shared-use path. The proposed concept is to build an elevated I-5 bridge in each direction over the BNSF rail line. The bridge structure would be about 1,700 feet long and would slope down to the west to connect with the new 6,000-foot or 12,000-foot bridge. Building a crossing under I-5 has more potential impacts that include:

- Permanent impacts to wetlands and floodplain areas to make room for new stormwater sites.
- Requires building temporary railroad trestles and retaining walls, and temporarily relocates railroad tracks to maintain operations during construction.
- Temporary structures for the railroad detour would require clearing trees and impacting wetlands near the existing track.

Overview of NEPA process

The study team shared more about the NEPA process. Coming out of the PEL Study with a recommended alternative and a set of preferred build options, the team must now determine if there are significant impacts to the natural and built environment. If significant impacts are identified, the process will halt and start a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).



The project is currently scoping for an Environmental Assessment. The scoping period, to determine how WSDOT will study environmental disciplines during the EA, is through September 12, 2024.

The environmental disciplines previously identified include:

- Stormwater and water quality
- Wetlands and other waters
- Fish, wildlife and vegetation
- Floodplains and sea level rise
- Geology and soils
- Visual quality
- Air quality, greenhouse gases & energy
- Cultural resources
- Noise
- Hazardous materials
- Land use, Farmlands & Section 6(f)
- Section 4(f)
- Socioeconomic and Environmental Justice

The study team reported feedback they have already heard from the Agency Coordination Group (ACG). The ACG shared questions and comments related to project design and aesthetics, anticipating impacts of climate change in flood modeling, understanding noise impacts to people using the shared-use path, construction and other logistics related to the proposed BNSF crossing, and the timing of later project phases.

The study team asked the EAG to share input on what is expected to be studied in the EA. They asked for feedback on if study areas were missing, if there are areas of particular concern, and what specific issues should be a study focus.

Questions and Comments:

- Bill Iyall – I am worried about the downriver portion of Nisqually and McAllister Creek. Is the meandering of the river improved through this project? Depending on the velocities and channel articulation, there might be significant improvement. Additionally, there would be significant crash barriers needed over the BNSF lines.
 - Planning for crash protection will be a critical part of the resiliency of the bridge. Regarding the river, this was one of the reasons we didn't do the 3,000-foot bridge option. We have found from studying the geomorphology that the bridge that will be constructed (6,000- or 12,000-foot options) will allow the natural transport of sediment. Today the I-5 embankment restricts the river's movement.

Upcoming engagement

The study team shared opportunities for upcoming involvement from advisory groups, subject matter experts and community members.



An online open house will launch on August 13, 2024, and will remain open through September 12, 2024. An in-person open house will be hosted on August 20, 2024, at the Lacey Community Center from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m.

The next EAG meeting will be held in January 2025. For any continued questions, the committee is advised to reach out to Whitney White at whitney.white@wsdot.wa.gov or 360-357-2740.

Next steps

The WSDOT team committed to the following:

- Distribute meeting materials.

The meeting adjourned at 2:10 p.m.