I-5 Marvin Rd to Mounts Rd Corridor Improvements Project—NEPA

Executive Advisory Group Meeting #2 Summary

Meeting purpose

The purpose of the second Executive Advisory Group (EAG) meeting was to:

- Share project updates
- Review preliminary Discipline Report findings

Meeting logistics

Wednesday, June 18, 2025, 10 to 11:30 a.m.

Virtual meeting

WSDOT study team in attendance: Aleceia Tilley (WSDOT), Aimee Hill (WSDOT), Jenifer Young (WSDOT), JoAnn Schueler (WSDOT), Mark Steingrebe (WSDOT), Victoria Book (WSDOT), Whitney White (WSDOT), Alex Atchison (Parametrix), Kirk Wilcox (Parametrix), Sharese Graham (SCJ Alliance), Hayley Nolan (PRR), Morgan Calder (PRR), Kate Shannon (PRR)

EAG attendees in attendance: Elisa Albury (FHWA), Aubrey Collier (City of Lacey), Joe DePinto (City of Yelm), Vanessa Dolbee (City of Lacey), Scott Egger (City of Lacey), Gus Lim (City of DuPont), Dayv Lowry (NOAA), Dave Smith (City of Olympia), Tiffany Speir (City of Lakewood), and Peter Stackpole (Intercity Transit)

Meeting opening and goals

The study team welcomed attendees to the second Executive Advisory Group (EAG) meeting for the I-5 Marvin Rd to Mounts Rd Corridor Improvements Project. The team led introductions and reviewed meeting goals: to share updates on the NEPA process, present preliminary findings from the draft Discipline Reports, and gather initial input from EAG participants.

The study team emphasized that outcomes of this meeting included enhancing understanding of the NEPA process, raising awareness of preliminary report findings, and documenting initial input from participating agencies and tribes.

NEPA process and schedule

The team reviewed the NEPA process and shared the current project status: in the Environmental Assessment (EA) phase, with Discipline Reports under FHWA review. Publication of the EA is anticipated in early 2026, followed by a 45-day public comment period and issuance of a decision document (anticipated Finding of No Significant Impact, or FONSI).

The team described the relationship between the PEL study (completed in 2023) and the current EA, noting the transition from evaluating existing conditions and alternatives to assessing impacts and advancing permitting coordination.

Project overview

The project team reviewed the project Action Alternative and the two design options in consideration. The Action Alternative aims to widen I-5 to add a high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane in each direction between Marvin Rd (Exit 111) and Mounts Rd (Exit 116). It also includes the construction of a shared-use path, bridge replacements through the Nisqually Delta, the realignment of McAllister Creek, a new grade-separated BNSF railway crossing, stormwater treatment facilities, fish passage barrier removals, and habitat restoration.

Two primary design options were discussed:

- **6,000-foot option**: Replaces multiple bridges and removes 6,000 feet of embankment.
- **12,000-foot option**: Adds an elevated interchange at Exit 114 and removes 12,000 feet of embankment.

The project design also reflects refinements since the PEL phase, such as changes to the BNSF crossing (moving forward only with the overpass option due to substantial impacts from the underpass alternative) and the extension of the shared-use path into DuPont to close a regional active transportation gap.

EA scoping phase: Community outreach and Agency Coordination

The study team summarized recent engagement, including Section 106 tribal consultation, public scoping in late 2024, and ongoing coordination with tribes and agencies. Outreach included online and in-person open houses and generated 180 comments.

Key community themes included:

- Concerns about environmental impacts and a desire for more resiliency
- Interest in noise reduction, future transit coordination, and travel time improvements
- Questions about the BNSF crossing and shared-use path

Preliminary Discipline Report findings

The team presented early findings from technical studies across more than 15 resource areas. The preliminary findings include the following:

- **Stormwater/Water Quality**: Proposed Action would add approx. 17 acres of new impervious surface to study area (similar for both alternatives). Enhanced treatment via infiltration or compost-amended biofiltration swales (CABS) planned; net water quality benefits expected.
- **Wetlands**: Both bridge options (6,000-ft and 12,000-ft) impact wetlands but provide larger gains through habitat restoration.
    - 6,000-foot option: 1.43 acres of wetland fill, .89 acres of wetland shading, 22.59 acres of wetland reestablishment, 13.16 acres of upland buffer gain, 30.69 acres of floodplain reestablishment, and 26.92 acres of tidal area below high tide line.
    - 12,000-foot option: .7 acres of wetland fill, 1.86 acres of wetland shading, 52.64 acres of wetland reestablishment, 16.36 acres of upland buffer gain, 63.91 acres of floodplain reestablishment, and 40.05 acres of tidal area below high tide line.
- **Vegetation, wildlife and fish**: Replacement of fill with bridges provides benefits that include improved connectivity, better tidal flow, and support for salmon habitat. Enhanced water quality treatment would remove pollutants in roadway runoff.
- **Floodplains/Geomorphology**: Embankment removal reconnects historic floodplains and reduces upstream flooding. Natural sediment movement and river channel migration would be restored, and flood levels downstream of I-5 would increase slightly as floodplain returns to natural state.
- **Geology and soils**: Elevated structures would replace embankments, restore natural topography and allow improved water and sediment movement beneath I-5. The project

design would reduce erosion, landslide and potential lahar flow risks and improve the seismic resilience of I-5 in the project area.

- **Navigation:** Proposed Action would have no impacts on waterway navigation. Temporary or permanent bridges will be higher than current conditions and construction of temporary and permanent bridges will require short-term closures of the river to navigation.
- **Transportation**: Reduced congestion, faster travel times, and active transportation connections
- **Noise**: Temporary construction noise; long-term noise effects vary by bridge length. Noise wall near Quinault Drive NE recommended with both options, other areas do not meet state criteria for noise walls. After construction noise changes include:
    - 6,000-foot option: Small noise increases; fewer homes are affected.
    - 12,000-foot option: More noticeable noise increases due to longer elevated bridge; more homes and RV park residents are affected.
- **Visual**: Elevated features more visible in valley, limited visual change in urban areas. View from Nisqually Valley varied by alternative:
    - 6,000-foot option: New elevated spans would alter views; improved integration with natural surroundings.
    - 12,000-foot option: Greater visual prominence; enhanced natural appearance through restoration.
- **Air quality and energy:** Project area is in attainment for all National Ambient Air Quality Standards; no detailed analysis required. VMT will increase, but emissions are projected to decline due to national emissions control programs. Despite higher VMT, overall energy use is projected to be lower than today.
- **Hazardous materials:** Most contaminated sites pose no or low risk; a few sites require management during construction. Contamination risks can be effectively managed with planning and controls. Removal of contaminated soil reduces long-term environmental and health risks. Anticipated property acquisitions.
- **Land use, farmlands and Section 6(f):** Land use impacts include some land acquisition for bridges, stormwater systems and creek realignment; one home would be displaced. No farmland impacts to existing agricultural uses, working with NRCS on FPPA coordination. No change of use for Section 6(f).
- **Socioeconomic:** Supports access to jobs, services, and opportunities, enhances public health and long-term community stability and access for all users, especially those without vehicles. Temporary construction impacts to transit, emergency response, and local traffic flow during construction and extensive community outreach ongoing.
- **Cultural and historic resources**: Section 106 PA under development to address ongoing and future coordination
- **Section 4(f) Report**: An individual 4 (f) evaluation is being prepared, a draft report will be published with the NEPA document

- **Greenhouse Gas analysis:** WSDOT is determining the path forward for documenting the Greenhouse Gas analysis to meet state requirements. GHG emissions are expected to decrease, driven by reduced congestion and cleaner vehicle technologies.

Comments and questions

- Scott Egger (City of Lacey) asked if the design layout will accommodate the installation of light-rail in the future.
    - Kirk Wilcox (Parametrix) shared that the design will not preclude future light-rail installation, though it is not being directly factored into the design.
- Gus Lim (City of DuPont) raised concerns regarding the risk of train derailments at the BNSF rail crossing, referencing the 2017 Amtrack derailment in the corrido. He emphasized the need for a design that prevents a derailment incident from shutting down I-5.
    - Kirk Wilcox confirmed that the proposed bridge would pass over the BNSF tracks, significantly reducing the risk of derailment impacting freeway traffic. He noted that while the Sound Transit bridge would still carry rail over I-5, the installation of positive train control greatly reduces the likelihood of derailment. Due to topographic constraints, elevating I-5 over the Sound Transit rail line is not feasible in this location.
- Scott Egger asked for clarification on a slide noting that vehicle miles traveled (VMT) are projected to increase while emissions and energy use are expected to decrease. He suggested the trend might be related to broader adoption of electric vehicles.
    - Sharese Graham (SCJ Alliance) explained that VMT growth is based on population projections through 2045 and that emissions are expected to decline due to ongoing improvements in vehicle technology and emissions regulations.
    - Alex Atchison (Parametrix) added that the project will also reduce vehicle idling by alleviating congestion and bottlenecks, which further contributes to lower emissions despite overall traffic growth.
- Gus Lim expressed interest in project team coordination with Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM), noting that recent transportation projects in the area have involved right-of-way impacts on JBLM property. He encouraged the team to be proactive in ensuring JBLM is fully informed and engaged to avoid perceptions of forced property use.
    - Sharese Graham confirmed that coordination with JBLM has been ongoing and that representatives attended the Agency Coordination Group meeting the day before, where the same project updates and findings were shared.
- Aubrey Collier (City of Lacey) asked whether meeting materials would be shared.
    - Hayley Nolan (PRR) confirmed that the meeting recording and summary will be posted on the project website. The study team will send a follow-up email to EAG members with a link to the meeting materials.

Next steps

The project team encouraged participants to reach out with any follow-up questions after the meeting. Cooperating agencies will be given the opportunity to review the draft Discipline Reports once they are approved by FHWA, anticipated in mid-August 2025. These reports will be available upon request. The findings from the Environmental Assessment will be shared with the public through online and in-person open houses scheduled for early 2026. The next EAG meeting will take place in early 2026.

The meeting adjourned at 11:02 a.m.