

CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION

Briefing on the I-405 Master Plan and the Renton to Bellevue Widening and Express Toll Lanes Project

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DIRECTION NEEDED FROM COUNCIL**INFORMATION
ONLY**

Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) staff will provide an update on the I-405/SR 167 corridor, including the I-405 Renton to Bellevue Widening and Express Toll Lanes Project. The presentation is an opportunity for Council to review progress on the I-405 Master Plan, learn about the planned closure of the Main Street bridge and ask questions.

RECOMMENDATION

N/A

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

Investments on I-405 have consistently been a high priority for the City Council. Bellevue has been actively involved in efforts to improve mobility and reduce congestion on I-405 since the late 1990s. The WSDOT I-405/SR 167 Executive Advisory Group (EAG) has advised the Governor, the Legislature and state agencies on I-405 improvements since 1999. EAG members include state and local elected officials, and representatives from federal and regional transit agencies.

Completed in 2002, the I-405 Master Plan calls for multi-modal improvements intended to reduce traffic congestion, expand travel options and improve trip reliability even as travel demands grow. The I-405 Master Plan includes over 150 projects designed to improve travel between Lynnwood and the Renton/Tukwila area, including bus rapid transit (BRT). When combined with SR 167, this north-south corridor will form a 50+ mile transportation system providing travelers with a reliable trip in the express toll lanes (ETL) and general-purpose lanes.

Currently, the I-405/SR 167 Corridor Program is constructing the I-405/Renton to Bellevue Widening and Express Toll Lanes (ETLs) project.

I-405/Renton to Bellevue Widening and ETLs Project

In 2018, staff from WSDOT updated Council on the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the I-405/Renton to Bellevue Widening and ETLs project (Renton to Bellevue project). The project will add capacity and create a two-lane ETL system between SR 167 in Renton and Northeast 6th Street in Bellevue. The EA found that the project will improve the flow of traffic across all I-405 travel lanes in most areas. This project phase – known as Contract 2 – is scheduled to open to traffic in 2024.

The Renton to Bellevue project is designed to improve speed and trip reliability for all travelers. It will also support the new Sound Transit I-405 Stride BRT line between Lynnwood and Burien that is part of the voter-approved Sound Transit 3 (ST3) package.

As part of the I-405 widening required for the project, WSDOT must remove the Lake Washington Loop Trail. As mitigation, WSDOT agreed to construct portions of the King County Eastrail, including a 2.5-mile paved section and a new crossing over I-405 in downtown Bellevue at the site of the former Wilburton rail bridge. Other non-motorized improvements as part of this project include widening the Main Street bridge to provide a pedestrian and bicycle multiuse path as part of the Lake-to-Lake Trail.

Contract 2 will add direct access high occupancy vehicle (HOV) ramps to the existing 112th Avenue Southeast interchange and expand the Newport Hills Park and Ride. Improvements at the Coal Creek Parkway interchange include adding a southbound general-purpose lane to the 112th Avenue Southeast interchange.

The final Renton to Bellevue project phase – known as Contract 3 -- is scheduled to begin construction in 2027 and open to traffic in 2029. The project will include extending Northeast 6th Street to the east, completing the direct access HOV ramp system and further improve the Coal Creek interchange by constructing roundabouts. The Legislature approved \$215 million for the completion of this phase; however, Contract 3 is at risk of delay due to a funding gap unless the Legislature provides financial resources.

Once all phases of the Renton to Bellevue project are complete, the new ETLs will connect to the existing ETL system between Bellevue and Lynnwood, as well as the SR 167 High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes, to create a 50-mile system of ETLs.

Construction Impacts, including Main Street Bridge Closure

During the Renton to Bellevue project construction, traffic conditions are expected to remain similar to existing conditions during the most congested times of the day; however, some short-term delays may occur. Temporary closures are required to widen the freeway, but they will occur on nights and weekends when traffic demand is lower and detour routes can better accommodate additional vehicles. Increases in vehicle delay would occur through construction areas and along detour routes. Construction is not expected to affect tolling operations.

To widen I-405, crews will remove and replace the existing Main Street bridge in downtown Bellevue. Work is anticipated to begin in March, including three full weekend closures of I-405 in Bellevue, a 150-day full closure of the Main Street bridge followed by 60-day single lane traffic in each direction of the Main Street bridge. The contractor, Flatiron Lane Joint Venture (FLJV), plans to demolish and replace the bridge in one phase. As part of this work, the slip-lane from 112th Avenue Northeast to 114th Avenue Northeast will be permanently closed and converted to a non-motorized path.

WSDOT worked with the City to develop a plan for mitigating traffic impacts as a result of the Main Street bridge closure. Measures include converting the eastbound HOV lane on Northeast 4th Street to a general-purpose lane, changes to traffic signal timing, installation of a camera on Northeast 4th Street to monitor real-time conditions and staffing the City's Traffic Management Center during the closure. Pedestrian detour routes will also be brought to Americans with Disability (ADA) standards.

During the I-405 weekend closures, highway traffic will bypass the Main Street bridge demolition and girder placement by detouring onto 112th Avenue Northeast and 116th Avenue Northeast.

In preparation for the Main Street bridge closure, WSDOT, FLJV and the City of Bellevue collaborated on a public outreach strategy to notify adjacent businesses, nearby neighbors and the travelling public of the closure and related detours. Communications strategies include building awareness for a variety of audiences before and during closures, communicating early and often with local businesses and working with local public agencies.

Variable message signs (VMS) and portable changeable message signs (PCMS) will play a significant role in diverting traffic before and during the closure. They will be an essential communication piece to warn the travelling public of the closure by encouraging drivers to change their routes. Signs will be placed on Bellevue streets a minimum of seven calendar days prior to the scheduled closure.

Legislative Update

In 2019, the Legislature authorized WSDOT to permanently toll the combined I-405 and SR 167 corridor, and to bond against the toll revenues to generate funding for the projects throughout the 50+ mile corridor. In 2021, the Legislature approved an updated list of projects funded through toll revenue to include: 1) up to \$600 million for the SR 522 to SR 527 Project; 2) up to \$215 million to complete the I-405 Renton to Bellevue Project; 3) up to \$3 million for the SR 167 Corridor Study; 4) up to \$100 million to construct the SR 167 Project that extends express toll lanes on SR 167 south to Pierce County; 5) up to \$250 million for design and construction of the I-405/N 8th Street Direct Access Ramp Project in Renton; 6) up to \$10 million for toll infrastructure at the NE 85th Street Inline Station.

In total, the Legislature authorized \$1.178 billion in projects corridor-wide to be funded through bonded toll revenue. However, the I-405/SR 167 corridor is facing a funding gap of approximately \$450 million due to a decline in toll revenue caused by the pandemic, increases in funding expectations from the Legislature, and increases in repair and replacement costs. This funding shortfall puts projects along the corridor at risk of not being completed in a timely manner and delaying the effective deployment of Sound Transit's Stride BRT along I-405.

EAG members and corridor stakeholders have asked Governor Jay Inslee and the Legislature to fund the \$450 million financial gap and provide WSDOT with direction to advance projects along the I-405/SR 167 corridor to help with timely deployment of BRT.

The Governor's proposed budget, released on December 16, allocates the funding necessary to deliver projects on an adjusted schedule, as supported by the EAG. The Governor's proposed budget has identified \$450 million of funding from sources that would not impact the rest of the department's budget, relying primarily on additional funding available from the federal response to the pandemic (\$300 million). The Governor also is proposing to defer sales taxes on these projects and access other available transportation funds to fill the funding gap.

I-405, SR 522 to SR 527 ETL Improvement Project - North End Improvements

In 2019, the Legislature approved up to \$600 million for improvements on I-405 in Bothell, building a second ETL in each direction between the SR 522 and SR 527 interchanges. It will also construct direct access HOV ramps at each of the interchanges. This project will allow full implementation of I-405 BRT

along the entire corridor as envisioned in ST3, a high priority for Bellevue.

WSDOT planned to issue bonds and begin construction on the north end improvements project in 2022 with project completion by 2025. Originally, this would have allowed the project to be completed in alignment with the Lynnwood-to-Bellevue segment of I-405 BRT. In 2021, the Legislature moved the project out two years from 2025 to 2027 due to forecasted toll revenue and financing assumptions.

Simultaneously, as a part of the Sound Transit's capital project realignment process, BRT projects were delayed due to slowdowns in the planning and environment review during COVID-19, third-party negotiations, permitting and right-of-way acquisitions. The I-405 Stride North BRT project is currently scheduled for a 2027 completion date.

South Downtown I-405 Access Study

The I-405 Master Plan envisions a new interchange in Bellevue, south of Northeast 4th Street. The on-ramp will provide travel time reduction benefits on I-405 and local roads, while reducing delays at intersections in the area. As envisioned in the I-405 Master Plan, this new interchange would complement the planned half-diamond interchange to and from the north at Northeast 10th Street.

With the new East Main light rail station opening in 2023, plans to further develop south downtown Bellevue and expanded toll lanes on I-405 opening in 2024, the City and the WSDOT partnered to study transportation improvement options.

Following a year of analysis and public engagement, the South Downtown I-405 Access Study confirmed the need for additional access to/from south Downtown and I-405. The City Council unanimously supported the recommendation to advance the Lake Hills Connector southbound on-ramp to I-405 as the alternative that best meets the City's transportation needs in the south Downtown area. The final report was published in July 2021.

This project is a high priority for Council and included it on the 2022 State Legislative Agenda, requesting \$150 million for design, environmental documentation and construction.

SR 520/124th Avenue NE Interchange Project

The City of Bellevue has partnered with WSDOT to examine cost-effective design solutions to reduce congestion at the I-405/SR 520 interchange. The SR 520/124th Avenue Northeast Interchange project will allow westbound drivers the option to access the downtown Bellevue vicinity by exiting SR 520 onto 124th Avenue Northeast before reaching the heavily congested I-405/SR 520 interchange.

This project will build a new on-ramp to eastbound SR 520 and a new off-ramp from westbound SR 520 at 124th Avenue Northeast, improving access to the Spring District and the medical district as well as downtown Bellevue and future East Link light rail. The project also includes a new eastbound auxiliary lane to Northeast 148th Street and will realign the existing bike path along westbound SR 520. It will correct fish passage and improve water quality.

The Legislature funded the preliminary engineering and right of way acquisition; however, the project is not yet funded for construction.

Next Steps

The Washington State Legislature will convene on January 10. After reviewing the Governor's proposed budget, the Legislature must approve supplemental operations, capital and transportation budgets. The City's Legislative Agenda includes a request for timely completion of projects along the I-405/SR 167 Corridor, including the projects identified above, and funding requests for the SR 520/124th Avenue Northeast Interchange and the South Downtown I-405 Access Improvement Project.

Starting as early as March, WSDOT crews will remove and replace the existing Main Street bridge in downtown Bellevue as part of the Renton to Bellevue project. Work will include three full weekend closures of I-405 in Bellevue, a 150-day full closure of the Main Street bridge followed by 60-day, single lane traffic in each direction of the Main Street bridge. Communications strategies include building awareness for a variety of audiences before and during closures, communicating early and often with local businesses and working with local public agencies.

POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS

Policy Impact

Completion of the I-405 Master Plan is a longstanding Council priority. The Renton to Bellevue project is a critical component of the plan. It will add capacity, help reduce congestion and allow for full implementation of BRT along the entire corridor as envisioned in the ST3 Plan. Implementing BRT on I-405 is a high priority for Bellevue.

Fiscal Impact

There are no direct fiscal impacts to the City associated with this briefing. Funding for the I-405 Master Plan projects has been provided from three statewide transportation funding packages, the details of which are included earlier in this agenda memo.

OPTIONS

N/A

ATTACHMENTS & AVAILABLE DOCUMENTS

- A. Bridge Demolition Detour Map
- B. Long-term Closure Detour Map
- C. City of Bellevue 2022 State Legislative Agenda

AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY

N/A