



Credit: Washington State Department of Transportation

## I-405 Renton-to-Bellevue Widening and Express Toll Lanes Project Washington State Department of Transportation

King County, WA

*This project constructs one new travel lane and converts an existing high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane to create a two-lane high-occupancy toll (HOT) lane system.*

### NOTABLE PRACTICES

#### ☑ Meaningful Public Involvement

- Extensive stakeholder engagement with environmental justice communities directly influenced future WSDOT outreach strategies.

#### ☑ Multimodal Travel Considerations

- Incorporated multimodal infrastructure investments into express toll lanes project.

#### ☑ Environmental Justice

- Offered an option for low-income individuals who are eligible for public benefits to use their electronic benefit transfer cards to open and maintain a tolling account.

#### ☑ Tiered Environmental Reviews

- Used tiered NEPA process to initiate projects as funding became available & incorporate NEPA into long-term corridor planning.

congestion, offer more reliable travel choices, improve safety performance, and support future transit lines. The project sponsor refers to the high-occupancy toll (HOT) lane system as an express toll lane (ETL) based on the operation of the lanes. The project creates a two-lane HOT lane system between State Route 167 (SR 167) in Renton and NE 6<sup>th</sup> Street in Bellevue.

WSDOT will add one new lane in each direction and convert the existing high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane to a HOT lane. These new HOT lanes will connect to existing ETLs between Bellevue and

Lynnwood and to the SR 167 HOT lanes as part of WSDOT's regional plan for a 50-mile HOT lane system.

WSDOT used a tiered National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process to implement the project, allowing for an evaluation of the entire I-405 corridor.

In addition to lane work, WSDOT will improve several

Figure 1: The "Renton to Bellevue Widening and Express Toll Lanes Project" is highlighted in orange. Credit: Washington State Department of Transportation.



### OVERVIEW

Travelers on Interstate 405 (I-405) between Renton, WA and Bellevue, WA contend with one of the most congested routes in the State. As part of I-405 highway and transit improvements, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is implementing the Renton-to-Bellevue Widening and Express Toll Lanes Project to reduce

interchanges. Other improvements include a new direct access ramp at 112<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE in Bellevue, a new direct access ramp and inline transit station at NE 44<sup>th</sup> Street in Renton, the construction of portions of the Eastrail trail, and new southbound auxiliary lanes at Coal Creek and Kenedydale Hill.

This project is part of the I-405 Corridor Program, a long-term regional transportation plan that identifies more than 150 transportation improvement projects. Like this Renton-to-Bellevue ETL project, I-405 Corridor Program projects are designed to be implemented as funding becomes available, making incremental progress to develop multimodal travel options and alleviate congestion.



### TIERED ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEWS

In 2002, WSDOT published the I-405 Corridor Program Tier 1 Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), which became the basis for the I-405 Corridor Program.

#### Using Corridor Planning Studies in NEPA

The purpose of using a Tier 1 EIS was to incorporate consideration of corridor-level impacts for I-405 into NEPA decision-making. WSDOT engaged affected regulatory agencies and local jurisdictions at key milestones and decision points during the environmental review process. The Tier I EIS explains that project-level environmental review must be conducted for each individual project.

The selected alternative in the 2002 Record of Decision (ROD) for the I-405 Corridor Program has a mixed-mode emphasis and allows for I-405 to be widened by up to two lanes in each direction. The ROD also notes that there may be future consideration for managed lanes (e.g., toll lanes, HOV lanes).

#### Tiered Process Used to Implement Projects as Funding Becomes Available

In 2010, WSDOT completed the I-405/SR 167 Eastside Corridor Tolling Study, which proposed managed lanes in the I-405/SR 167 corridor. In 2015, WSDOT developed environmental

assessments (EAs) for the Renton-to-Bellevue project to account for the addition of managed lanes. WSDOT used two EAs, with independent utility, to cover the length of the 14.6-mile project: I-405, Tukwila to I-90 Vicinity Express Toll Lanes Project (Tukwila to I-90) and I-405, Downtown Bellevue Vicinity Express Toll Lanes Project (Downtown Bellevue).



### MEANINGFUL PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

WSDOT engaged with members of the public on the I-405 Corridor Program and the tolling/HOT lanes in the Renton-to-Bellevue project since 2009. The agency held more than 200 briefings with neighborhood organizations and local jurisdictions and held many open houses.

For the Renton-to-Bellevue EAs, WSDOT placed advertisements announcing the public hearings in local newspapers and in online publications, including those that serve limited English proficiency populations. Display ads were translated into Spanish, Korean, Chinese, and Vietnamese. WSDOT distributed posters and postcards in community gathering spaces like public libraries and announced meetings and events in email listservs maintained by agency and community groups.



Figure 2: Public hearing held in July 2018 at Renton High School for the I-405, Tukwila to I-90 Vicinity Express Toll Lanes Project EA. Credit: Washington State Department of Transportation.

#### Stakeholder Engagement Influences Environmental Justice Initiatives

WSDOT reached out to environmental justice (EJ) populations, contacting 38 social service providers that serve EJ populations and

conducting seven interviews with social service providers who serve EJ populations to understand how the project – including HOT lanes – may affect low-income individuals or individuals with limited English proficiency. Insights from the interviews allowed WSDOT to better communicate HOT lane information to EJ populations.

Since 2009 WSDOT has allowed those eligible for public benefits to use their Electronic Benefit Transfer cards to open and maintain their *Good To Go!* tolling accounts. This mitigation commitment offsets the ETL's disproportionate impact on low-income users, by allowing those without bank accounts to access the ETLs and avoid extra charges for the pay by mail option. Further, WSDOT has also worked to expand the number of retail locations, such as grocery stores, where people can purchase *Good To Go!* passes with cash.

Engagement with EJ organizations has not only resulted in innovative and creative project solutions, but it has also informed WSDOT's outreach practices, such as the translation of instructional videos about HOT lanes into Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese.



## ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

The purpose of the project is to (1) provide a reliable trip choice for I-405 users; (2) increase vehicle capacity and person throughput; (3) improve reliability for transit; (4) reduce project-wide congestion; and (5) improve safety performance. The Tukwila to I-90 segment includes a sixth purpose, which is to improve access for I-405 users.

### Two EAs Cover One Broad Project Area

Moreover, because the EAs cover segments that are being constructed simultaneously and are located next to one another, WSDOT considered the impacts of the entire Renton-to-Bellevue Widening and Express Toll Lanes Project in certain sections of the EAs (e.g., air quality, noise, and transportation analysis). The EAs are different, however, in sections where

mile-by-mile features vary, for example where a specific, significant cultural resources property is in the southern segment but not in the northern segment.

WSDOT and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) published a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for Downtown Bellevue in 2018, followed by a FONSI for Tukwila to I-90 in 2019. Construction began in 2020 and is expected to be completed in 2024.



## MULTIMODAL TRAVEL CONSIDERATIONS

The Renton-to-Bellevue Widening and Express Toll Lanes Project has several multimodal travel impacts. Bus services that utilize I-405 are likely to become more reliable because the HOT lanes will reduce traffic congestion and buses will have access to an additional managed lane.

### Multimodal Infrastructure Incorporated into Express Toll Lanes Project

The project plan incorporates the construction of a direct access ramp and inline transit station at NE 44<sup>th</sup> Street in Renton. This new station will support Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) operations, which is the selected high-capacity transit mode envisioned in the Preferred Alternative of the 2002 I-405 Corridor Program Final EIS. The Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority (known locally as Sound Transit) is leading the BRT planning process. If the project were not built, BRT would not be able to meet planned travel times or reliability standards due to congestion in the existing HOV lane.

As part of the project, WSDOT will construct new portions of the Eastrail trail in partnership with King County. This trail will be a continuous, 42-mile recreational path for bicyclists and pedestrians, and it will provide a non-motorized transportation connection between the communities of Kirkland, Renton, Bellevue, Woodinville, and others.



## PROJECT OUTCOMES

When the Renton-to-Bellevue Widening and Express Toll Lanes

Project is complete, WSDOT anticipates that passengers in both HOT lanes and the general-purpose lanes would experience improved travel times in most of the project area when compared to the no-build alternative.

By 2045, the Downtown Bellevue project is projected to deliver a travel time of under three minutes between I-90 and SR 520 during the PM peak period for both general-purpose lanes and HOT lanes. The no-build alternative is projected to deliver travel times of 23 minutes in the general-purpose lane and 11 minutes in the existing HOV lane. Table 1 compares average projected future travel times (in minutes) for general-purpose lanes and HOT lanes from I-5 in Tukwila to I-90 in the design year of 2045 with and without the project.

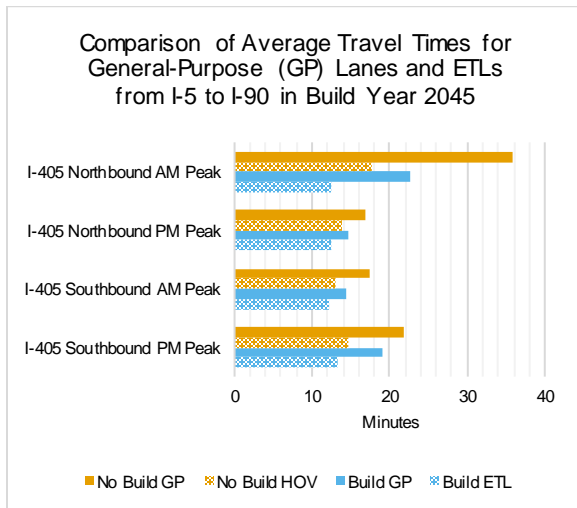


Figure 3: Chart adapted from data in the Tukwila to I-90 EA.

Beyond managing congestion, the project will expand both recreational and non-motorized transportation opportunities by constructing portions of the Eastrail trail.



## FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT

Robert Woeck  
 I-405/SR 167 Deputy Program Administrator  
 Washington State Department of Transportation  
 425-455-3555  
[WoeckRo@wsdot.wa.gov](mailto:WoeckRo@wsdot.wa.gov)



## RESOURCES

I-405 Corridor Program Tier 1 Final EIS:  
<https://wsdot.wa.gov/Projects/I405/corridor/feis.htm>

I-405 Renton to Bellevue Widening and Express Toll Lanes Project Site:  
<https://wsdot.wa.gov/Projects/I405/RentontoBellevue/home>

I-405 Renton to Bellevue Widening and Express Toll Lanes Environmental Assessments (Downtown Bellevue & Tukwila to I-90):  
<https://wsdot.wa.gov/projects/i405/rentontobellevue/environmental-review>



## PHOTO CREDITS

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