



PlanWorks Case Study

Collaborative Consideration of a Tolling Option Washington State Department of Transportation



This case study is an excellent example of collaboration when projects change significantly in scope and alternatives. Washington State DOT (WSDOT) initially used PlanWorks Corridor Planning in the beta version to gain consensus from important stakeholders. The PlanWorks Corridor Planning key decisions will be very useful in helping other agencies collaborating for a similar purpose.

Executive Summary

The completion of State Route 509 (SR-509) in the Puget Sound region of Washington State was an identified transportation need which had stalled over the years due to lack of funding. The project is a large-scale project which failed to receive enough financial support to be completed, until it was funded by the state legislature's Connecting Washington transportation package in 2015. This funding included local contributions, gas tax and a tolling element. Tolling enabled a four lane facility to perform, reducing the scope and helping cover the costs of construction and operations. Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) participated in an early pilot of PlanWorks, to test working with partners and stakeholders in considering tolling and phasing options. By following the Decision Guide process for Corridor Planning, WSDOT brought in new stakeholders early in the process to develop a plan for phasing SR 509 with a reduced scope. As tolling had not previously been considered for the project, stakeholder support was critical. After the pilot, WSDOT combined the SR-509 project with a related project for State Route 167 (SR-167) to create the Puget Sound Gateway Program and received funding to complete both as one Program. Although some of WSDOT's planning processes had changed since the earlier pilot, WSDOT continued the strong collaborative process through the joint project phasing and NEPA re-evaluation process.

Agency's Challenge

In the 1990s, WSDOT began studies for SR-509 and SR-167 in order to complete major links between Puget Sound marine ports and regional industrial areas, as well as an important connection to the Sea-Tac International Airport. While both projects demonstrated solutions to regional congestion and critical gaps in the transportation network and both had completed

Overview

The Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT) pilot tested the PlanWorks beta website to apply the Corridor Planning key decisions to SR 509, a large highway project with a tolling component.

Lessons learned from the pilot test included:

- Identify key stakeholders early, especially those who could block the project.
- Develop performance measures with key stakeholder input.
- Reducing scope/price of the project requires ongoing stakeholder input and support.
- The project was later jointly funded with the SR-167 project. Planning for both projects identified the first phases of construction and a plan for tolling.
- Tolling had not previously been considered, therefore, stakeholder and partner support was critical.

NEPA Environmental Impact Statements (EIS), they stalled for years primarily due to their large funding requirements.

In 2011, WSDOT was selected to pilot the earlier version of PlanWorks. WSDOT used the Decision Guide Corridor Planning process to define a Phase 1 of the project for implementation by reducing the number of lanes and introducing tolling. According to the 2013 Gateway Concept (described below), Phase 1 of the SR-509 project extends SR-509 south for three miles, and connects with Interstate-5 with four additional miles of widening. Specific plans for tolling and managed lanes were not defined at this point. Using this approach, WSDOT hoped to make the project scalable and more feasible for funding and implementation. The Decision Guide and other features were helpful in working with stakeholders to identify needs and priorities, and determine a new scope for the project.

In 2013, WSDOT combined the SR-509 project with the SR-167 project into a joint Puget Sound Gateway Program (Gateway Program), with the intent to align regional and stakeholder interest and support behind a package of improvements with regional benefits that directly serves the Ports of Seattle and Tacoma. The Puget Sound Gateway Program included concepts identified in the pilot Final Report, including tolling options.

In 2015, the Gateway Program was funded with a new state gas tax of \$1.5 billion over a 16-year period with additional required local jurisdiction contributions of \$130 million and a tolling contribution of \$180 million. This funding allowed WSDOT to move forward with the two projects, however, significant effort was still needed to:

1. Refine the scope of the joint project, using practical design principles, to meet stakeholder needs and interests and align with funding.
2. Secure local support and funding matches.
3. Complete NEPA re-evaluations for each project.

The Washington State Legislature's intent was for tolling to help pay for the construction of the projects. WSDOT now needed stakeholder and public support

for two very large projects located in different districts of the State, the Olympic and Northwest Regions. Although the joint projects would serve to meet similar goals, reaching consensus on scope and securing stakeholder support would be a challenging task.

Pilot Testing PlanWorks

PlanWorks began as a research product of the SHRP2 Capacity Program and was originally called Transportation for Communities—Advancing Projects through Partnerships (TCAPP). Its purpose was to develop a framework that would allow institutionalizing collaborative decision making within transportation planning. WSDOT's efforts in the TCAPP pilot for SR-509 were foundational in continuing and expanding the collaboration required to refine and gain support for the SR-509 and SR-167 components of the Puget Sound Gateway Program.

In order to define Phase 1 of the SR-509 project as an acceptable plan for all stakeholders, WSDOT focused on identifying key stakeholders with the ability to stall the project and conducted a stakeholder assessment. In general, SR-509 was viewed by stakeholders as a favorable project, however, there were some concerns about tolling and potential spillover traffic into communities. Identifying stakeholders representing the full range of perspectives was important to WSDOT during the development of the environmental impact statement (EIS) in the 1990s. After conducting the assessment, WSDOT expanded their list of stakeholders participating on the steering and executive committees to include residents, and members of the freight and local business communities.

The WSDOT SR-509 Project Team worked with the executive and steering committees through the Corridor Planning key decisions and the first key decision in the Environmental Review phase. The steering and executive committee determined an agreed-upon set of project goals, which helped guide the scope for Phase 1. They also developed criteria to evaluate phasing and tolling options; however due to time and resource constraints, these were only applied to the phasing options. The TCAPP Performance Measures Application was used to inform their development of specific measures for the project. Using these performance measures, the project team analyzed a set of phasing options which were developed under

consultation with the steering committee, following the agreed-upon goals. Based on this analysis, the executive committee endorsed the steering committee's recommendation for Phase 1.

Although an EIS had been prepared previously for the SR-509 project, the change in scope and addition of tolling required a re-evaluation. While recommended options for tolling were not determined in the TCAPP pilot, the project team followed the Environmental Review scoping key decision (ENV-1) to develop a list of issues required for re-evaluation. TCAPP provided guidance to the project team regarding agencies to coordinate with and data and analyses needed for the re-evaluation. At the conclusion of the TCAPP pilot, the plan and approved Phase 1 were submitted to the Washington State legislature to await funding.

Puget Sound Gateway Program

Despite the decisions reached in the TCAPP pilot, the SR-509 project remained unfunded. In 2013, WSDOT elected to combine the SR-509 project with the SR-167 project, which would serve a joint goal of connecting the ports of Tacoma and Seattle to each other and to key industrial areas in the region. WSDOT produced a report on a joint program, which included recommendations for Phase 1 construction and tolling options. Both projects would realize efficiencies in planning and project delivery to save costs and focus support for a combined regional project. The combined projects were called the Puget Sound Gateway Program and were funded through a major state revenue package in 2015.

State funding for the Gateway Program was to be delivered in phases over 16 years, with the assumption that a portion of construction costs comes from local matches and tolling revenue. Once funded, WSDOT moved forward with executive and steering committees for both projects to refine design concepts and make key decisions on funding and construction phasing.

Between the completion of the Gateway report and the funding of the projects, WSDOT adopted Executive Order 1096 to support a Practical Design approach, indicating that WSDOT will “design transportation infrastructure related solutions that are targeted to address the essential needs of the project, not every

Decision Guide Connections

- **COR-1: Approve Scope.** Although not formally approved until Phase 2 Step 6, UDOT primarily develops the scope of the corridor plan in Phase 1, Steps 3 and 5.
- **COR-2: Approve Problem Statements and Opportunities.** UDOT develops high-level needs for the corridor in Phase 1, Step 4. UDOT develops detailed problems and opportunities in Phase 2 Step 8.
- **COR-3: Approve Goals.** High-level goals for the corridor during scoping; Phase 1 Step 4.
- **COR-5: Approve Evaluation Criteria, Methods and Measures.** UDOT develops evaluation criteria after goals and needs are determined in Step 9.
- **COR-6: Approve Range of Solution Sets.** In Step 10 UDOT and partners approve a list of alternatives for evaluation.
- **COR-7: Adopt Preferred Solution Set.** In Steps 11 and 12, UDOT evaluates alternatives and documents strategies to move forward.
- **COR-9: Adopt Priorities for Implementation.** An implementation strategy is developed in Step 13; which includes phasing options and prioritization of selected projects. UDOT moves projects to the STIP based on this prioritization.

need.”¹ The Practical Design approach required the planning team to revisit the goals, proposed phasing, and performance measures. The steering and executive committees were tasked with reviewing the project's “essential” and “contextual” needs to ensure that the project met the Practical Design requirements, and that performance metrics and approved solutions met the Practical Design standards.

As significant work had already been accomplished on each project, the Puget Sound Gateway Program retained project managers for both the SR-509 and SR-167 portions of the overall program. At the onset

¹ <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/publications/manuals/fulltext/M22-01/1100.pdf>



Figure 1: Completing SR 509 and SR 167 creates direct links between ports and industrial/distribution areas

of the combined program, each project manager held separate stakeholder meetings for the two projects. As the projects progressed, the project managers began to hold joint meetings. The joint meetings initially proved challenging due to the size of participation and initially separate interests; however, the joint meetings helped communicate the full context and rally support for the project as a whole (Figure 1).

Stakeholder Collaboration

Building trust between WSDOT and the stakeholders as well as among the stakeholders was an important theme throughout the Gateway Program Practical Design process. The planning process included high levels of transparency, early inclusion of key stakeholder voices in decision making, and identifying shared goals. Early on the project team conducted a bus tour of project locations for the executive and steering committees of both projects to prompt discussion and dialogue in the field.

Value of Pilot Testing

Identifying key stakeholders was an important part of the success of the Puget Sound Gateway Program. During the TCAPP pilot, one of WSDOT's first activities was to conduct a stakeholder evaluation to identify stakeholders who would be impacted by the project, as well as all stakeholders with the power to stall or delay the project. Bringing in all voices and perspectives early in the planning process helped build trust among stakeholders and address concerns before significant work was accomplished.

Executive and Steering Committees

Each project had both an executive committee and steering committee, which served as the primary stakeholders for the projects. The executive committee represented 26 entities largely comprised of local decision makers, including mayors, county leaders, port leaders, tribe, and transit agency leaders. The Washington State Transportation Commission and FHWA leaders also participated. The role of the executive committee was to provide feedback on the plan and implementation and build consensus with local stakeholders.

The steering committee included local, regional, state and federal staff, tribal staff, trucking association leaders, and chambers of commerce leaders. The role of the steering committee was to provide strategic advice and technical input to the executive committee and other stakeholders.

Local Nexus Projects, Grants, and Partner MOU

State funding for the Gateway Program was dependent on local contributions of \$130 million. For a Program of this size, soliciting and securing local contributions proved to be a challenge, especially in determining the amount of funding each of the 18 jurisdictions adjacent or affected by the project felt comfortable contributing. Through a series of five meetings, the Gateway Program team worked with local leaders and the steering/executive committees to identify a process to obtain local funding in a way that was mutually beneficial and satisfactory to everyone.

Following the theme of transparency and trust, WSDOT hired a grant specialist and economic assessment advisor to estimate the economic benefits of "local nexus" projects for each local jurisdiction and suggest

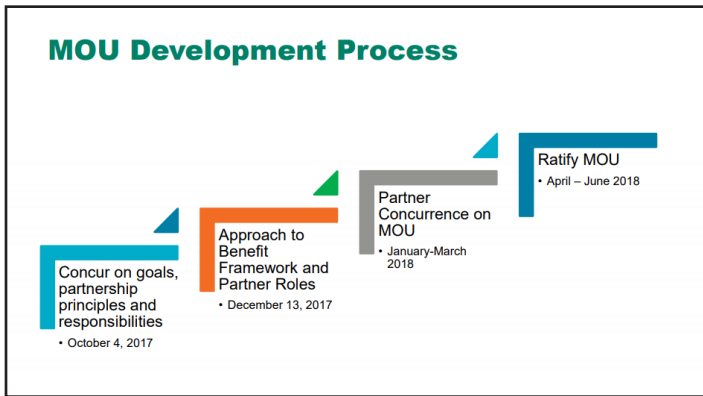


Figure 2: MOU Development Process

appropriate contributions based on the expected benefit. Local nexus projects are components within the Gateway Program that demonstrated clear benefit to the local community. Projects included local access ramps to SR-509 and SR-167, trails, a road extension and a bridge relocation. Measurable benefits included transportation linkages, local sales taxes, travel time savings, traffic diversion from local streets, local employment figures, developable residential and commercial lands, local policy goal achievement, , and environmental and social benefits.²

² <https://www.wsdot.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2018/04/19/Gateway-Subcommittee-Presentation-03082018.pdf>

All 18 jurisdictions signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) outlining planned local contributions in support of the Gateway Program (Figure 2). Included in the MOU was an agreement to contribute funds, in-kind donations, and coordinate grant applications for local projects to avoid competition that would hinder progress of the Gateway Program.

Key Outcomes

- Inclusion of key and diverse stakeholders early in the planning process helped bring all voices and perspectives to the process, which informed WSDOT of challenges, pushbacks, ideas, and local priorities.
- WSDOT worked with local stakeholders to clearly identify benefits to local communities. They received support for the project as a whole, including financial contributions. It was also essential that they specifically addressed elements which were considered high priority both for the overall project and for local communities.
- Clear and transparent dialogues that WSDOT facilitated about the project's funding mechanism, effects from tolling, and expected benefits helped bring support for a large and controversial project.

For more information

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Resources

- **Puget Sound Gateway Program website**
<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Projects/Gateway/default.htm>
- **Pilot Test of the TCAPP Collaborative Decision-Making Framework Including a Self-Assessment Methodology: Washington State's SR 509 Project**
<http://www.trb.org/Publications/Blurbs/169555.aspx>
- **Puget Sound Gateway Project report**
http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2013/09/09/Gateway_Report_091313_WEB1.pdf