

I-5 Lid Feasibility Study

Study Committee - Guiding Principles and Key Assumptions Workshop Summary

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Workshop summary

Welcome, meeting purpose and introductions

- Susan Hayman, meeting facilitator with EnviroIssues, opened the meeting, reviewed the agenda and ground rules, and led a round of introductions. Susan said OPCD hopes committee members will share information from the workshop with their organizations and communities and provide feedback to OPCD by June 25.
- Susan led the committee through an ice breaker activity.
- David Driskell, Deputy Director of the Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD), thanked committee members for joining the workshop. David recognized the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT), Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation (Parks), and the Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT) as important project partners. He also introduced Quanlin Hu, Development Advisor and Project Manager with OPCD. Quanlin has joined the feasibility study team to support Study Committee coordination, communications and project management.

Questions for presenters/discussion

- None

Project update

- Lyle Bicknell, OPCD Project Manager, provided a brief update about work done since the last meeting including gathering large amounts of data from a variety of agencies, meeting with stakeholders, and developing the draft guiding principles and key study assumptions that are the topic of today's workshop.
- Dhyana Quintanar, WSP consultant team Deputy Project Manager, reviewed the study area boundary established by OPCD, the detailed workplan and timeline to complete the feasibility study, and the look-ahead schedule for future Study Committee meetings.
 - The consultant team is nearly done creating a base map of the study area boundary; grateful to WSDOT for the data and information they provided.
 - The study area connects communities throughout the corridor and could host opportunities to help Seattle address some of its most important challenges, such as affordable housing and lack of open space.
 - The study area boundary is where the team will look at structural feasibility. Some elements of the study, such as the economic analysis, will extend beyond the study area boundary.
 - The purpose of the study is to look at the technical and financial feasibility of creating new land by lidding over I-5.
 - The two main goals of the study are to understand what is feasible from a technical and financial perspective, and to create a framework to maximize benefits for everyone.
 - The study will answer questions like: Where can a lid be built? What can a lid support? How might development programs perform? What are the next steps?

- Next steps will be defined in a “blueprint for the future” which will identify questions to be answered and future work necessary should decision makers want to further explore a lid.
- The study will not include lid programming/specific uses, design or a preferred alternative with specific costs.
- By the end of August 2019, the team will know where a lid can be built within the structural assessment boundary, feasible geometric layouts and high-level capital cost ranges.
- By mid-October 2019, the team will understand the area of developable land within the study area boundary and the structural load capacity.
- By late January 2020, the development program analysis will be complete along with the economic benefit cost analysis, funding and financing opportunities and governance options.
- The final feasibility study report is expected to be complete in early April 2020.
- The Study Committee meetings will be timed to align with the major milestones in August, October, January and April. Each meeting will likely be workshop-style with the committee helping the team to examine each of the key questions and test opportunities/outcomes.
- In small groups, the committee discussed the workplan and committee meeting plan.

Questions for presenters/discussion

- None

Presentation of guiding principles and key study assumptions

- Dave Warner, WSP consultant team Project Manager, provided an overview of the guiding principles and key study assumptions, emphasizing that they will frame the approach to the study.
- In addition to the guiding principles and key study assumptions, the consultant team will also consider federal, state and local requirements. These are often highly technical and include things like design standards and policy documents.
- Guiding principles are important to the study because they define opportunities, articulate a vision for the future, shape assumptions, inform analysis and create alignment with city plans such as the Seattle 2035 Comprehensive Plan and Imagine Greater Downtown.
- David Driskell added that guiding principles help guide the study, decision making and how we define and approach trade-offs. He noted that there are many city plans and policies that our guiding principles will need to align with. The Seattle 2035 and Imagine Greater Downtown plans are good examples because they articulate values for a similar planning timeframe as the lid (2035) and have been developed in partnership with many of the same agencies and stakeholders.
- Dave Warner shared the draft guiding principles for the feasibility study – affordability, complete community, connectivity, equity, health, identity, and sustainability and resilience.

- Key study assumptions are influenced by the scope of the study and existing policies and requirements. They are important to the study because they fill gaps that existing plans do not address, identify existing policies that may impact lid feasibility, help define feasibility, and identify areas of mutual benefit.
- The committee's input on guiding principles and key study assumptions will inform the consultant team's memo to the city. There is not a set date for when the memo will be done, as the consultant team is still working through a lot of technical information.
- Dave Warner reviewed the key study assumptions from the presentation:
 - The feasibility study will not make any decisions about the future of the I-5 corridor. There isn't currently an I-5 project that this study or lid is part of, such as the SR 520 Montlake lid.
 - Projects constructed by April 2019 are included in the feasibility assessment, while projects in planning are not considered to be built. This is important because the study area boundary base map is based on what exists today. That doesn't mean that the study won't consider the future, but structural analysis/feasibility must be based on what is physically there.
 - Existing structures are not being assessed for deficiencies; PSRC 2018 State Facilities Action Plan is the basis for the I-5 asset analysis. A full assessment of all structures for deficiencies would require more time and money than the study currently has. It is also important not to speak for WSDOT on the state of their structures.
 - Existing bridges, ramps, or other structures within the structural assessment boundary can be removed, modified or replaced, for the purpose of the analysis. Removal of ramps would require additional analysis, beyond this study, to address potential implications. The study will describe the types of impacts, such as removing or relocating a ramp, in coordination with WSDOT. Relocation of a ramp, for example, would require further study and analysis.
 - The study will not assess structural modifications to the existing lids at Freeway Park and the Convention Center beyond potential edge integration with a future lid.
 - The lid will be a conduit for economic growth in the region; ownership, funding, and maintenance may be shared by more than one public or private entity.
 - Economic analysis will be conducted for a 2035 buildout with full completion of major investments by Sound Transit, WSDOT, SDOT and King County, and informed by the PSRC Transportation Plan.
 - The economic and financial feasibility will be informed by the analysis of development program test cases.
 - The analysis will consider private sector revenue generating uses on the lid; current state or federal policies that may prohibit such use will be identified as barriers to implementation. There are state and federal regulations that may prohibit private development on the lid. The team needs to better understand what to do to remove these barriers, rather than constrain the study by assuming something is not possible.
 - Development program test cases allow us to monetize potential benefits aligned with the guiding principles; these are not definitive proposed programs for the lid as

- they are not defined under a comprehensive planning process with significant public input.
- Geospatial boundaries for the urban context analysis will consider census tracts within a 15-minute walkshed from the structural assessment boundary. The real estate and economic analysis will consider different study boundaries for each type of market (hospitality, office, residential and retail). These have not yet been defined.
 - There are other highly technical assumptions that are in development and review with the Technical Advisory Team.

Questions for presenters/discussion

- As the team conducts the various analyses and develops the test cases, be careful not to preclude anything. The study should act as a prompt for future decision making and it will be important that all options are examined and documented.
- Note all the future work that will need to be done and questions that will need further study. We want future decision makers to be able to pick up the study and move forward without having to come up with new assumptions or wonder what ours were.
- There has been cursory conversation that the capacity of this portion of I-5 could be improved and that could inform the work that we do with the feasibility study. We need to articulate a clear relationship between this study and WSDOT's planning/future considerations for I-5.
- This study could be an opportunity to inform what WSDOT might do with I-5 through downtown or how they might think about it in the future.
- To move or eliminate ramps, a network study would need to be done which is clearly out of this scope. But, saying "if we could remove this constraint" helps identify future study needed. Please look at the best engineering approach and know that it will require future analysis by WSDOT.

Break

- Committee members took a 10-minute break before beginning small group work sessions.

Small group discussion

- To inform the small group work session, Greg Baker, WSP consultant team, provided an overview of the segment of the study area boundary between Seneca and Madison streets. Greg shared existing freeway constraints such as vertical clearance, ramps and overhangs, and existing conditions around the edges of the study area boundary.
- Susan Hayman reviewed the small group work session guide with the committee and the small group facilitators. Working in three groups, the committee identified opportunities and challenges, and discussed the key study assumptions and guiding principles. Each group shared highlights from their work session with the full committee, including:

Comments about opportunities

- Use the lid to improve on systemwide or adjacent issues like easing congestion on Madison.
- Align solutions and leverage across initiatives. How is what we do here supportive of other City efforts?
- Align zoning (incentives) with single family not micro-units.
- A lid will be better and more feasible (politically and financially) if done with a redesign and rebuild of I-5 through downtown. Works better if all done as one.
- Make use of buildings along 6th Ave. and other north-south streets to address the grades.
- The lid can reconnect places.
- Back doors can become front doors; back streets can become main streets.
- We need a community center, a school and open space.
- We need small-scale retail and activating uses on the lid.
- Inspire adjacent property owners with a vision.
- Create/boost demand for office towers and job density on First Hill to better mix use and build office capacity in downtown.
- Rethink Freeway Park to make it more accessible, active and inviting, especially the opportunity to open-up Freeway Park on the south end/at Seneca Street.
- Leverage the existence of and investment in Freeway Park.
- Inform the historic nomination/designation process for Freeway Park.
- The south area of the lid could be a gateway to downtown and a gateway to First Hill.
- There is an opportunity to improve Spring Street connectivity and mobility at First Hill.
- We need a new mobility paradigm for downtown. Leave single occupant vehicles at the edge of downtown and use transit, bike, walking to get into downtown.
- What does Seattle look like in 25 years? How people are getting around and what role does I-5 play in that?
- Madison Street ruins the neighborhood as a “freeway ramp.”
- SDOT’s street concept plans are applicable to edge streets.
- Fundamentally rethink the ramps in the sound end of the study area. They present pedestrian challenges and missing/inadequate sidewalks.
- Add a sidewalk on 6th Avenue between Spring and Madison streets.
- Have a city-wide discussion about onramps and offramps regardless of lid feasibility study. They don’t serve the city well now.
- Get rid of Seneca Street offramps – lid or no lid.

Comments about challenges

- Onramps and offramps make for problematic pedestrian conditions
- Lack of open space in downtown Seattle
- Freeway Park is not inviting or active and has poor sightlines
- Freeway Park historic designation could limit lid opportunities
- Freeway circulation around the area – existing and with future growth
- Avoid piece-meal solutions

Comments about guiding principles

Connectivity

- Not just for cars (Imaging Greater Downtown discussion of limiting SOV in the city is related)
- Reintroduce the street grid
- Connect utilities east-west
- Connect places
- Alignment of potential solutions allows leveraging across initiatives

Complete community

- Health and equity impacts

Equity

- No comments provided

Health

- Benefits of I-5 sound mitigation
- Benefits of open and green space; hearing birds and seeing nature is important for physical and mental health

Identity

- No comments provided

Affordability

- No comments provided

Sustainability and resilience

- No comments provided

Access

- A lid should be accessible to all people

Comments about assumptions

- Create a zoning overlay for I-5 lid. Zoning should encourage/incentivize workforce housing.
- Include workforce housing for downtown workers.
- Study if special zoning could create MHA funds recipient district to fund lid or affordable housing.
- Create zoning that is feasible to be supported by this market.
- Pay attention to market-driven economics when looking at zoning overlay.
- People will require increased social infrastructure in this area – schools, parks, services.
- Truly study the mix of housing types and who would benefit from new amenities. Permanent affordable housing is concentrated nearby – will not be displaced. Who will be displaced?
- Population will continue to increase in urban areas. People will want to want to live/work here.
- Families will want to live downtown, but development patterns may not support it.
- The world in 20 years will be multi-modal – light rail, congestion pricing, etc.
- Car dependency will decline as transit and active transportation options increase.
- Downtown access will change – more transit and more bikes.
- A north-south bike lane has long been a desire of lidding I-5.
- Assume the opportunity of a “clean slate”; get rid of I-5 ramps.
- Improve public safety.

Questions for presenters/discussion

- Balance open space and buildings. Don't have to sprinkle everything everywhere. For example, the south end could be more open space with more buildings on the north end.
- To make parks equitable they must be a destination, so they must be big enough and have greenery.
- We want the lid to be accessible for all – and we do have an elevation challenge. We must think about creating diagonals that don't exist today to provide pedestrian connections to from downtown.
- Lessons to be learned from Freeway Park. It is a giant planter box, so the foliage has grown much faster and larger than anticipated. The overgrowth created safety challenges.
- The stormwater impacts or potential benefits could be significant.
- People who have nowhere else to go will live under the lid, creating access/safety impacts for people that are already the most vulnerable in our city. We must remember vulnerable people will continue to occupy these spaces until they have other options.
- Is the property at 7th/8th Avenue and Madison Street for sale?
- Is the fountain near 6th Avenue and Spring Street a memorial?

Public comment

- No public comment was given at this meeting. One person signed-up but was not present when public comment began.

Questions for presenters/discussion

- None