

Chapter 2 Introduction to the Project

Chapter 2 explains the project background, the purpose and need for the project, and how this project relates to other projects in the SR 520 corridor.

How did the SR 520 Variable Tolling Project come about?

In May 2006, the USDOT announced a major nationwide initiative to reduce transportation system congestion. The plan, called the *National Strategy to Reduce Congestion on America's Transportation Network*, provides a blueprint for federal, state, and local officials to consider as they work together to reverse the current trends of congestion. One major component of this initiative is the Urban Partnership Program. The USDOT solicited applicants that, if selected, would adopt the "Four Ts": tolling, transit, telecommuting and technology – strategies believed to be effective on a combined basis in reducing traffic congestion. In return, the USDOT will provide federal funding to the selected Urban Partners to support implementation.

In 2007, the Seattle area was selected to join the Urban Partnership program. The Lake Washington Urban Partnership Agreement (UPA) is an agreement between the USDOT and the Seattle-area Urban Partners: WSDOT, King County, and the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC). Variable tolling on SR 520 is just one component of the Lake Washington Urban Partnership Agreement (UPA). Other components include transit improvements, new technologies such as real-time traveler information systems and active

What are the other elements of the Lake Washington Urban Partnership?

The Lake Washington Urban Partnership includes three elements in addition to tolling. Together these four elements will be implemented to help reduce congestion along the SR 520 corridor and will meet the terms of the Urban Partnership Agreement. Detailed information can be found on the Web at www.upa.dot.gov/agreements/seattle.htm. The three additional elements include:

1) Transit

King County Metro will improve transit service on SR 520 by expanding park-and-rides, adding at least 45 new buses, increasing service hours, and increasing rider information services.

2) Technology

WSDOT will implement European-style active traffic management (ATM) techniques on SR 520 and I-90 to improve traffic flow and safety. These techniques involve the use of dynamic message signs suspended over each lane every half-mile to provide variable speed and lane control information to drivers, while queue warning information and other messages will be provided via variable message signs.

3) Telecommuting

PSRC will develop programs to encourage telecommuting and the use of other transportation demand management tools. PSRC will work with employers to encourage flexible employment arrangements that improve worker productivity and reduce rush-hour traffic demands.

traffic management (ATM), and increasing telecommuting programs. These components are being implemented separately from variable tolling, with separate environmental reviews.

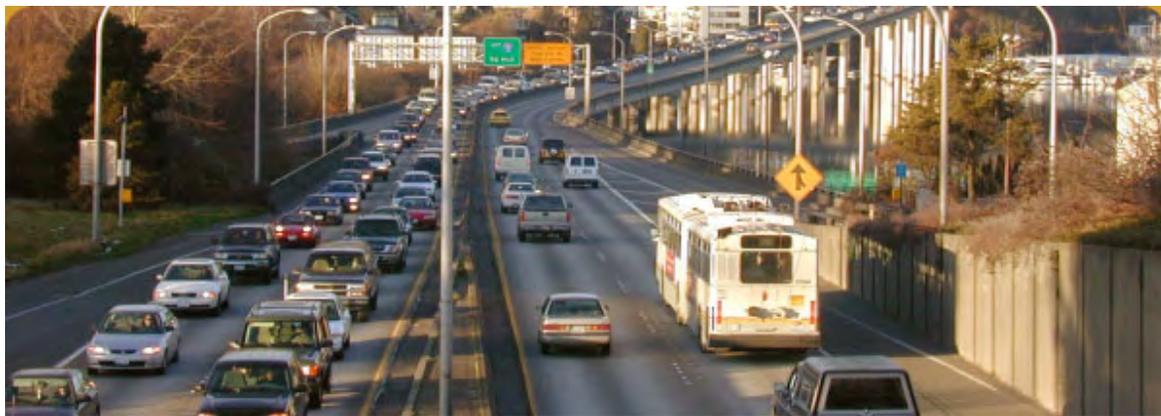
What is the purpose of the project?

The purpose of the Urban Partnership SR 520 Variable Tolling Project is to reduce congestion on SR 520 between I-5 and I-405 by implementing tolling, meet the requirements of the UPA, and raise revenue for future transportation improvements on SR 520.

Why is this project needed now?

The movement of people and goods needs to be improved on this important corridor.

SR 520 is a regionally important transportation corridor, connecting major employment and population centers with one of the only two bridges across Lake Washington (see Exhibit 2-1). Successful implementation of regional land use plans requires the ability to efficiently and reliably move an increasing volume of people and goods across the lake.



Traffic congestion on SR 520

Traffic congestion makes travel unreliable.

This project needs to be implemented now because of the severe traffic congestion on SR 520. Population and employment growth in the central Puget Sound region has led to an increased demand for travel that exceeds the highway's capacity. This means that more drivers want to use the highway than it can accommodate. The result is a long backup of vehicles traveling at very slow speeds—a scenario that many people traveling during rush hour have experienced. Details of the traffic congestion analysis can be found in the *Transportation Discipline Report* in Appendix E.



Existing peak traffic on SR 520

The project must meet the requirements of the Lake Washington Urban Partnership Agreement.

USDOT will only provide funding for the projects that are part of the Lake Washington Urban Partnership Agreement if the Seattle-area Urban Partners meet the requirements of the agreement. Implementing a variable toll on SR 520 is one of the requirements. The agreement also requires the toll be implemented on an accelerated schedule.

How does this project relate to other SR 520 projects?

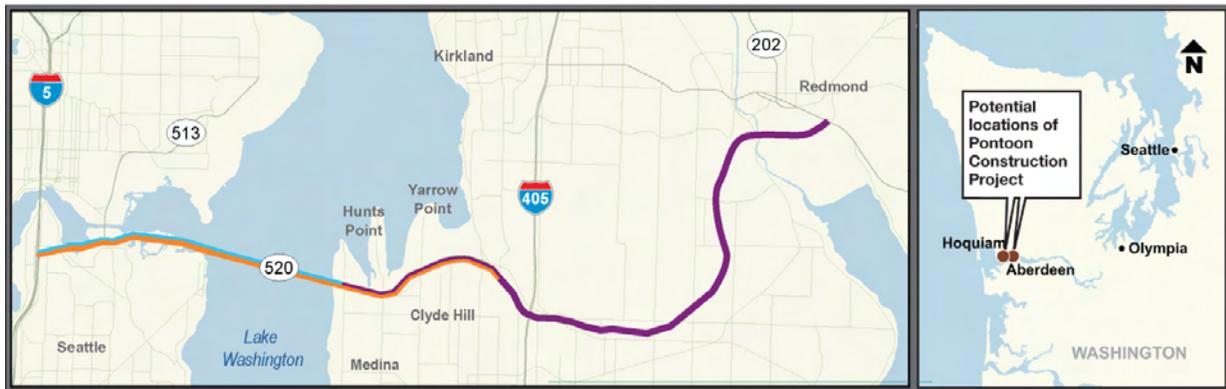
The SR 520 Variable Tolling Project is one of four projects that compose the SR 520 Bridge Replacement and HOV Program. Of those projects, three of them are physically located in the SR 520 project area. There is a fourth project, the Pontoon Construction Project, which will be located outside the project area. Exhibit 2-2 shows a brief summary of the four projects.

**Exhibit 2-2
Summary of SR 520 Projects**

The SR 520 Bridge Replacement and HOV Program will replace the Portage Bay and Evergreen Point bridges and improve existing roadway between I-5 in Seattle and SR 202 on the Eastside.

The SR 520 Bridge Replacement and HOV Program includes four projects:

- **Urban Partnership** – Traffic management and tolling from I-5 to I-405.
- **Eastside Transit and HOV** – Evergreen Point Road to SR 202.
- **Pontoon Construction Project** – pontoons for catastrophic failure planning.
- **Bridge Replacement and HOV Project** – I-5 to the vicinity of Evergreen Point Road.



SR 520 Bridge Replacement and HOV Project

This project would improve the SR 520 corridor from I-5 in Seattle to the vicinity of Evergreen Point Road. It would include replacement of all the existing bridges with newer, safer bridges designed to better withstand earthquakes and windstorms. The project is currently being reviewed in a NEPA/SEPA EIS process and is planned to be open in 2016. Both the new roadway configuration and the toll rates would be different from what is being studied for the SR 520 Variable Tolling Project.

SR 520 Eastside Transit and HOV Project

The SR 520 Eastside Transit and HOV Project will enhance travel time reliability, mobility, access and safety, for transit and HOVs in rapidly growing areas along the SR 520 corridor east of Lake Washington.

The project will improve and complete the HOV lanes on the 8.5 miles of SR 520 from the Evergreen Point Transit Station near Lake Washington to SR 202 in Redmond. The HOV lanes and transit stops will be shifted from the outside to the inside of the roadway. This work will include reconstructing the approximately three-mile section of SR 520 between the Evergreen Point Transit Station and 108th Avenue NE. WSDOT is currently preparing a NEPA Environmental Assessment for the project. The project is scheduled to be complete in 2013.

SR 520 Pontoon Construction Project

This project will advance pontoon construction so the SR 520 floating bridge can be restored in the event of a catastrophic failure. The project also includes storing these pontoons until they are needed. WSDOT is currently evaluating two potential sites – one in Aberdeen and one in Hoquiam– for construction of a new casting basin facility. An existing site in Tacoma would also be used to construct some of the pontoons. WSDOT is currently preparing a NEPA/SEPA EIS for the project. Construction of the new facility would start by the end of 2010 to enable pontoon construction to start in 2012.

Related to this project is a separate project called Advance Construction Methods and Engineering that would test proposed construction methods before construction of the new facility starts.

See Exhibit 2-3 for the current program schedule for the projects in the SR 520 program.

