SR 3 Gorst Area Planning and Environmental Linkages Study

Community Advisory Group Meeting #1 Summary

Meeting purpose

The purpose of the first Community Advisory Group (CAG) meeting was to:

- Establish CAG roles and responsibilities.
- Provide a study overview.
- Solicit input on Purpose and Need statement.
- Present the conceptual Range of Alternatives for public comment.

Meeting logistics

Thursday, February 27, 2025, noon to 1:30 p.m.
Virtual meeting on Zoom

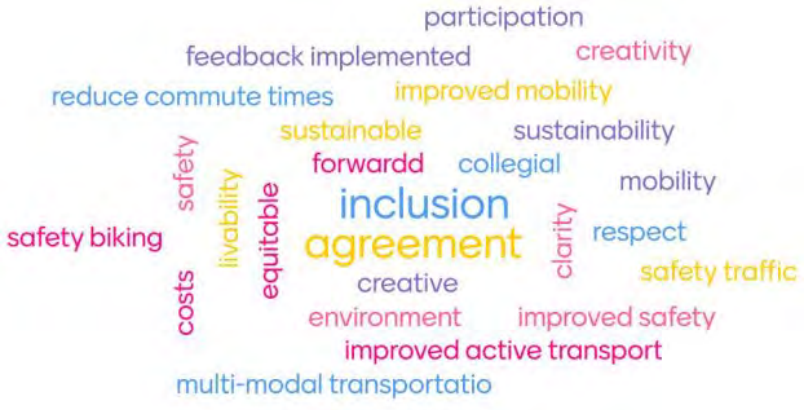
WSDOT study team in attendance: Ashley Carle (WSDOT), Mark Krulish (WSDOT), Ally Bradley (WSDOT), Kirk Wilcox (Parametrix), Hayley Nolan (PRR), Morgan Calder (PRR), Kate Shannon (PRR)

CAG attendees in attendance: Brian Watson (Bicycle Teacher), Carrie O'Hora (resident), Connor Dahlquist (resident), Garry Qualman (resident), John Willett (resident), Ken VanBuskirk (business owner), Laura Pugh (resident), Paul Dutky (West Sound Cycling Club), Rick Feeney (Kitsap County Non-Motorized Advisory Committee), Robin Salthouse (Kitsap Environmental Coalition), Roger Gay (resident), Rudy Baum (Kitsap Public Health District), and Sandy Pernitz (resident and business owner).

Meeting opening and Community Advisory Group agreements

The study team opened the meeting by reviewing Zoom logistics and the meeting agenda. The team led introductions and reviewed Community Advisory Group (CAG) and WSDOT responsibilities outlined in the draft Charter. The study team established that the CAG's responsibilities do not include voting or making decisions about the study. The study team invited participants to share any additional responsibilities they want captured in the Charter.

Mentimeter #1: What would success look like for the CAG?
Meeting participants responded to this question using a word cloud format.



The study team invited CAG members to help build collective agreements for how the CAG will show up during meetings. CAG members requested to include an agreement to keep an open mind and consider alternative perspectives. Brian Watson expressed appreciation for the CAG agreements stating they serve as good reminders. Hayley Nolan (PRR) acknowledged these recommendations and comments for inclusion in the draft Charter.

Community engagement

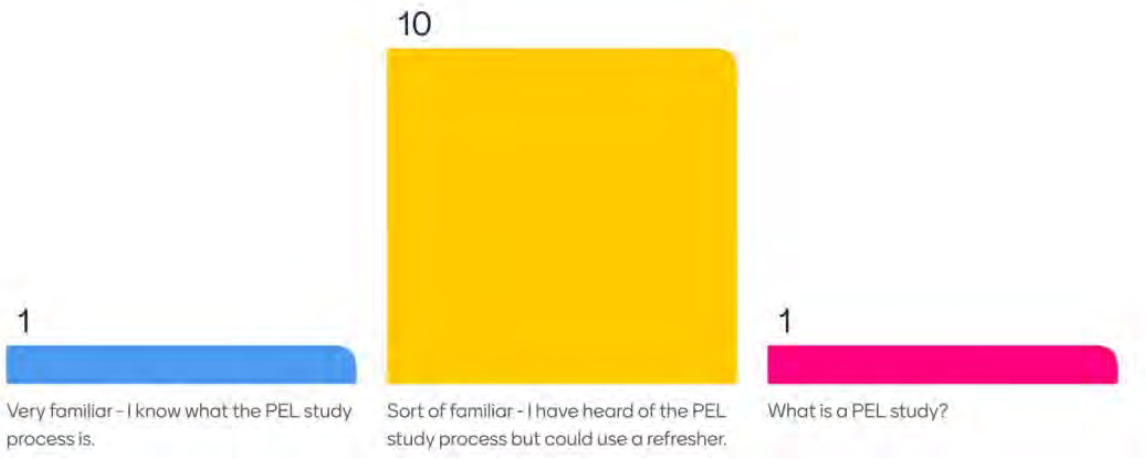
The study team explained how the CAG fits into the larger context of study partners and engagement efforts. The primary purpose of the CAG is to provide input and guidance on the SR 3 Gorst Area Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study, ensuring that community perspectives are considered in the planning process. The CAG will serve as a bridge between the Gorst area community and study team, fostering dialogue and collaboration. In addition to the CAG, WSDOT is working with its federal partner Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), tribes, and executive and technical advisory groups. Broader community engagement efforts will include in-person and virtual strategies for sharing information and gathering input. Discussion and input form the CAG will be one of many inputs WSDOT considers in decision making.

HEAL Act

The study team shared information regarding Washington State's Healthy Environmental for All Act (HEAL Act). The work of the CAG aligns with guidance outlined in the legislation by helping ensure we are hearing from communities impacted by environmental health disparities throughout the study.

Mentimeter #2: How familiar are you with the Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) study process?

Most participants indicated they were 'sort of familiar' with the PEL process, with one person selecting 'Very familiar' and one person selecting 'What is a PEL study?'.



Study background

The study team began by acknowledging the previous studies conducted in the SR 3 Gorst area. There is a significant amount of work that came before this PEL study, and those studies will help to inform the decision WSDOT makes for future work in the Gorst area.

PEL process overview
The study team shared a graphic to demonstrate the progression of the PEL process. The study team explained the key benefits and elements of the PEL process. The study team collects environmental and transportation data about the existing conditions of the study area. Using this data, the team develops the study Purpose and Need and the range of design options, or alternatives, for meeting the purpose.

The team plans to complete the PEL Study Report in March 2026. At the end of the PEL study, we'll have a report and implementation plan. These documents will describe the alternative or alternatives the team will study in the environmental review phase.

PEL study focus areas
The study team presented the focus areas identified for the study which include:

- System resiliency, or the ability for the system to withstand growth, climate changes and environmental events.
- Cultural and treaty resources, including fishing rights and any areas of cultural or archaeological significance.
- Enhancing safety and reducing collisions in the corridor.
- Removing barriers to fish.
- Mobility for all modes of transportation, including transit, cars, trucks and active transportation.
- Maintaining and enhancing access to local businesses and neighborhoods.
- Increasing safety for people who walk, bike or roll, through active transportation facilities.
- Looking at options for the Navy railroad bridge.
- And understanding existing conditions of the natural and built environment.

Comments and questions received

- Brian Watson asked if the study team was familiar with a practical solutions study that took place sometime between 2014-2016 and addressed active transportation issues.
    - Kirk Wilcox (Parametrix) said the study team will look into it.

- Ken VanBuskirk asked if the PEL study will be impacted by federal funding or lack thereof.
    - Ashley Carle (WSDOT) addressed this concern, sharing that the PEL study is fully covered between state and federal funds, and the study team has the funds needed to complete the study.
- Sandy Pernitz asked if the study will include wildlife, expressing concern over the otter population and wildlife at large.
    - Ashley Carle (WSDOT) confirmed that wildlife will be considered during the study, under the fish, wildlife, and vegetation discipline.

- Carrie O'Hora asked if the study will address moderate bacteria presence, raising concerns about the water quality in Gorst Creek and mitigation actions.
    - Ashley Carle (WSDOT) responded that this is something the study team will look at but it likely won't fall under the scope of the study. The study team will make note of this concern for future projects set to address water quality.
- Sandy Pernitz asked if the intended timeline to pick an alternative is 2026.
    - Ashley Carle (WSDOT) confirmed that the goal is to develop a study report and implementation plan, including recommended alternatives, by March 2026. The process will involve screening a range of alternatives, gathering environmental and transportation data, and working closely with tribal partners, advisory groups, and FHWA to identify the best path forward.

Purpose and Need overview

The study team described that the Purpose and Need is the foundation of a PEL study. The Purpose explains the transportation problem that WSDOT is trying to solve. The Need includes the supporting data and information that shows a problem currently exists or is likely to occur. The purpose and need, along with our understanding of potential environmental impacts, are used to develop screening criteria. This screening criteria will help the team evaluate the range of alternatives we study during PEL. If certain alternatives don't meet the purpose and need, they will be eliminated from consideration.

The study team developed overarching goals that align with the Purpose and Need. These goals will help guide the PEL study and the development of alternatives.

- Equitable access: Meet the transportation needs of vulnerable populations and overburdened communities.
- Economic vitality: Efficiently move people and goods, while improving access to businesses in the study area.
- Environmental: Avoid, minimize and mitigate potential environmental impacts, including on cultural and archaeological resources, from recommended alternative(s).

Draft Purpose and Need statement

The study team presented four draft PEL purpose statements:

- **Mobility:** Improve person throughput and reduce congestion and delay for all vehicle modes.
- **Safety performance:** Improve existing safety performance in terms of fatal and serious injury crashes and promote designs with fewer conflicts and greater separation for vulnerable roadway users.
- **Active transportation:** Provide active transportation access with connections to local active transportation facilities.
- **System resiliency:** Implement a climate resilient design that supports anticipated future travel demand growth.

Breakout rooms

The study team directed participants to select one of the topics outlined in the purpose statements (mobility, safety, active transportation, or system resiliency) to discuss in breakout rooms. A study team member was stationed in each breakout room to facilitate the discussion.

Following five minutes of discussion in the breakout rooms, participants returned to the main meeting and shared some of the key points of discussion within their group.

The mobility group discussed a need for data that captures drivers' start and destination points to better understand traffic volumes and to identify where the need to accommodate greater traffic volumes is. The group discussed the term "person throughput" and how the term is not widely understood or clearly defined. The group also discussed clarifying the difference between traffic delay versus congestion.

The safety group discussed the importance of ensuring safety during construction. They also emphasized the need for effective stormwater treatment, noting that the bridge alternative would provide the greatest opportunity to improve stormwater management. Additionally, the group acknowledged that cost remains a significant factor influencing these decisions.

The active transportation group noted that much of the conversation centered on non-motorized movement, including both bicycle access and pedestrian connectivity. The group discussed the lack of public transportation options serving the area, highlighting that residents traveling between Bremerton and Port Orchard often rely on the foot ferry, with limited bus service available only through Mason County.

The system resiliency group discussed the issue of increasing development and how this is causing additional environmental stressors, including stormwater runoff and flooding. The group discussed the challenge of how low the existing roadway is. If the roadway were to be raised, it would need improved drainage, especially with sea level rise. The group also discussed earthquake resiliency and the impact such an event would have on the shoreline. Their conversation also included a discussion of Kitsap County and their level of acceptable service for the streets that feed in and out of the Gorst area currently.

Comments and questions received

- Brian Watson asked for clarification on the terms "person throughput" and "delay."
    - Ashley Carle (WSDOT) explained that person throughput refers to the number of people that are moved through the corridor, considering different vehicle types such as single occupancy vehicles, carpools, and buses, which carry more people in less space. Delay refers to congestion experienced, especially during peak times.
    - Brian noted that improving person throughput doesn't always align with public expectations of fast travel and added that some level of delay, with lower speeds, can actually improve safety and still enhance throughput. He encouraged the team to be mindful of how delay is defined and perceived.

- Rick Feeney shared additional local context about the closure of the metal yard in Gorst and raised it as a concern for environmental safety of the nearby creeks.

    - Ashley Carle (WSDOT) expressed appreciation of this additional information, and shared that the study team is just starting engagement with property owners and

is working closely with the county to identify and inventory all the hazardous materials and sites in the area.

Range of alternatives

The study team reviewed the alternative evaluation process. The selected alternatives will be sent through two levels of evaluation and screening. Each level assesses how each alternative meets the purpose and need, study goals, and helps the team identify potential environmental impacts and the best performing alternative or alternatives. The study team will complete the screening process by the end of 2025.

The study team developed a draft range of alternatives that address issues in the study area. As the alternatives are considered, the team may determine that mixing and matching options may best fit the area's needs. The study team explained that some of the options seem similar but have unique design features that would change traffic flow, safety, and access.

The study team shared a graphic that shows the alignments included in the initial range of alternatives. All alternatives under consideration include additional lanes and active transportation facilities.

The study team provided high level descriptions of the alternatives:

- Alternative A: the most similar to existing conditions, widening would be along the existing alignment.
- Alternative A-1: Elevated structure through Gorst would bypass the regional SR 16 to SR 3 traffic
- Alternative A-2: Frontage roads for local traffic with access to SR 3 and SR 16 via slip ramps and an elevated roundabout would separate regional traffic through Gorst.
- Alternative B: Range of bridge alignments across Sinclair Inlet to move regional traffic out of Gorst.
- Alternative C: Direct bridge alignment via Ross Point to re-route all highway traffic from existing SR 3 alignment along Sinclair Inlet.
- Alternative D: Inland alignment to re-route all highway traffic from the existing alignment along Sinclair Inlet
- Alternative E: Builds a triangle of roundabouts through Gorst. Alternative E would be paired with either Alternative B, C, or D to divert regional traffic from Gorst. This would reduce congestion for regional traffic while still supporting Gorst's economic growth by maintaining access to local businesses.

Active transportation alternatives

The study team shared that in addition to the roadway alternatives, the team is studying four active transportation alternatives. These alternatives include safe routes and connections for people walking and rolling in the study area.

- Waterside route: offers the most direct route for people walking and rolling. It has minimal grade changes, scenic views, and easy access to the Sinclair Inlet shoreline.

This alignment connects to existing bike lanes along SR 304 in Bremerton and the shared-use path along Tremont Street West in Port Orchard.

- Landside route: provides a direct route for users and has minimal grade changes. This route wouldn't require crossings to access the facility. This alignment connects to existing bike lanes along SR 304 in Bremerton and the proposed shared-use path along Old Clifton Road in Port Orchard.
- Off-corridor State Routes: uses state routes to connect the Gorst area to Bremerton. As state routes, these segments are subject to Complete Streets design requirements.
    - Complete Streets requires WSDOT to design facilities with all road users in mind. This means that any combination of the Off-Corridor segments with the waterside or landside routes would require coordination with partners, like the City of Bremerton, Port Orchard, or Kitsap County, to build a continuous facility.
- Off-corridor local roads: uses local roads along the corridor, such as National Avenue, Sherman Heights Boulevard, and West Charleston Beach Road. Local roads may feel more comfortable because they have lower traffic volumes and speeds. However, they can also be steeper and provide a less direct connection for people walking and rolling.

Transportation System Management Operations (TSMO) alternatives

The study team shared that along with the roadway and active transportation alternatives, the team will study potential Transportation System Management and Operations, or TSMO, options. TSMO strategies help make existing transportation systems safer and more efficient. These are affordable and quick solutions that may help alleviate transportation issues in the study area. These include:

1. Vehicle ferry (Port Orchard to Bremerton)
2. Shipyard shift revisions
3. Additional worker buses
4. Additional transit service
5. Additional parking (e.g., park and ride lots, designated carpool or vanpool parking)
6. Commute trip reduction policies
7. Charge parking fees
8. Public transit incentives
9. Rideshare programs, Dial a Ride service, and Paratransit service
10. Employee challenges and rewards for carpooling or using transit and active transportation

Comments and questions received

- Laura Pugh thanked the team for making the Open House materials available online.
- Roger Gay asked whether a Gorst Bypass, previously discussed several years ago, is still under consideration in the current study. He also noted that vehicle counts for the various alternatives, especially during commuting hours, would be valuable to understand traffic movement.
    - Kirk Wilcox (Parametrix) responded that the Gorst Bypass, which would have connected Chico to Sunnyslope, was considered in studies conducted in the 1990s. However, due to the significant challenges of creating 15 to 18 miles of new alignment through sensitive areas such as the Bremerton watershed and

other areas that have since been further developed—it was not carried forward then and is not part of the current PEL study range of alternatives.

- Carrie O'Hora commented that funding and geology would likely be the biggest determining factors for the project.
- Garry Qualman said that he reviewed the online open house materials and emphasized the need for a 12-lane upgrade to the Navy's railroad bridge for long-term viability. He expressed support for the bridge option and recommended maintaining a roadway connection between Gorst and Bremerton for flexibility during maintenance work.
- John Willett highlighted prior discussions about potential Navy funding to help mitigate toll costs for a new bridge. He reiterated that this could reduce the financial burden on travelers.
- Laura Pugh and Brian Watson both raised concerns about pedestrian and bicycle access in the area. Laura noted that Sherman Heights Road currently lacks sidewalks and has minimal shoulders, making it hard to use for people who walk. Brian added that the steep grades along Sherman Heights Road make it challenging for people who bike. He also mentioned that Old Clifton Road appears in the Kitsap County Non-Motorized Routes, but there is no current shared-use plan for the corridor.
- Sandy Pernitz asked if choosing a shorter bridge route would remove environmental enhancement opportunities from the project.
- Garry Qualman repeated his position that any at-grade work through Gorst would require a 10- to 12-lane railroad underpass upgrade.
- Brian Watson suggested exploring congestion pricing for single-occupancy vehicles during peak hours as a Transportation Systems Management and Operations (TSMO) strategy. He also voiced support for tolling, believing that per-trip fees could encourage mode shifts.
- Ken VanBuskirk expressed support for Alternative C, with Alternative D as a secondary preference, citing safety during construction and minimized impacts to existing transportation networks.
- John Willett reported that the Kitsap County Non-Motorized Facilities Community Advisory Committee (KCNMFCAC) previously asked the Navy about using the rail line or allowing non-motorized travel alongside it. John said that the Navy declined due to security concerns.
- Rick Feeney raised the question of tolling in a bridge alternative.
    - Ashley Carle (WSDOT) shared that tolling is not something the team is looking at in the study, but it may be something of interest to the Legislature.
- Sandy Pernitz asked for clarification on what the team means by 'decommissioning the current roadway.'
    - Kirk Wilcox (Parametrix) shared that the intent with that solution is that all regional traffic would be on the state system but the current roadway along the railroad tracks would be taken over by Kitsap County or City of Bremerton and repurposed. The alternative would tie into local streets but would not allow traffic to continue directly onto SR 304. The existing roadway would still be accessible to local traffic.
    - Sandy Pernitz expressed apprehension towards that option raising the concern on the impact it would have on people who live and work in Gorst, especially in the additional traffic it could bring to the neighborhoods of local roads from people attempting to cut through to avoid congestion on the main route.

    - Kirk Wilcox (Parametrix) acknowledged this concern and shared that this kind of solution could involve major speed reductions to the redesigned street, including design elements such as narrow lanes, speed tables or other features enabling improvements to the street network in the Sherman Heights area for local traffic but preventing it from becoming an attractive shortcut for regional traffic.
- Rick Feeney expressed that the road widening option and the granite blasting is something done before and that it's probably the most cost-effective method to get three lanes on both sides of the highway.
- Roger Gay said that he believes the selection of options will depend on the funding available. He believes the best solution would be to build a bridge from SR 16 into SR 3 at SR 304. He expressed hesitancy in that solution raising the Belfair Bypass as an example of a long-standing and expensive project that hasn't begun construction due to funding constraints.
    - Hayley Nolan (PRR) acknowledged that cost is certainly a consideration in this process.
- John Willett raised that safety as a consideration is just as important as cost, expressing concern over the risks associated with granite blasting in the widening alternative. He also raised the disruption levels associated with each alternative, with particular concern over traffic flow and routing should the widening alternative move forward.
    - Hayley Nolan (PRR) acknowledged this concern as another important part of the decision-making process.

Next steps

The study team shared what is to come next for the study and ways to stay in touch with the team.

- Send out revised CAG Charter.
- Online open house available through March 11.
- Finalize study purpose and need and range of alternatives.
- Engage with property and business owners this summer.
- Hold the next CAG meeting in June 2025.

The meeting ended at 1:32 p.m.