

WSDOT's Corridor Sketch Initiative is a collaborative planning process with agency partners to identify performance gaps and select high-level strategies to address them on the 304 corridors statewide. This Corridor Sketch Summary acts as an executive summary for one corridor. Please review the User Guide for Corridor Sketch Summaries prior to using information on this corridor:

I-5 & SR 543: I-5/SR 543 Jct (Blaine) to Canadian Border

This four-mile long forked corridor in Whatcom County runs north-south along Interstate 5 between the southern city limits of Blaine at Dakota Creek and the US-Canada border and northeast along State Route 543 between the I-5/SR 543 junction and the US-Canada border. This corridor is located completely within the city of Blaine. The corridor runs parallel to Drayton Harbor, Semiahmoo Bay, the Strait of Georgia, and SR 548. Blaine Harbor and the Semiahmoo Marina are both located across Drayton Harbor from I-5. The I-5 portion of the corridor is primarily suburban and urban, with a lot of density and retail stores, restaurants, and housing. The corridor along SR 543 is also suburban in character with retail, residential, industrial, and school uses. Plant life for both sections of the corridor, is mostly scant, with the occasional trees along the sides of the corridor with the exception of where SR 543 passes by Lincoln Park.



Current Function

I-5 is the major north-south route along the United States' west coast connecting most major cities between Canada and Mexico. SR 543 provides an alternate connection through Blaine to the Canadian border from I-5 for passenger vehicles, and is the main truck and bus route for border crossing. Both the I-5, before the border, and SR 543 segments of the corridor primarily function as a freight corridor, supporting the international movement of people and goods. This corridor bisects the city of Blaine and provides direct access through and within the city's retail and employment centers, as well as recreation at several parks along the corridor. Bicycles are permitted on SR 543 and I-5. Whatcom Transportation Authority provides transit service to Blaine from Ferndale and Bellingham. BOLT bus service, Quick Shuttle, and Greyhound, and Amtrak are other cross-border transportation options that are available through this corridor.

Future Function

Based on the projected population, land use, and economic trends, the future function of this corridor is expected to remain the same.

Highlights and Performance

This section of I-5 is a primarily four-lane, divided highway with the exception of the Port of Entry queue lanes at the border. SR 543 is a three-lane, undivided highway with multiple special use lanes to support Port of Entry operations at the border. The annual average daily traffic on this corridor is highest near the I-5/SR 543 interchange and lowest located at the Canadian border.

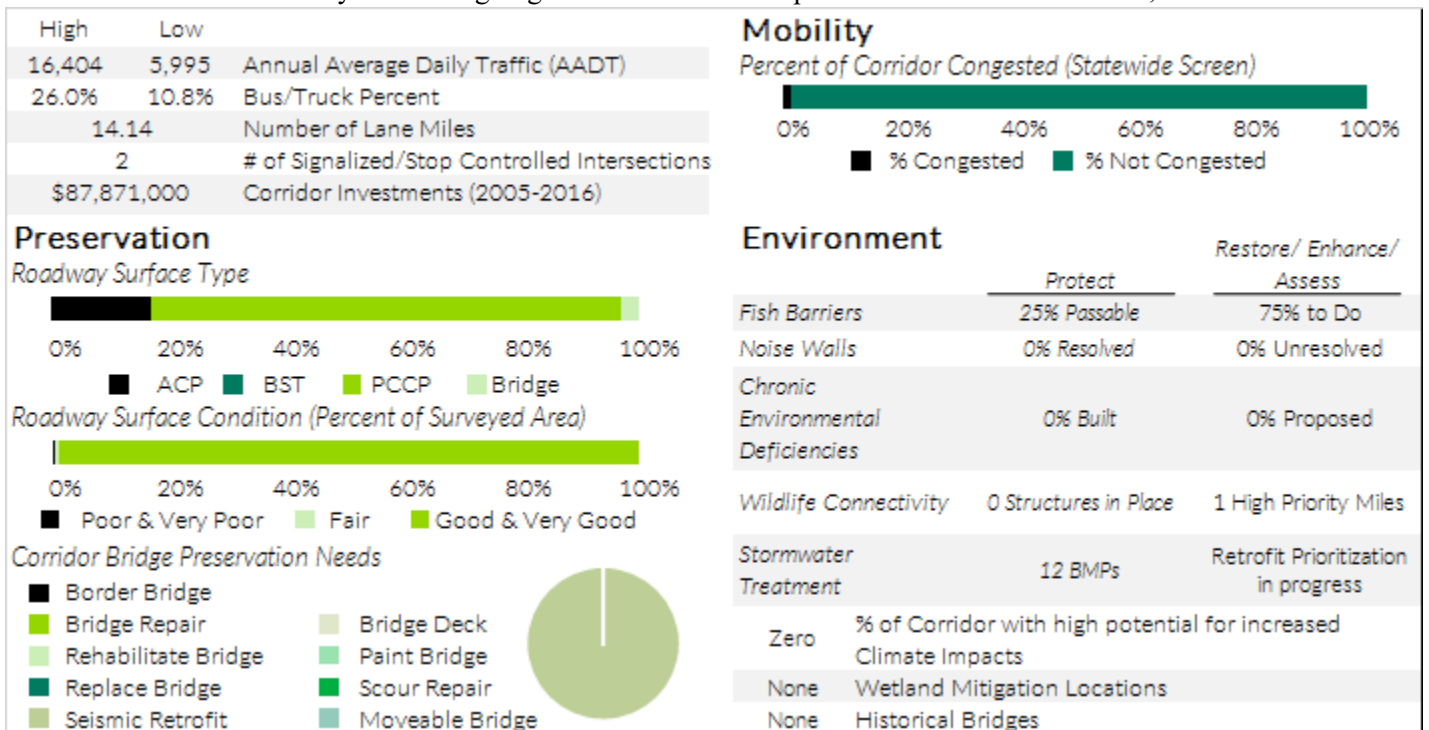
What's working well?

- Roughly 99% of surveyed pavement on the corridor is in fair or better condition.
- The Port of Entry expansion reduced delay by adding holding areas, inspection booths, and a NEXUS lane.
- NEXUS usage is reducing wait times for all lanes.
- 46% of traffic uses NEXUS lanes on I-5, 40% on SR 543.
- WSDOT is coordinating with partners in the International Mobility and Trade Corridor program to develop integrated strategies for the corridors.
- WSDOT's Intelligent Transportation Systems is used by border agencies to scale staffing to demand facilitating faster crossings.

What needs to change?

- While the majority of this corridor is performing well, about 1% of the corridor is regularly congested.
- A significant portion of travelers that cross the border on I-5 at least once a month are not enrolled in NEXUS.
- Trusted Traveler (FAST Program) enrollment does not meet the travel needs of freight carriers effectively.
- Daily backups occur at the interchange between I-5 and SR 543.
- A bottleneck occurs at D Street on SR 543 just south of the border crossing.
- Freight trucks park along SR 543 due to a lack of facilities impeding visibility for other users.

WSDOT monitors the state system in ongoing efforts to track asset performance. For this corridor, WSDOT finds:



1) 2015 data unless otherwise noted. 2) For more information see the User Guide for Corridor Sketch Summaries at <http://bit.ly/WSDOTcorridorsketch>

What we heard from our partners

WSDOT collected feedback from agency partners. Key themes included:

- Concern over truck backups on SR 543 which impact I-5.
- Interest in improving east-west connections between facilities leading to border crossings. Current connections do not foster access, creating bottlenecks.
- Interest in expanding truck storage and overnight parking near the border to address queueing issues.
- A concern over lack of non-motorized connections to local street over I-5 and SR 543.
- Support for improvements at exit 274.
- Multiple upcoming changes on the Canadian side may affect operations such as off-site inspection facilities.
- Desire for Amtrak station to provide direct connection within the city of Blaine.

Strategies

WSDOT identified the following strategies and associated actions to keep the corridor working well and address performance gaps. Regional partners collaborated on high-level mobility strategies. The identified strategies are not meant to be all-inclusive, nor an established list of priorities. Further evaluation is needed before any strategy can be recommended as a solution to address performance. Project funding decisions will take place at the programming phase, and are subject to statewide prioritization. For more strategy information, visit the Corridor Sketch Summary User Guide.

Policy Goals / Strategies Description and Near-Term Actions

Economic Vitality

Under Development	<i>WSDOT will continue to work with partners in developing strategies to address economic vitality.</i>
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Environment

Protect and Maintain	<i>Protect and maintain existing assets that provide environmental function (these include WSDOT's mitigation sites, storm water systems, fish passable culverts).</i>
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Enhance or Restore	<i>Enhance or restore natural areas and environmental functions associated with the multimodal transportation system.</i>
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Fish Barrier Retrofit	<i>WSDOT has prioritized the removal of state-owned culverts that block habitat for salmon and steelhead. See interactive map of uncorrected fish barriers at http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Projects/FishPassage/default.htm.</i>
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Mobility

Assessment	<i>Further information about the proposed strategies can be found attached at the end of this document.</i>
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Preservation

Maintenance	<i>Based on expenditure history, it is expected that the top three activities will continue to be maintenance on snow and ice control, rest areas, and pavement repair.</i>
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Safety

Investment	<i>WSDOT has identified one Safety Investment action in the next six years encompassing 59% of the corridor.</i>
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Stewardship

Planning	<i>Under Practical Solutions, the Corridor Sketch Initiative identifies corridor performance, and assesses alternative strategies to improve the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of the transportation system.</i>
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This segment provides the primary freight access across the U.S.-Canada border.

During peak travel periods, traffic volumes exceed capacity and there are significant queues restricting movement across the border and to key destinations within the Blaine community.

Mobility Strategies: Operational Improvements

- Incorporate adaptive signal operations to reduce delay.
- Improve local street network to improve general traffic circulation and freight movement to Blaine's industrial areas.
- Provide traveler information to drivers on roadway conditions to avoid delays.

Demand Management

- Improve active transportation connectivity across the U.S.-Canada border and into the Blaine community.

Policy Change

- Coordinate with agencies on linking border inspection operations with transportation system demand to reduce wait times.
- Work to leverage funding for mutually beneficial improvements on local and state system.

Corridor Segment Characteristics

- The segment lies within the city of Blaine.
- The average daily traffic on the segment was 13,895 vehicles in 2015. Freight accounted for 26% of traffic.
- The speed limit on the segment is 40 mph.
- The corridor is a primary freight corridor across U.S.-Canada Border.
- There are many heavy trucks, heavy tour buses, and trusted traveler usage on the corridor.
- The segment has managed access.
- There are limited pedestrian and bicycle facilities on the segment.

Contributing Factors

- Traffic volumes at the U.S.-Canada border crossing cause backups on the segment and restricting local mobility.
- Northbound truck delay and truck parking on shoulders significantly affect corridor operation and local traffic mobility.
- Congestion on I-5 northbound off-ramp during peak periods result in backups.
- Poor NEXUS access impedes segment throughput.
- Access to Duty Free Store impacts operations.
- Pedestrian and cyclist facilities are limited causing poor non-motorized connectivity along segment.



Lane configuration SR 543/ D Street Intersection approaching border

For more information

To find out more information about this corridor or how to get involved, please contact:

Todd Carlson

NW Mt. Baker Area Planning Office
Planning & Engineering Services Manager
360-757-5980
carlsot@wsdot.wa.gov

Washington State Department of Transportation's Corridor Sketch Initiative is a set of planning activities that engage our partners to define the context and performance information for all of the state's 304 highway corridors. The Corridor Sketch complements and supports regional planning processes in Washington. It is not intended to duplicate, substitute or compete with other planning efforts; nor is it intended to generate lists of projects.

Under 23 U.S. Code § 148 and 23 U.S. Code § 409, safety data, reports, surveys, schedules, lists compiled or collected for the purpose of identifying, evaluating, or planning the safety enhancement of potential crash sites, hazardous roadway conditions, or railway-highway crossings are not subject to discovery or admitted into evidence in a Federal or State court proceeding or considered for other purposes in any action for damages arising from any occurrence at a location mentioned or addressed in such reports, surveys, schedules, lists, or data.

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