

**West Olympia Access Study Briefing Paper**  
**Olympia City Council**  
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Prepared by Thera Black  
Thurston Regional Planning Council

The purpose of this briefing paper is to update the Olympia City Council on activities associated with the West Olympia Access Study. A copy of the study Scope of Work is attached.

**Summary:**

Study Partners The City of Olympia and the Washington State Department of Transportation Olympic Region (WSDOT) have partnered to conduct the West Olympia Access Study. The study will evaluate west side transportation mobility, access, and circulation issues on local and state facilities, and recommend a package of measures to meet current and future needs. Olympia and WSDOT contracted with Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC) to conduct the public involvement process and assist with technical analysis.

Study Objectives The study objectives are to evaluate current and future mobility needs for Olympia's west side and identify a strategy for improving access and circulation. The intent is to accommodate planned growth while maintaining safe and acceptable levels of mobility.

Study Approach The study will evaluate local and state transportation systems, independently and in relation to each other. A range of alternatives will be developed and assessed to determine the appropriate mix of local and/or state investments. The process will actively engage those who live, work, or use services in the study area to help define issues and evaluate alternatives. *Changes to the state highway system are not a foregone conclusion.* The study will work to identify a "local only" package of investments that can meet access and circulation needs before evaluating potential changes to the state highway system.

Study Results A package of infrastructure / program investments will be jointly agreed upon by Olympia and WSDOT. Once completed, project partners can proceed with the final steps of federal compliance if an interchange is warranted, which entails completion by WSDOT of an Interchange Justification Report. Partners can also begin work to secure implementation funds.

Study Timeframe Background work began in November 2006. The formal public involvement process starts in early March 2007 and concludes in early 2008. Olympia and WSDOT will reach agreement on a preferred alternative and its associated responsibilities in 2008. It is anticipated that the West Olympia Access Study will be complete by late 2008 or early 2009.

Study Constraints The study will not reconsider underlying land use assumptions. The study will provide transportation system network levels of detail that may seem coarse compared to previous studies. The study does not presume access changes to the highway system. If it does consider changes they must comply with all state and federal access requirements.

On October 26, 2006 a study got underway that will look at potential changes to US 101 and the local street network on Olympia's west side. It's called the West Olympia Access Study and it is a partnership effort between the City of Olympia and the WSDOT. Those two agencies contracted with TRPC to conduct the public involvement process and help facilitate the overall process.

By its very design, the West Olympia Access Study is a partnership effort between the WSDOT Olympic Region and the City of Olympia. Both agencies have vested interests that must be considered in this process. Both agencies are contributing financial resources to the project, and will jointly agree on a preferred alternative. And it is likely that both agencies will be responsible for implementing some part of the final package of recommendations.

This briefing paper describes the study and the approach that will be used to accomplish the study objectives.

### **Study Objective**

The purpose of the study is to assess what transportation investments will be needed to accommodate current and future mobility and access needs on Olympia's west side. This includes US 101 as well as Olympia's local street network. The intent is to accommodate growth called for in Olympia's adopted *Comprehensive Plan* while meeting safe and acceptable levels of mobility for all modes of transport. The study reflects currently adopted land use plans and projected needs associated with a 2030 forecast horizon.

For several years there has been a presumption that some modification to US 101 will be needed to accommodate future west side growth. This concept was solidified in the Olympia *Comprehensive Plan* and the *Regional Transportation Plan* as the "Yauger Way Extension." This concept would modify the Black Lake Boulevard / US 101 interchange to provide an additional off- and on-ramp allowing westbound local traffic to by-pass the Black Lake Boulevard / Cooper Point Road intersection.

WSDOT and the Federal Highway Administration are interested in protecting their investments that have already been made in the state highway system. Before they will grant Olympia permission to modify access to US 101, the City must demonstrate that this is truly the best strategy for meeting current and future mobility needs, and that there is not an alternate package of local investments that will suffice. This is the impetus behind the West Olympia Access Study.

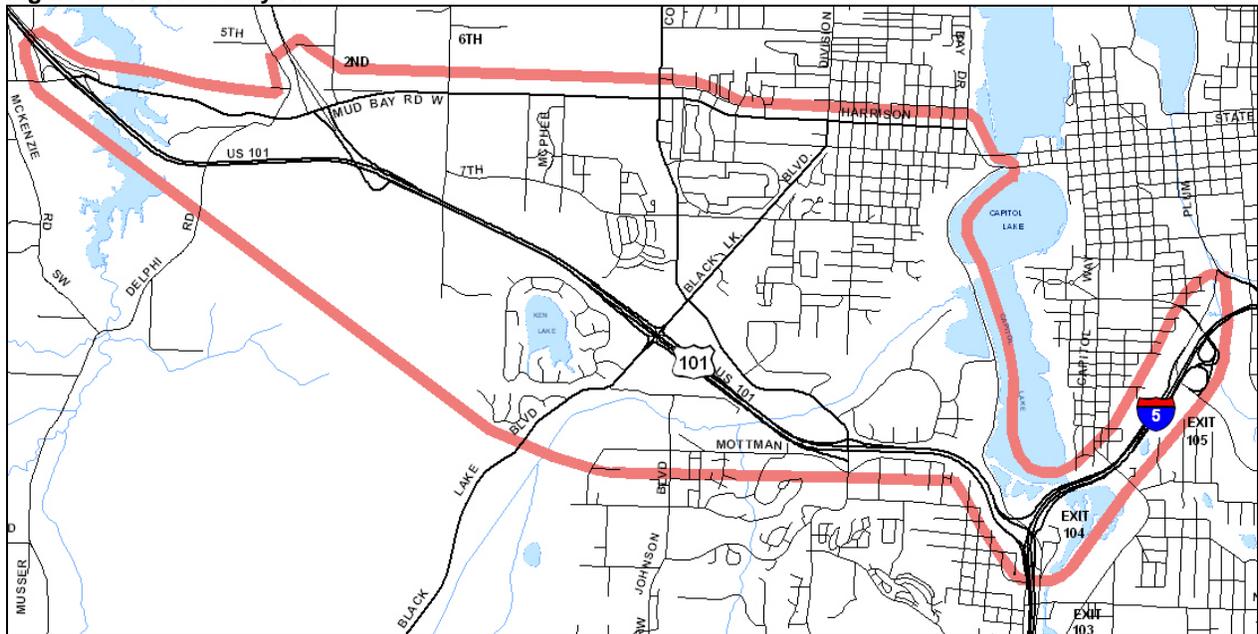
The West Olympia Access Study, or WOAS, will take a hard look at mobility and access issues on Olympia's west side. The study area depicted in the figure on the next page includes all of the west side between Harrison Avenue / Mud Bay Road to the north and approximately 29<sup>th</sup> Avenue (Mottman Industrial Complex) to the south, and between Capitol Lake to the east and 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue / Mud Bay Road to the west. It also includes analysis of I-5 operations as far north as the City Center exit and just south of the I-5 / US 101 interchange. It must also include analysis of Capitol Way and the effect of any future changes proposed for Capitol Way on the interstate.

In addition, the WOAS "area of influence" includes the entire Cooper Point peninsula as well as all of downtown Olympia, and I-5 as far south as Trosper Road in Tumwater.

The study area and area of influence required approval by the Federal Highway Administration

(FHWA) and WSDOT Headquarters prior to commencing the study to ensure that final results could be considered valid by those two authorizing agencies. Those two agencies will evaluate study results to determine whether changing highway access on Olympia's west side has a negative impact on I-5 traffic flows and operations of the I-5 / US 101 interchange.

**Figure 1 – WOAS Study Area**



### **Study Approach**

The attached Scope of Work details the approach that will be used to conduct the West Olympia Access Study. Olympia's west side accounts for almost 24,000 people and 17,000 jobs today. Those numbers will increase by about 50% by 2030 in accordance with Olympia's adopted *Comprehensive Plan*. In addition, this area is a regionally-significant economic hub that accounts for 49% of Olympia's retail sales tax revenue that supports local government programs and services. Add to that the increasingly prominent role of Capital Medical Center as a regional medical facility serving Thurston, Grays Harbor, and Mason Counties, and it is quickly apparent that there is a complex array of constituents to engage in this process.

TRPC, under contract to Olympia and WSDOT, is conducting the public involvement process. Phase 1 of the general outreach solicits input on issues and criteria associated with west side mobility, access, and transportation / land use integration. Phase 2 of the general outreach entails a review and critique of various alternatives. During Phase 3, all feasible alternatives and the preferred alternative, if it has been identified, will be presented for comment.

Public meetings and targeted outreach account for only part of the public outreach. TRPC relies on a variety of tools to engage the public and solicit informed input. A project website will go "live" in mid-February at [www.trpc.org/westolympia](http://www.trpc.org/westolympia). This will provide a repository for background and presentation materials, white papers, analyses, and reports throughout the process. On-line surveys will augment general purpose meetings for soliciting input. A regular newsletter will keep constituents updated and provide links for more detailed information. A

dedicated email address has been established to facilitate public correspondence: [westolympia@wsdot.wa.gov](mailto:westolympia@wsdot.wa.gov). The project will also rely on more traditional media opportunities to keep the community informed. In addition, TRPC's public involvement strategy includes direct outreach to known stakeholders and interest groups. Since late November TRPC has conducted about 30 of these targeted "informational interviews" to supplement its background work on study area characteristics and issues.

WSDOT is leading the technical analysis with support from Olympia and TRPC. A variety of analysis tools are being developed. This starts with the 2030 regional travel demand model developed by TRPC. The regional model reflects future growth across the region based on adopted land use plans from each jurisdiction. It includes transportation projects in the pipeline as well as those long-range projects that are included in the adopted *Regional Transportation Plan*. This is important considering the regional significance of the state and local network on Olympia's west side.

The technical team will use this 2030 forecast model as a starting point for the analysis. From this, detailed operational analysis and simulation models will be developed to assess the circulation and access capabilities of the network. Intersection movements and ramp flows will be evaluated in conjunction with various combinations of street connections, intersection treatments, and other measures.

*Changes to the state highway system are not a foregone conclusion.* Analysis will focus initially on modifications to the local transportation network. The study will work to identify a "local only" package of investments that can meet access and circulation needs before evaluating potential changes to the state highway system. Depending on those results, additional analysis will focus on access modifications to the state highway. The study may evaluate changes to the Crosby Boulevard/Cooper Point Road interchange, the Black Lake interchange, and the Evergreen Parkway interchange in addition to the effect of adding new highway access in the vicinity of Kaiser Road.

State highway access is governed by strict guidelines that will be respected in the technical analysis. It would be irresponsible to promote alternatives with the public that would be denied at the state and federal levels for lack of compliance with these requirements. The project team will pay close attention to these requirements as it proceeds to ensure that feasible alternatives will meet these state and federal standards.

### **Study Results**

The study will result in a package of investments needed to meet future mobility needs on Olympia's west side. It will clearly spell out roles and responsibilities of Olympia and WSDOT in implementing its recommendations. For that reason, both Olympia and WSDOT must agree to any preferred alternative that results from this study. At that time both agencies can proceed with completing any necessary federal compliance requirements and securing funding to implement the recommended strategies.

### **Study Timeframe**

The West Olympia Access Study is expected to take two years to complete. This includes about 18 months for public involvement and technical analysis, and 4 to 6 months for

completion of the study report and endorsement by Olympia and WSDOT.

Background work began in November 2006. This includes a review and synopsis of all previous plans, studies, and decisions affecting the study area; a compilation of demographic, environmental, land use, economic, and transportation characteristics of the study area; and informational interviews with study area stakeholders and interest groups. During this same time the initial technical analysis tools were being developed.

The primary public involvement process kicks off in the first week of March. Phase 1 activities – intended to generate input on issues and criteria in addition to creating community awareness – will conclude in late March. Scenario development and technical analysis will proceed throughout the spring and summer. Phase 2 of the public outreach process – evaluation of alternatives – is planned for fall 2007. Refinement of remaining alternatives will take place in winter 2007. Phase 3 of the public process will take place in early 2008, when the community will be asked to weigh in on select alternatives. The remainder of 2008 will be spent getting consensus from Olympia and WSDOT on details of the preferred alternative and finalizing the study report. It is expected that the study will conclude in late 2008 or early 2009.

### **Study Constraints**

In addition to describing what the study will do, it is worth explaining at this time what the West Olympia Access Study will not do.

- The WOAS will not look at any alternative land use. It is based strictly on the adopted land use plans of Olympia, Thurston County, and Tumwater. It is anticipated that there will be interest on the part of some people who want to revisit underlying land use assumptions. However, alternative land use is not on the table for discussion as a part of this study.
- The level of detail in WOAS will not be as fine as that of previous City corridor studies. Previous corridor studies - West Bay Drive, Boulevard Road, and Capitol Boulevard – looked at individual design details like width of planting strips, location of street trees, and impacts on individual parcels of land. By comparison, WOAS may seem coarse in its level of detail. While it is a multi-modal transportation study, it is a sub-area system plan focusing on network circulation, access, and the interface between local and state transportation networks. Adopted City street standards are presumed appropriate to meet multi-modal transportation needs for each street type. Physical details of street elements will not be addressed in this process.

It is expected that many people will want to delve into those finer details, details like street design, the exact location of pedestrian or neighborhood paths, treatment of transit stops, and traffic calming measures for specific streets. Even though they are not being solicited, the public involvement team is capturing those detailed comments as they surface. These comments are being forwarded to Olympia for follow-up consideration when the West Olympia Access Study is complete.

Olympia and WSDOT worked closely on the scope and budget to preserve as much funding as possible for that future follow-up work. These more detailed issues and opportunities that emerge are being referred to as “Olympia-specific” details. The fact that they are not included in WOAS does *not* mean that they are unimportant. It is simply a scale of

evaluation that is not feasible for the larger system-wide analysis that is needed first. They complement each other but they serve different functions and are treated as such in this process.

- The West Olympia Access Study does not presume that modification to the state highway system is warranted. This is an important point to emphasize. To comply with state and federal requirements and get approval for future investments, WOAS must demonstrate that a package of “local only” investments will not meet circulation and access needs. WOAS will look at the benefit of increasing local street connections and modifying intersection treatments as means of improving circulation and access. WOAS will evaluate the role that increased transit service, strategic location of park-and-ride lots, and improved bike and pedestrian connectivity can play in improving west side mobility. It may seem to some people initially that WOAS is ignoring the potential change that highway access modification could bring. Modification to the state highway system will likely be evaluated, but it is not the first or only option that will be considered.

### **For More Information:**

For more information, or to be placed on the project notification list, or to schedule a small group presentation, call Thera Black or Kathy McCormick at 360.956.7575 or send an email to [westolympia@wsdot.wa.gov](mailto:westolympia@wsdot.wa.gov). After February 20, 2007 visit the project website at [www.trpc.org/westolympia](http://www.trpc.org/westolympia).

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