

# Canyon Road Regional Connection Project

## *River Crossing Environmental Assessment*

**9.15.2021 Virtual Town Hall**

### **Presenters:**

- Letticia Neal - Engineering Manager, Pierce County Office of the County Engineer
- Gretchen Mallari - Environmental Biologist, Pierce County Transportation Improvement Section
- Brian Johnston – Environmental Resources Supervisor, Pierce County Transportation Improvement Section
- Ken Gunther – Assistant Director, City of Fife Public Works
- Jenny Thacker – Communications consultant, PRR

### **Virtual Town Hall objectives:**

- To update members of the public on the design progress of the Canyon Road Regional Connection Project – River Crossing
- To share what the project team is learning during the Environmental Assessment
- To answer questions about the project

### **Presentation summary:**

#### Background

The Canyon Road Regional Connection project is the largest of several road projects Pierce County is undertaking to support the economy through more efficient connections between the Port of Tacoma and the rest of the County.

The purpose of the Canyon Road Regional Connection Project is to provide a more direct North/ South connection between the Port of Tacoma and the Fredrickson Manufacturing Industrial Center. By better connecting our region to global commerce, the Canyon Road Regional Connection Project will contribute to the creation of more family wage jobs in South Pierce County. The project design also leverages the Washington State Department of Transportation's SR 167 Completion project.

The route of the Canyon Road Regional Connection Project is the result of 30 years of public process. The design that was selected meets the needs of the project while also improving environmental conditions, reducing flooding, and protecting rural farmland.

The full project extends Canyon Road from Pioneer Way, across the Puyallup River, on to 70th Ave East and into the City of Fife. Because the project is so large, for the purposes of design and planning we've separated it into two different projects – the Railroad Crossing, and the River Crossing.

Design elements include:

- Two lanes in each direction with center turn lanes.
- Three new bridges - one over the BNSF railroad crossing, one over Clarks Creek, and one over the Puyallup River.
- Additional traffic signals.
- Sidewalks and signalized crossings to make it safer for pedestrians and other non-motorized users.
- Stream relocation and wetland mitigation.
- Compatibility with the future Puyallup River trail system.

The River Crossing, which extends from 62nd Avenue East in Pierce County, to 45th Street Court East in Fife, has reached the 30% design milestone. That work has included traffic modeling, intersection design, designing complete street elements, and working through issues with the City of Fife. We are finalizing our right of way plans, and we are in the process of conducting our environmental assessment process, as required by the National Environmental Protection Act and the State Environmental Assessment Act. Pending funding, we are on track to begin construction in 2025.

#### The new Puyallup River bridge

The new bridge over the Puyallup River is grade separated. That means that there are no intersection points with River Road or Levee Road. Instead, those roads pass underneath the structure. People crossing the bridge from Fife will turn right on 66th Ave East which will take them to an intersection with River Road East. Drivers coming towards Fife will cross the bridge and turn right on 45th Street Court East, and right again on 74th Ave East to get to North Levee Road East.

Instead of sidewalks, the bridge will feature a shared-use pathway that will be suspended underneath the bridge structure that connects to sidewalks and a signalized pedestrian crossing at both River Road and North Levee Road East. The suspended pathway has several advantages, including eliminating potential conflicts between non-vehicular traffic, like pedestrians and bicyclists, and cars and trucks. It also allows a narrower bridge, which is less expensive to build, and does not shade the Puyallup River as much.

#### Cost

The projected construction cost is \$250-\$300 million. The project has received \$12 Million for project design and right of way acquisition, which are fully funded, and is pursuing grant opportunities and funding partners for the construction phase.

#### Environmental Assessment

As part of our design work, we are required by state and local laws to investigate how our project is likely to affect the environment and the surrounding community and take steps to mitigate any potential negative impacts.

Pierce County is studying impacts to:

- [Air quality](#)
- Cultural and historic resources
- Drainage
- Fish and wildlife

- [Hazardous materials](#)
- [Noise](#)
- 4(f) properties
- Traffic
- [Visual and aesthetic impact](#)
- Social and environmental justice

Project staff reported on preliminary findings in these areas through an online open house from August 16 - September 26, 2021. A summary of that content is below:

#### Air quality

- The Clean Air Act requires that federally funded projects do not violate national air quality standards.
- Based on the analysis, the project may increase the emissions locally if, as expected, there is an increase in local traffic through the area. However, the project will make improvements to signal timing at some intersections, and will remove other intersections, which should reduce engine idling.
- Regionally, this project will provide a more efficient route to and from the Port of Tacoma and Frederickson which will improve air quality regionally because vehicles will be traveling fewer miles.

#### Cultural and historic resources

- Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act requires us to identify the effects of our project on cultural and historic resources.
- This report's preliminary findings are that there may be cultural artifacts in the project area, 25 feet below the surface. The report recommended having someone on site during digging and earth moving activities to monitor for cultural artifacts.
- The report also finds that the Milroy bridge, which will be removed by the project, will be negatively impacted. Other historic resources that will be minimally impacted are the "House of Tomorrow" on 66th Avenue East, and the Puyallup River Levee.

#### Drainage

- The drainage and stormwater report investigated how stormwater is currently being managed and identified water-quality criteria the project needed to meet in order to comply with water quality laws, regulations, plans and policies.
- The drainage report indicated that the project will improve how stormwater is managed in the project area by adding stormwater capture, retention, and treatment facilities.

#### Fish and wildlife

- Section 7 of the endangered species act requires Pierce County to show that the project is ensuring any fish habitat that may be impacted is healthy enough to support fish as they feed, breed, spawn, and grow.

- The fish and wildlife report's early findings indicate that while construction activities may temporarily negatively impact fish in the Puyallup River, the stormwater collection and treatment improvements will mean that less polluted runoff is entering the river.

#### Hazardous materials

- Several state and local laws require Pierce County to safely manage any potentially hazardous materials on the project site.
- The hazardous materials report highlights six locations as possible sources of contamination that would need to be disposed of, contained, mitigated, or considered in the project design to minimize risk to workers and the environment during and after construction.

#### Noise

- Federal regulations 23 CFR 772 (2010) gives states the authority to develop their own noise policy. This project is governed by the 2020 WSDOT Noise Policy and Procedures.
- The noise analysis determined that some residences at the Ardena Gale Mobile Home Park in Fife would be impacted and recommends the project include a noise wall that would be 318 feet long and range from 6-8 feet in height.
- The project team will consult with the Ardena Gale residents about whether to include a noise wall in the project.

#### 4(f) properties

- Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966 makes it national policy to "preserve the natural beauty of the countryside, public park and recreation land, wildlife and waterfowl refuges, and historic sites."
- Three 4(f) properties were identified in the project area: the historic Milroy Bridge, the lower Puyallup River levee, and the City of Fife Levee Pond and Community Garden
  - While the bridge is going to be removed, the project team is still working through what will happen to it and how to appropriately acknowledge its historic nature.
  - The lower Puyallup River Levee will only be impacted temporarily.
  - The project team is working with the City of Fife to relocate the community garden.

#### Traffic

- The traffic report examined how the proposed roadway will impact traffic.
- The early findings of this report are that this project will create a more efficient route and reduce traffic conflict points which is projected to decrease congestion and increase safety.

#### Visual and aesthetic impact

- The National Environmental Policy Act requires the project to "use all practical means" to "assure for all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and esthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings."
- The visual report looked at how the project will affect the visual environment and character of the area and concluded that the visual impact would likely be low because most residents will

not have views of the new four-lane road and bridges, and project elements will be designed to blend in with the surroundings.

#### Social and environmental justice

- The Environmental Justice and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act requires that a proposed project not be unduly harmful to already disadvantaged populations.
- The project team is still studying how this project will impact minority or low-income populations.

#### Community outreach and opportunities for input

The project team values public input and transparency and has made investments in 2021 to both inform the public about what is happening with the project, and to gather feedback. This has included:

- A project website - <https://www.canyonroadconnection.org>
- A project blog - <https://www.canyonroadconnection.org/stay-connected>
- Project briefings to community groups and elected officials
- A project mailer
- An online open house from August 16 – September 26 at [canyonroadconnection.org/open-house](https://www.canyonroadconnection.org/open-house)
- This virtual Town Hall

Outreach in 2020 and 2021 to the agricultural community and the leadership of the Pierce County Agricultural Advisory Committee led the Pierce County Council to unanimously pass [Resolution 2021-96](#), which establishes an agricultural corridor, and directs any transportation projects in an agricultural corridor to consider how to create a design that meets the transportation needs while respecting the needs and unique nature of agricultural areas. This includes:

- Looking at signage that clearly identifies the area as an agricultural corridor
- Reviewing speed limits to allow for safer passage of pedestrians and equipment in the corridor
- Designing the roadway to benefit agricultural producers
- Setting traffic impact fees that make sense for agricultural producers

#### Next steps

The project team will refine the River Crossing design, complete the environmental assessment, and continue pursuing funding opportunities.

#### Contact information

- For general project questions, email [canyonroadconnection@piercecountywa.gov](mailto:canyonroadconnection@piercecountywa.gov)
- To reach Letticia Neal, email [letticia.neal@piercecountywa.gov](mailto:letticia.neal@piercecountywa.gov)
- To reach Ken Gunther, email [kgunther@cityoffife.org](mailto:kgunther@cityoffife.org)

## Questions and answers:

**Q:** Will the stormwater released to the Puyallup River be from an existing facility or a new release point?

**A:** Any stormwater going into the Puyallup River will be through existing release points. Not adding new release points to the Puyallup River was an important issue for the Puyallup Tribe of Indians and something they made clear early in our consultation with them. There will be new release points to Clarks Creek.

**Q:** So stormwater from the bridge and the new roads in Fife is discharged at Clarks Creek?

**A:** No. The new discharge points are for Clarks Creek, but we are using existing discharge points wherever possible. Most of the stormwater runoff in the City of Fife will be going to Old Oxbow Lake, west of 70th Avenue East. The water that falls on the new bridge itself will be directed, half to the north to Fife, and half to the south to Pierce County. The stormwater that goes to Fife will be collected into the Fife stormwater system and will be treated, retained, and released through existing outfalls to Oxbow Lake or to the Puyallup River. The water that goes to the Pierce County side will likewise be treated and released to existing outfalls to the Puyallup River, or new outfalls into Clarks Creek.

**Q:** What will happen to the Community Garden at Levee Pond Park?

**A:** The community garden will be relocated but will remain in the Levee Pond Park. Pierce County and the City of Fife are working together to find the best place for it – likely higher up the field from its current location.

**Q:** What will traffic look like for the school busses to get over the Puyallup River to get to Puyallup High School?

**A:** Traffic patterns will change dramatically with the completion of this project, especially when it is combined with the SR 167 extension that will be built at about the same time. So the patterns that we currently see, the routes that busses currently use, the routes we take to the grocery store, will all probably change. We will be working with emergency service providers, school districts, and others to make sure they are aware of how the patterns will change during construction, and when construction is completed. We are still a few years away from that point though, and I'm sure the school district will look at how to optimize routes given the new roadway when we get closer to completion of the project.

**Q:** I'm worried about cut-through traffic to Levee Road in my Fife residential neighborhood. How do we know the Radiance neighborhood will not be impacted by trucks?

**A:** The City of Fife is planning to add an overpass over the railroad crossing on 70th Avenue East. This is in our current 6-year transportation improvement plan. Once that overpass is in place, the most efficient way for trucks to go to and from the Port of Tacoma will be to remain on 70th Avenue East, rather than cutting through the neighborhood. The lack of an at-grade connection between Levee Road and the new Puyallup River bridge will also discourage trucks from cutting through the neighborhood.

**Q:** What measures are proposed to prevent southbound 70th Avenue East traffic headed to Levee Road from cutting through the Radiance neighborhood, especially trucks?

**A:** The City of Fife is currently looking at traffic calming features and is putting together a study to determine what those features could be. If we find there are a number of trucks going through Radiance, we're going to have a policy and procedures in place to deal with that in the future.

**Q:** A traffic light is proposed for 45th Street Court East. Is that to support the proposed Amazon Distribution Center?

**A:** The Amazon Center is proposing to install a signal at 45th Street Court East. That signal will encourage gaps for north bound traffic coming out of the Radiance neighborhood in order to go north on 70th Avenue East. We are also looking at a “flying-T” modification at that intersection. Fife’s 6-year transportation improvement plan also includes plans for a signal at Radiance.

**Q:** You say that air quality will decrease locally as more traffic comes through but it will improve regionally as more vehicles travel fewer miles. Can you please define “locally” and “regionally?”

**A:** “Locally” refers to immediately around the project area, perhaps 10 miles around the project area. The [Air Quality report](#) is publicly available and in that report there is a graphic that clearly describes the local project area. “Regionally” refers to the Puget Sound area.

**Q:** Are there any traffic calming measures planned to encourage agriculture-friendly speeds?

**A:** Yes, that goes back to the resolution that Pierce County Council recently passed ([Pierce County Resolution 2021-96](#)). We will be looking at the possibility of speed reductions in the area where the farmers are. It is one of several areas that we will be examining that could be beneficial to the agricultural community. This is a pilot program so we are looking at these issues in light of the Canyon Road Regional Connection project, but the idea is to be able to ask these same questions on other projects that are going through agricultural areas. “Would this area benefit from signage making its connection to agriculture clear? Should we modify speed limits in this area? How can we design the roadway to meet the needs of the project while also respecting the needs of the agricultural community? What kinds of traffic impact fees will make sense for members of the farming community?” This resolution encourages us to take a broader look at how regional transportation projects impact agricultural areas that goes far beyond the Canyon Road Regional Connection project.

**Q:** I noticed street lighting along the Canyon Road extension. Will these lights meet Dark Skies standards for street lighting?

**A:** The illumination for the Canyon Road Regional Connection project has been modified to be more in line with rural aesthetics. That means that the lights will be spaced farther apart, they will be a lower wattage, and they will be properly shielded LEDs to comply with Dark Skies policies. This is a request we have heard from the farming community and others and we are doing our best to meet this request.

**Q:** What bicycle-friendly measures will be in place to increase that traffic flow? Are there any artist renderings of how bikes will cross the river?

**A:** We do not have any renderings that are specific to bikes - that is something we should probably do in the next few years. The shared-use pedestrian path that will be below the bridge is intended to be used by all non-vehicular traffic, including bikes. This structure will be much larger than a sidewalk and the intention is that bicyclists will be able to cross the river using that facility and from there they will be able to access either the sidewalks or the roadways as they choose on either side of the Puyallup River.

I am going to anticipate a very common question that we receive, which is, “Why are we not keeping the Milroy bridge as a pedestrian or bicycle crossing?” We have looked at that possibility at length and unfortunately the structure is so old, and in such need of maintenance, and poses such an environmental hazard to the river, that it will have to be removed.

**Q:** When you talk about increasing traffic by multiple factors, it seems strange not to provide alternatives for routes connecting Fife to Puyallup by non-vehicular traffic. Can you speak to what steps are being taken to consider Fife’s Complete Streets ordinance as it relates to non-vehicular traffic?

**A:** There are proposals right now for a trail system between Puyallup and Fife. One would be on River Road, and the others would be within Fife. None of those have moved very far. With the SR 167 project though, there are discussions of a trail system, known as the Riverwalk Trail, that would go from Puyallup to Fife following the 167 alignment. This project is designed to connect to the Riverwalk Trail whenever it is constructed. The trail itself though is beyond the scope of our particular project.

**Q:** How much state funding has been committed?

**A:** We actually have a lot of federal funds committed to the project. Federal funds are channeled to local agencies like Pierce County, through the state, and we have received to date about \$12 Million in federal funding that has gone to design and property acquisition for this project. We anticipate and hope to receive considerably more for the construction itself. We have been successful obtaining other funding for the Canyon Road projects that are farther south.

**Q:** Instead of traffic turning right from 66th on River Road, what is to stop people from trying to short cut the route by turning right on 62nd, and then left on 48th and the out the new outlet onto 66th?

**A:** That is an interesting question. Really the answer is that there will be nothing to prevent that. If you are a creative driver, there will be nothing stopping you from finding a way to get from point A to point B that is different from what we are designing for. However, the route that you describe in your question will not be very efficient. We've kept 48th a very local road, so it will be somewhat narrow, it will have some extra bends in it, and where it joins in at 66th there will not be a traffic signal so it may be difficult to make turns at that location – it is truly intended for local access purposes only. The quickest and most efficient way to get from point A to point B through this area is going to be using the 66th-River Road intersection, and from there to Canyon Road. Creative drivers will always find creative routes through the area if they want to.

**Q:** From one of the slides, it looks like there is an intersection between River Road and 52nd Street to access 48th Street East. Is that correct? The intersection would be on 66th Avenue East.

**A:** That is correct. Currently 48th, 66th, River Road, and the Milroy bridge all come together at this five-legged signalized intersection. When the project is complete, the Milroy bridge will no longer be there, River Road and 66th will be the signalized intersection, and we are re-routing 48th a little further south, so it will intersect with 66th, but further south, about mid-way between River Road and 52nd. This will not be a signalized intersection because we are keeping 48th as a local access road. So although you could certainly drive through it if you so choose, it will be a narrow road and will not have a signalized intersection on either end to help you get in or out.

**Q:** Approximately how much traffic will increase on 70th Avenue East? Do you know what the anticipated traffic counts on 70th Avenue East on Fife will be when this project is completed?

**A:** With the SR 167 project and a number of other regional projects that are going to take place in Fife, the distribution of traffic is going to change. The traffic modeling that Pierce County has done, which has been reviewed by the City of Fife, suggests that initially there will be an improvement for those who are getting out of Saddle Creek, Radiance, and nearby neighborhoods. This project is also eliminating a couple of really significant choke points in the area, which are both ends of the Milroy bridge. The Milroy bridge is, as you know, one lane in each direction. One end is controlled at a stop sign at a three-legged intersection. The other is a very awkward five-legged signalized intersection and both of those back up tremendously at all hours of the day. This project eliminates both of those choke points and provides a route that is a straight shot, with fewer signalized intersections and fewer conflict points for vehicles. In addition, Fife has already invested a significant amount of money to improve 70th Avenue in anticipation of connecting to this new bridge. So, we have really done everything that we possibly could

to prepare for the traffic distribution that we anticipate occurring. Time will tell whether more improvements are necessary to keep traffic moving through this area, and if there are, Pierce County and the City of Fife will work together to find a way to keep getting people where they need to go as quickly as possible.

**Q:** Are there any widening improvements planned for 48th Street, between 70th Avenue and Freeman Road?

**A:** This project will make the west end of 48th a cul-de-sac. It will not connect into 70th Avenue East. We'll also have some widening and modifications at the future 48th Street-74th Avenue East intersection. The City of Fife does not currently have plans to make any changes to the 48th Street-Freeman Road intersection, outside of potential developer improvements that might take place.

**Q:** Residents in Radiance frequent downtown Puyallup via Levee Road, not necessarily the Milroy bridge. What new route will be accessible without back tracking?

**A:** I would say that the use of 45th Street Court East and the future 74th Avenue East would be a direct link to Levee Road and to Puyallup. The 74th Avenue East roadway needs to be constructed before the bridge over the Puyallup River, so it will go in relatively early on in the project.