



Canyon Road Regional Connection Project

March 30, 2022 - Virtual Public Meeting Summary

Radiance, Valley Haven, and Saddle Creek neighborhoods

Background:

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

After the project team examined feedback from the Virtual Town Hall in September of 2021, it became clear that extra consideration and interaction was needed for the residents of the neighborhoods along 70th Avenue East, near the River Crossing portion of the project area. The project team curated the content of this virtual public meeting to discuss the specific concerns members of these communities raised during the fall 2021 outreach, while also providing a broad overview of the history of the project and its current status. The meeting was held on the Zoom platform. The [meeting slides](#) are available on our website.

Presenters:

- **Leticia Neal** – Transportation Improvement Section Manager, Pierce County Planning & Public Works
- **Brian Johnston** – Environmental Resources Supervisor, Pierce County Planning & Public Works
- **Ken Gunther** – Assistant Public Works Director, City of Fife
- **Jenny Thacker** – Communications Consultant and Senior Project Manager, PRR

Presentation Summary:

Project history

This is by no means a new project. We have been working on this for almost 30 years going through a public process, including a lot of community outreach.

Previously studied alternatives

In early years of this project, outreach was focused on the alignment of where this new corridor would be established. In the 1990s, we reached out to the public three times to weigh options and we received a lot of great input about which choices were preferred and why. The final option, and what we are currently designing toward, was chosen in 1998. The final option met the needs of the project and met environmental conditions, reduced flooding, and protected rural farmland.

Project schedule

The project is made up of two segments: the Railroad Crossing and the River Crossing. The design of the Railroad Crossing segment, from Pioneer Way to 52nd Street, is nearly complete and is currently on pause while we wait for the design of the River Crossing project to be completed. This means that everyone gets the benefit of a single construction timeline so that when the work is done, it is truly done. Pending funding, we are on track to begin construction in 2025.

Corridor at a glance

The Canyon Road Regional Connection Project is the largest of several road projects that Pierce County is undertaking to support our economy, and to make a vital link between our two largest manufacturing and industrial centers: Frederickson and the Port of Tacoma. We are taking measures to address the environmental impacts of this project, and we believe this work will meaningfully reduce congestion for Pierce County residents.

Connectivity

This project addresses a missing link between the Port of Tacoma and the Fredrickson Manufacturing Center . The River Crossing area of the project in Fife is really the center of our county and will connect to the planned State Route 167 Completion Project. These two projects together will completely change the way that traffic moves in this part of Pierce County.

Related projects in Fife

[This slide](#) represents a large overview of the projects that the City of Fife has planned for the future. Our six-year transportation improvement plan is in its infancy, and they will be going into 2026. We are in the process of updating our plan now and will be addressed at future Planning Commission and City Council meetings. We encourage your attendance at public hearings.

River crossing

This is a visual of the entire project area of the Canyon Road northerly extension. Tonight we are focusing on the River Crossing portion of the project, which will be the connection point between Pierce County and the City of Fife. In the last year we have completed our 30% design, and we have worked with the Department of Transportation regarding design elements along River Road. We've done traffic modeling with the local access streets, and we're working with the City of Fife to design other elements such as stormwater facilities. We're just now beginning conversations with property owners to acquire the properties we need to construct the project. And we're working through the Environmental Review process.

Traffic backup

Part of what this project will address is the traffic backup that drivers currently experience when trying to cross the existing Milroy Bridge. As it stands currently, the bridge has only one lane in each direction so it becomes easily congested, and cars spend a lot of time idling on North Levee Road and River Road. We're aware that the Saddle Creek neighborhood bears the brunt of this backup. Another major concern we've heard from this neighborhood is regarding the potential for drivers to try and cut through their neighborhood to try and avoid this backup.

Traffic cut through

We completed a cut through study for the City of Fife in 2020. We discovered a route along 43rd Street East was likely to be used whenever Milroy Bridge was particularly backed up. We discovered another longer route along Radiance Boulevard East that could potentially be used as a cut through. Ultimately, although we can't prevent drivers from trying to come up with crafty alternatives, we are confident that the option available with the new river crossing will provide the quickest possible route over the river and for that reason, drivers will be less likely to try to use the neighborhood streets as a short cut.

New bridge configuration

The new bridge over the Puyallup River is a grade separated structure which means it will pass over River Road and North Levee Road. It will not intersect with the two roadways.

New local pathways

Drivers crossing the bridge from Fife heading South over the bridge will turn right on 66th Avenue East which will take them to an intersection with River Road. Drivers crossing the bridge North into the City of Fife will turn right onto 45th Street Court East, and right again onto the new 74th Avenue East to get to North Levee Road. So drivers will still be able to access these River Road and North Levee Road, it just won't happen right at the intersection where the bridge crosses over them.

Active transportation

The new bridge will also include a shared-use pathway which include room for pedestrians, cyclists, skateboarders, and anybody who is using non-motorized forms of transportation. This pathway will be suspended beneath the bridge itself, and accessible from North Levee Road and River Road. This design has a lot of advantages, one of the most important of which is that it separates pedestrians and vehicles. This design also makes the bridge significantly less wide which results in a lower construction cost. Finally, because it is narrow, it throws less shade on the river, which is better for the fish. This kind of path has been built before and it has been proven safe and effective. The shared-use path connects to sidewalks, and there will be a signalized crossing at North Levee Road, and it will also provide a connection to the future Tacoma to Puyallup trail system.

Levee Pond Park

The City of Fife recently turned a portion of property just East of 70th Avenue East into a park -Levee Pond Park. Pedestrians and cyclists using the new shared-use pathway will also have access to the City park system which is an exciting development of this project.

Planning for growth

We would like to describe what's going on in terms of regional growth before getting into environmental impacts. Pierce County in general has seen a lot of growth, development, and transportation projects. This region is projected to grow by 1.6 million people and 1.1 million jobs by 2050. These developments and transportation projects, including the Canyon Road Regional Connection Project have all been part of a plan to manage that growth. You can find more information in the [Puget Sound Regional Council Vision 2050 Plan](#).

Regional growth strategy

The Puget Sound Regional Council analyzed all the transportation projects in our region and did an Environmental Impact review. They were looking for the impacts cumulatively on our air quality, greenhouse gas emissions, and other related factors. Based on what the plans are for the region, we adopt different policies into the plan for our project. The Canyon Road Regional Connection project is part of our overall comprehensive plan which is meant to manage growth and minimize the overall environmental impacts happening to our region.

Environmental assessment

On a project level, our [overall environmental impacts are being assessed](#) according to the standards of the State and National Environmental Policy Act. Environmental disciplines that we are analyzing as part of the project include air quality, noise, hazardous materials, cultural and historic resources, drainage, fish and wildlife, 4(f) properties, visual and aesthetic impact, and social and environmental justice.

Air quality

In our studies of air quality for this project we found that, with the expected increase in traffic volumes, air quality in the project area will go down, but it will still meet the Department of Ecology standards.

A central benefit of the project is improving traffic flow for our region overall. Because the project will improve traffic flow, with a more direct route, timed signals, and other infrastructure, the project will decrease air pollution and improve air quality in the larger region.

Noise wall

Naturally, when traffic increases in a certain area, you will experience an increase in noise. We modeled and assessed what the noise impacts might be when the project is complete versus what residents experience now. We found that the noise levels along 70th Avenue East in Fife will not increase much beyond what they are now. However, we found that in one small area along the new 74th Avenue East the noise level was projected to increase to such a level that an analysis was triggered to see if a noise wall would be beneficial. The noise report found out that a noise wall would in fact be beneficial to the community there, and that would be within financial reach for the project. The project team polled community members who lived along the site of the proposed noise wall to find out their preference and they preferred a wall, so it will be included as part of our work. We recently wrote a [blog post](#) discussing this process.

Keeping you informed

In the last two years, we've had to make some adjustments to our typical way of reaching the community given the pandemic. We've been able to accomplish a lot despite the barriers. In September of 2021 we held an online open house, and in November we were able to meet in person with the residents of the Ardena Gale community. We're always working to keep our partner jurisdictions, legislature, and other local groups informed about the project, making sure to provide updates regularly. We'll continue to be available online and you can [sign up for our email list](#) on our website.

Next steps

We will be keeping community members up to speed with regular outreach, continuing our environmental assessment work, design, and property acquisition to complete the project. We are still working on getting all of the funding necessary to complete this project as construction is estimated to cost between \$250 – \$300 million dollars. Design and property acquisition are fully funded.

Questions and Answers:

Questions regarding Fife:

Q: What type of transportation improvements is the City making? Where can we find out more about those?

A: Yes. The City of Fife is currently working on [the six year transportation improvement plan](#). A draft of the updated plan will be posted on our webpage before the planning commission meeting in May. That plan addresses improvements that the City will need, including an overpass over the railroad at 70th Ave E, and other improvements, for example at Radiance Boulevard and 70th Ave E. The Planning Commission is meeting May 2 to discuss the updated plan and the City Council will discuss it on June 14. We invite the public to both meetings to provide input.

Q: Is there a way to work on street design standards along 70th Ave E in conjunction with this project? Is the project team working with the Fife city planners to implement an improved street design for the future?

A: We currently do have a green streets standard which the city uses for new development, and that was applied to this project along 70th Ave E. The City is currently working on a traffic calming plan. The City is also discussing a traffic count program in which we will be taking citywide traffic counts every two years, as opposed to every 10 years which is our current practice.

Q: Will the road be widened at the railroad crossing on 70th Ave E?

A: The plan is for an overpass over the railroad which will be the full width of the current 70th Ave E. The City undertook a [location, size, and type study](#) for a railroad crossing at that location, you'll find it posted on the City's website. That study lays out the anticipated locational impacts and the types of materials used on that overpass.

Q: Circling back around to the railroad on 70th Ave E, there was mention of an overpass, potentially, being constructed. Would that overpass match the two lanes in both directions?

A: That's correct. The overpass will match the full width of 70th Ave E.

Questions regarding air quality:

Q: I am more concerned about increasing air pollution than waiting to cross the bridge. The project was conceived in the 1990s, but the population in Fife doubled between 2000 and 2010. Saddle Creek was not here at that time. My concern is that the project planners are approving a project that is going to decrease the health of the people in my neighborhood. What are you planning to do to remedy the air quality? Are there other options?

A: What's happening to your neighborhood is happening to a lot of neighborhoods in Washington. The Puget Sound Regional Council has identified air quality as being an issue for people in the South Puget Sound area. This project will improve air quality regionally, but it will increase air pollution locally.

However, the levels are expected to stay well within the acceptable limits set by the Environmental Protection Agency. At a very local level we are doing what we are required to do within the project. To improve air quality on the regional level, Puget Sound Regional Council worked with the State to pass legislation to [adopt California's vehicle emission standards](#), and pass the [Climate Commitment Act](#) with the goal of ending gas car sales by 2030. One thing members of the public who are concerned about local air pollution can do is to encourage additional legislation to go down to zero carbon emissions and ask the legislature to set policies and goals to try and offset the emissions that come with growing populations. If we were to take this project out of the equation and look only at the long-range growth plan for the City of Fife, we know that the population will increase and the level of service over the Milroy Bridge decreases. That means that vehicles will back up and idle longer, which means you will still see a decrease in air quality. The growth projections indicate that without the project, before 2040 we will see complete gridlock in this area, increasing the amount of pollution. This project adds capacity for now and in the future. It addresses that gridlock problem, and it allows fewer vehicle miles to be driven in the region. Essentially, it is a tradeoff.

Questions regarding noise:

Q: Can you explain more about the noise wall? I don't see how it will help noise in Valley Haven. Can you say more about noise along 70th Ave E just north of the project area?

A: What triggers a noise impact assessment is when you have a project action that brings a vehicle closer to a noise receptor which is where people live or work. Within the project limits, we are expanding the roadway which will bring vehicles closer to noise receptors. The area you're describing is north of the project limit, and we are not making changes to the roadway there so we did not do a noise analysis there. In the areas we evaluated, we checked for current noise levels, and projected noise levels after the project is finished. If the noise levels are anticipated to reach a certain threshold, then the next thing to do is to look and see what we can do to minimize the anticipated impact. A noise wall is one option, but we can only do that within the project limits.

For homes along 70th Ave E within the project area, the fact that the bridge will be grade-separated means the noise will be at a higher elevation level which will dissipate the noise above the houses so the sound will travel over them.

Q: I am in Valley Haven and my house backs up to 70th Ave E. Would the city help with noise reduction by possibly planting trees?

A: This area is outside the project limits and was not studied. This community was also built after 70th Ave E, so the road was not evaluated for noise concerns. But the city can look at the possibility of planting trees.

Questions regarding timing of the project:

Q: Why wait two years (to 2024) for start of construction? I do understand permitting does take a while, but would there be a way to expedite the permitting process to move this forward now that the recent multi billions infrastructure bill was recently passed for local and national bridges? Will that funding cover this new Puyallup River 70th Ave E bridge?

A: The project is not waiting just because of environmental permitting, although that is a long process. We are still in the early phase of the design of the bridge itself. We've just completed 30% design of the

bridge and are starting to acquire property that we'll need to build it. The Move Ahead Washington funding package is intended to carry forward over the next several years, so hopefully this project will be successful in attaining some of that funding. And we are pursuing other funding options as well. Having the permitting in place and the right of way acquired sets us up well for getting the funding that we need.

Questions regarding traffic:

Q: Do you anticipate that traffic will increase on 70th Ave E? And if so, will a traffic light be installed at Radiance Boulevard? Will there be a traffic light installed at the River Road entry point?

A: There will be a traffic light at the River Road entry point. That entry point is at the current exit of the Milroy bridge. That traffic light will stay, but intersection will be configured differently since the bridge will no longer be there. For Radiance Boulevard, we don't yet have a traffic signal planned. There will be a traffic signal at 45th St Ct E, and in terms of Radiance, we will be monitoring the traffic volumes as this goes on. Once the requirements for a traffic signal are met, then the City will take action to install a traffic signal. We have to follow the national standards criteria before we can install a light. With all these changes, the traffic patterns will change dramatically but it's very hard to predict exactly how they will change. We're putting everything in place that we can right now, and we'll be very reactive to issues that arise once these projects are constructed.

Q: How is the intersection on 70th Ave E and Valley Ave E expected to change from a traffic perspective once the Canyon Road project and SR 167 extension are completed? It would seem that the intersection would get very busy after the completion of both projects.

A: This project was in fact incorporated into the modeling that was done for SR 167 extension project. They are designing that extension project and all of its connections to be able to handle the traffic that comes along with this project. We will continue to monitor traffic impacts once the project is in place.

Q: What is the anticipated percentage increase of truck volume on 70th Ave E north of the Puyallup River?

A: We have modeled the area extensively but we do not have a breakdown specifically for 70th Ave E freight traffic. By 2027, the traffic we're seeing now will be practically doubled for the Canyon Road and 70th Ave E full corridor. The Annual Average Daily Traffic we're predicting in 2040 in a scenario in which we do not build anything will be significantly lower than the scenario in which we move forward with building the bridge. That is because the area, without the project, will become gridlocked. It can only increase so much without change, and it cannot grow beyond a gridlocked scenario. So, if we build the project, we expect to see more cars and trucks on 70th Ave E, but they will be moving, rather than gridlocked, which is what we would see in a future in which we do not complete this project.

Q: Will the new 70th Ave E bridge have any traffic signals or will it be a continuous route to Puyallup?

A: There will not be a traffic signal on either end of the new bridge because the bridge will not intersect with other roads. That's part of the advantage of building a grade-separated structure. Currently the Milroy Bridge has a traffic signal on one end, and a stop sign on the other. The new bridge that will be connecting to 70th Ave E will not have a traffic signal or stop sign on either end because it will travel over River Road and Levee Road. There is no direct connection to the City of Puyallup through this project. You will still be able to travel there via River Road the same as always, but there will be a slightly different route depending on the direction you're traveling.

Questions regarding the Milroy Bridge, and the new planned bridge:

Q: Is the Milroy Bridge expected to last another decade? Or at least until the new bridge is built?

A: Yes. The Milroy Bridge is still functional and safe. The problem is that it was designed with a much lower volume of traffic in mind, much lower than we have today. In addition, there was not a lot of attention paid to pedestrian and non--motorized users' needs, or ADA standards. In short, the bridge, although functional, is obsolete. If construction of the new bridge took 10 or even 20 years to complete, the Milroy bridge would stay in service during that time. We inspect it regularly and it is safe. However, it is a point of gridlock now, and it certainly will not be able to handle the traffic volume that we expect to see in 10 or 20 years. It's also currently not an environmentally sound structure. It does not have design elements to capture storm water, for example. So all of the things that come off of your car like gasoline, paint chips, and brake fluid end up in the Puyallup River. Eliminating the Milroy Bridge therefore also has positive environmental impacts.

Q: How many lanes will there be on the new bridge that will cross the river?

A: Two lanes in each direction, four total.

Q: How often is the Milroy Bridge inspected?

A: The inspection program that we have in Pierce County requires inspection of all bridges every two years, which is the federal standard. But due to the age of this bridge and the fact that we're actively looking at replacing it, we have increased that inspection to annually.

Questions regarding local farms:

Q: How will this effect Picha and Sterino farms, and other local farms?

A: From a purely physical standpoint, the current 66th Ave E (which runs between Picha and Sterino farms) is two lanes and we will be widening it to four lanes (two in each direction). We will be acquiring some property on both sides of 66th Ave E to accommodate the new lanes. We have not completed the acquisition of that property yet. We are currently in negotiations with Sterino and have not started yet with Picha. We do compensate property owners through our extensive acquisition process which includes a market appraisal and review. Our compensation includes damages as well as the value of the property. At this time, we do not anticipate that we will need to eliminate or relocate either farm.

Questions regarding general safety:

Q: I am concerned about speeding along 70th Ave E.

A: Once the project is in place the City will be looking at potentially installing traffic signals at Radiance Boulevard if it becomes an issue.

Q: What will the speed limit on 70th Ave E be?

A: It will not be changing. 70th Ave E is already at the configuration that it will remain at after the project. For the new roadway that will be connecting to 70th Ave E, the speed limit will be posted at 35 mph.

General questions:

Q: I was shocked to hear that this project has been 30 years in the making. With that being the case, and with so many things being changed in the area, was the new Amazon warehouse taken into account during the cut-through study?

A: The Amazon warehouse was definitely not planned for in the 1990s when this project was initiated. The additional traffic from the warehouse will however be taken into account as we design the new signal that will go in at the intersection of 70th Ave E and 45th St Ct E. The new warehouse site was a Tribal property. Since the Tribe has their own government, they were not tied to our planning efforts even though we work hard to engage each other. They participate frequently in our planning efforts, but the traffic analysis did not anticipate that particular site development. Unfortunately, we were not able to plan ahead for the Amazon warehouse, but we will work to be reactive to the changes it will cause through signal timing measures.