



MEMORANDUM

TO: Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council Board of Directors
FROM: Matt Ransom, Executive Director 
DATE: July 31, 2018
SUBJECT: SR-500 42nd Ave. and 54th Ave. Safety Improvements Study

AT A GLANCE

Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) project staff will present the SR-500 42nd Ave. and 54th Ave. Safety Improvements Study analysis and recommendations.

BACKGROUND

On SR-500 between I-5 and SR-503 there are two signalized intersections remaining at Falk Road/NE 42nd Avenue and at NE 54th Avenue/Stapleton Road. Over the last decade, the SR-500 corridor has experienced a significant growth in traffic volumes and conflicts. Over the last five years, there have been almost 400 crashes around these two SR-500 intersections.

In response to this condition, WSDOT has worked to enhance safety by adjusting traffic light timing, coordinating the traffic lights and installing traffic-warning signs. Efforts to improve safety have helped, but additional improvements are necessary to have a significant impact in reducing both the number and severity of collisions.

WSDOT has recently completed a safety study to analyze safety issues on SR-500 between St. Johns Road and Andresen Road. This study was conducted in coordination with local partners including the City of Vancouver, Clark County, C-TRAN, and the Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council (RTC). In addition, WSDOT conducted a significant public outreach effort.

In February 2018, WSDOT staff presented an introduction and project background to the RTC Board. At the August RTC Board meeting, WSDOT project staff will present an update on the SR-500 42nd Ave. and 54th Ave. Safety Improvements Study efforts.

PROJECT HISTORY

During the 1980s, SR-500 was planned and developed to address growing congestion and crashes on Fourth Plain Blvd. It was envisioned as a higher speed regional facility with limited access points originally uncontrolled at lower volume connections (e.g. 42nd and 54th) and controlled by traffic signals at higher volume connections (e.g. Andresen). Over time, the state has invested in improvements along SR-500 with the addition of a number of interchanges. These improvements include interchanges at NE Andresen Rd (1998), NE Thurston Rd (2003), NE 112th Ave/NE Gher Rd (2006), and NE St. Johns Rd (2012).

In 2002, WSDOT completed environmental analysis which recommended an overpass at 42nd and an interchange at 54th; these improvements were estimated to cost \$80 million, but have not been funded.

Even if this level of funding were identified for improvements at these locations, the Washington State Legislature and WSDOT policy direct that any improvements need to be determined using a practical solutions approach, which focuses on cost-effective, data-driven strategies to address specific needs. This approach could identify different improvements than were previously identified.

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATION

SR-500 safety improvements were identified through the SR-500 42nd Ave. and 54th Ave. Safety Improvements Study. The intent of the safety study was to identify and select through public process a cost-effective approach to reduce crashes on SR-500 and maintain pedestrian and bicycle connectivity across the highway. Utilizing public input with recommendations by an Executive Committee and Technical Advisory Committee, WSDOT analyzed a number of potential safety improvements. The Executive Committee and Technical Advisory Committee have recommended the Right-In/Right-Out Alternative.



The Right-In/Right-Out alternative would remove the existing traffic signals; add center barriers to restrict left turns; and improve merge lanes to provide safe access to SR-500. A pedestrian and bicycle bridge would be added at 54th Street (See diagram). This improvement would reduce collisions, eliminate left turn conflicts, and significantly improve SR-500 traffic flow. The total improvements for these two intersections could cost up to \$6 million to construct.

WSDOT Southwest Region is exploring opportunities to improve safety as soon as possible. Given funding constraints, early safety improvements would likely mean delivering the proposed project over time, with some immediate actions soon, and the pedestrian crossing and other improvements coming hopefully within the next 5 years. Timing such as this can create uncertainty around commitment to project completion. At this time, the funding (up to \$6M) is in WSDOT's future budget and is planned to be available starting no later than the 21-23 biennium. WSDOT is looking at options to move those improvements sooner. As with all aspects of a potential safety project, the timing for funding still needs to be locked down.