PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN

Mountain Loop Highway Feasibility Study
WA SNOHOMISH 20(1)
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Prepared for:
WESTERN FEDERAL LANDS HIGHWAY DIVISION

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## ABBREVIATIONS/ACRONYMS

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>ADA</td>
<td>Americans with Disabilities Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>DARA</td>
<td>Darrington Area Resources Advocates</td>
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<td>FHWA</td>
<td>Federal Highway Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>MP</td>
<td>mile post</td>
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<td>NCCC</td>
<td>North Cascades Conservation Council</td>
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<td>NEPA</td>
<td>National Environmental Policy Act</td>
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<td>PIP</td>
<td>Public Involvement Plan</td>
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<td>RPA</td>
<td>Robert Peccia and Associates</td>
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<tr>
<td>SR</td>
<td>State Route</td>
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<tr>
<td>USFS</td>
<td>United States Forest Service – Mt. Baker - Snoqualmie National Forest</td>
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<td>WFLHD</td>
<td>Western Federal Lands Highway Division</td>
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<td>WTA</td>
<td>Washington Trails Association</td>
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PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN (PIP)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is completing a feasibility study for potential corridor improvements to the Mountain Loop Highway in the Mount Baker National Forest. The study, referred to as the Mountain Loop Highway Feasibility Study, will identify feasible improvement options to address access, operational, and maintenance concerns within the study area based on needs identified by the public, the study partners, and resource agencies.

The Mountain Loop Highway provides access between the Town of Darrington and the City of Granite Falls as an alternative to SR 530. The Mountain Loop Highway Feasibility Study will include analysis of geometric characteristics (road widths, curves, approaches, etc.), collision history, and existing and projected operational characteristics of the corridor. An inventory of existing and projected land uses and environmental resources will also be developed.

The study will be a collaborative process between FHWA, the United States Forest Service (USFS), Snohomish County, the Town of Darrington, the City of Granite Falls, resource agencies, and the public meant to identify transportation needs and potential solutions. A key outcome of the study will be the development of a comprehensive package of short- and long-term recommendations intended to address the transportation needs of highway users over the next twenty years (i.e. planning horizon year 2040). Developing these recommendations will help the study partners define the most critical needs and allocate resources.

This document, called the Public Involvement Plan (PIP), describes the process for engaging the public, stakeholders, and other interested parties in the study. The purpose of the PIP is to establish a process that provides opportunities for interested parties to participate in all phases of the corridor planning process. Providing complete information, timely notices, and opportunities to comment, as well as ensuring full access to key decisions, will help achieve the PIP objectives.

1.1 CORRIDOR PLANNING PROCESS

FHWA will use a corridor planning process to investigate improvement options for the Mountain Loop Highway. The corridor planning process will inform any projects that may develop from improvement options identified in the study. The process will help advance viable options for use in potential future NEPA processes, while providing an opportunity for partner involvement at all stages.

The corridor study process will encourage early communication with interested parties to help identify needs, constraints, and opportunities to determine reasonable improvements given available resources and local support. Community, stakeholder, agency and other interested party involvement are important components in any successful planning process. For this study, several proposed involvement strategies will aid in reaching the most people possible to elicit meaningful participation. These opportunities will achieve the following goals:

- Educate corridor users regarding the planning process for evaluating corridors needs.
- Provide opportunity for input and to solicit comments throughout the corridor planning study.
- Present findings and recommendations.
1.2 Study Area

The study area, shown in Figure 1, is located in Snohomish County, Washington. The Mountain Loop Highway is 52 miles in length and connects the communities of the Town of Darrington and the City of Granite Falls. The study will encompass a 40-mile section of the Mountain Loop Highway, starting at Mile Post (MP) 10.76 and ending at MP 50.87.

Figure 1: Study Area

1.3 Goals of Public and Agency Outreach Effort

The goal of the public outreach effort is to provide ongoing involvement opportunities for members of the public, stakeholders, and select agency representatives throughout the planning study process. Education and outreach are essential elements in successfully informing individuals about the planning study process and soliciting feedback on the study outcomes.

2.0 Participation Procedures

The PIP describes the information and input opportunities that will be provided while developing the Mountain Loop Highway Feasibility Study. This plan encourages active participation in identifying and commenting on study issues at every stage of the planning process. Participant involvement includes the following:
The general public: residents of Snohomish County, the Town of Darrington, the City of Granite Falls, and adjacent areas
- Landowners and business owners within or near the study area boundary
- Tribes
- Stakeholders and other interested parties

This document contains descriptions of the notification process for informational meetings and other participation procedures. FHWA and the Consultants will provide information regarding all aspects of the planning study to the public and interested parties and will seek their input throughout the process.

2.1 STUDY CONTACTS

All information published regarding the Mountain Loop Highway Feasibility Study will have contact information for FHWA and Robert Peccia and Associates (RPA). This information is provided below.

PRIMARY STUDY CONTACT

- **Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)** – Western Federal Lands Division
  610 East Fifth Street, Vancouver, Washington 98661
  Contact: Michael Traffalis, FHWA Project Manager
  (360) 619-7787
  michael.traffalis@dot.gov

SECONDARY STUDY CONTACTS

- **Snohomish County** – Participating Agency
  300 Rockefeller, M/S 607, Everett, Washington 98661
  Contact: Eric Nordstrom, Special Projects Engineer
  (425) 388-3488
  eric.nordstrom@co.snohomish.wa.us

- **United States Forest Service (USFS)** – Participating Agency
  2930 Wetmore Avenue, Suite 3A, Everett, WA 98201
  Contact: Felix Nishida – Assistant Forest Engineer
  (425) 783-6081
  fnishida@fs.fed.us

- **Robert Peccia and Associates (RPA)** – Consultant
  825 Custer Avenue (PO Box 5653), Helena, MT 59604
  Contact: Jeff Key, PE – RPA Project Manager
  (406) 447-5000
  jkey@rpa-hln.com

2.2 OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

An Oversight Committee has been established to provide feedback and guidance on the study process and outcomes. Oversight Committee members include representatives from the following governmental entities:

- FHWA – Western Federal Lands Highway Division
- USFS – Mt. Baker - Snoqualmie National Forest
- Snohomish County
2.3 STAKEHOLDERS
Stakeholders include other agencies, individuals, tribes or groups with a direct presence, involvement or investment in the study. It is critical to engage stakeholders during the life of the study.

- Tribes (to be engaged separately by USFS)
- Economic Alliance of Snohomish County
- Sno-King Watershed Council
- Darrington Strong
- Darrington Area Resources Advocates (DARA)
- Reece’s Hideout
- Forgotten Mountain Estates
- Washington Trails Association (WTA)
- The Mountaineers
- Washington Wild
- The Wilderness Society
- Backcountry Horsemen of Washington
- Mountain Loop Conservancy (formerly Stillaguamish Citizens Alliance)
- Pilchuck Audubon Society
- North Cascades Conservation Council (NCCC)

2.4 OTHER INTERESTED PARTIES
Stakeholders are often not the only people with an interest in the study. There are others who do not have a direct role or investment in the study, but are interested for varying reasons. All individuals who attend informational meetings or other events and provide email addresses on sign in sheets will be added to a study mailing list to keep track of those desiring notification of future study related activities. The mailing list of interested parties will include landowners within two miles of the study area and will be maintained for the duration of the study.

2.5 INFORMATION SHARING
Information sharing is a critical piece of public involvement and a key part of receiving valuable feedback. Throughout the Mountain Loop Highway Feasibility Study, information will be shared through the following methods: meeting notices, study website, email list, public postings, and social media outlets.

2.5.1 Publications
Newsletters will be developed prior to informational meetings. There will be three newsletters that will correspond with each informational meeting held during the development of the study. Newsletters will include the following information:

- Study updates or analysis findings
- Summary of public involvement activities
- Study schedules, and
- Feedback mechanisms to elicit comments from the recipients.

Final versions of the newsletters will be posted on the study website and hardcopies will be mailed to interested parties as included on the study mailing list.
2.5.2 Media Coordination
In addition to newsletters, news releases will be developed to inform the public of the status of the study. Newsletters will include information on key issues, potential impacts, and future concepts for the study.

News releases may be distributed via direct mail, newspaper articles, social media, study webpage updates on the WFLHD website, radio public safety announcements, or inserts in community newsletters.

2.5.3 Study Website
A study website will be developed at the following address - https://flh.fhwa.dot.gov/projects/wa/mountain-loop/ to increase public awareness of the study and to provide current study information. The site will include the following documents.

- Purpose of the study
- History of study data
- Study Schedule
- Study Newsletters
- Public Involvement Plan
- Map of study area
- Environmental Scan
- Existing and Projected Conditions Report
- Concept Development Memorandum
- Informational Meeting Presentations
- Draft Feasibility Study Report
- Final Feasibility Study Report

3.0 MEETINGS
Over the course of the study, various planning and informational meetings will occur to guide the study process and allow opportunities for input.

3.1 OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE MEETINGS
The Oversight Committee will provide feedback and guidance on the study process and outcomes. Oversight Committee members include representatives from:

- FHWA
- United States Forest Service (USFS)
- Snohomish County
- Town of Darrington
- City of Granite Falls

The Oversight Committee will convene every other month for the duration of the study.
3.2 INFORMATIONAL MEETINGS
Informational meetings will be held to provide educational and feedback opportunities during the study. There will be three sets of informational meetings to be held in both Darrington and Granite Falls. The sets of meetings in both Darrington and Granite Falls will have the same format and context; the duplicate meetings in two locations allow for easier attendance by interested parties at either end of the Mountain Loop Highway.

The first set of the three informational meetings will provide information about past projects and planning efforts for the Mountain Loop Highway, the planning process and policies that will affect the study, and initial findings.

The second set of informational meetings will provide information on the findings of the Environmental Scan and the Existing and Projected Conditions Report. This second informational meeting will also be a key point for collecting feedback on potential improvement options for the corridor.

The final set of informational meetings will provide information on the final set of improvement options and kick off the public comment period for the Feasibility Study Report.

Information for all informational meetings will be posted on the study website, in newsletters, and email.

3.3 PARTNER AGENCY PRESENTATIONS
A series of two partner agency presentations will occur over the duration of the Mountain Loop Highway Feasibility Study. Partner agency presentations will provide updates to local and partner agencies at major milestones in the study. The partner agency presentations will coincide with the second and third informational meetings.

The first partner agency presentation will provide information on the findings of the Environmental Scan and the Existing and Projected Conditions Report, and provide information on study progress.

The second partner agency presentation will provide information on the final set of improvement options and the draft Feasibility Study Report.

3.4 CONSIDERATIONS FOR TRADITIONALLY UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS
The need to involve traditionally underserved populations, such as minorities, persons with disabilities, and low-income persons, will require mindful planning. Contribution from these populations is needed to reflect all opinions, concerns, and needs along the corridor. To ensure diverse representation, the following steps are being taken:

- **Location of meetings**: informational meetings need to be accessible to all demographics. This requires that meetings be held in Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible locations and are scheduled to consider geographic equity. Specific populations may have less access to varying geographies based on a variety of reasons, and special consideration to plan meetings in accessible locations will be taken.

- **Help from community leaders and organizations**: Facilitating participation from traditionally underserved populations can prove challenging due to lasting stigmas and preconceived notions. To alleviate some of these deeply rooted beliefs, consultation with community leaders and organizations involved with the targeted audiences will likely be the most effective way to promote involvement.
• **Awareness of diverse audiences**: During informational meetings, study partners and consultants will work to communicate the message of the meeting as effectively as possible. Technical jargon shall be avoided and appropriate dress and common rules of conduct are expected to be followed.

### 3.5 ACCESSIBILITY

In attempts to provide accessible information and services to all individuals, the following measures for the study will be included:

- Meetings will be hosted in ADA-accessible locations.
- The study team will confer with community leaders and representative organizations about the best ways to involve traditionally underserved populations.

### 4.0 OVERALL STUDY COMMUNICATION

The following communication strategies and techniques will be used to distribute study information to the community, stakeholders, and interested parties and to seek a higher level of engagement:

- All deliverables in draft and final forms will be posted on the study website; this will include associated technical memorandums and study materials.
- Newsletters will be available one month prior to meetings.
- News Releases for the newspaper, social media, or other widely circulated publications will be developed.
- Hard copies of materials will be provided at the locations described in Section 2.5.4.

Questions and comments from interested parties concerning the participation process, drafted memorandums, study documents, and other work products will be included in an appendix to the actual documents.

### 5.0 STUDY SCHEDULE

Adherence to the study schedule is important to stay on track and to keep all participating parties engaged. Figure 2 contains the study schedule:
Figure 2: Study Schedule