

Chapter 2. Origin and History of the Project

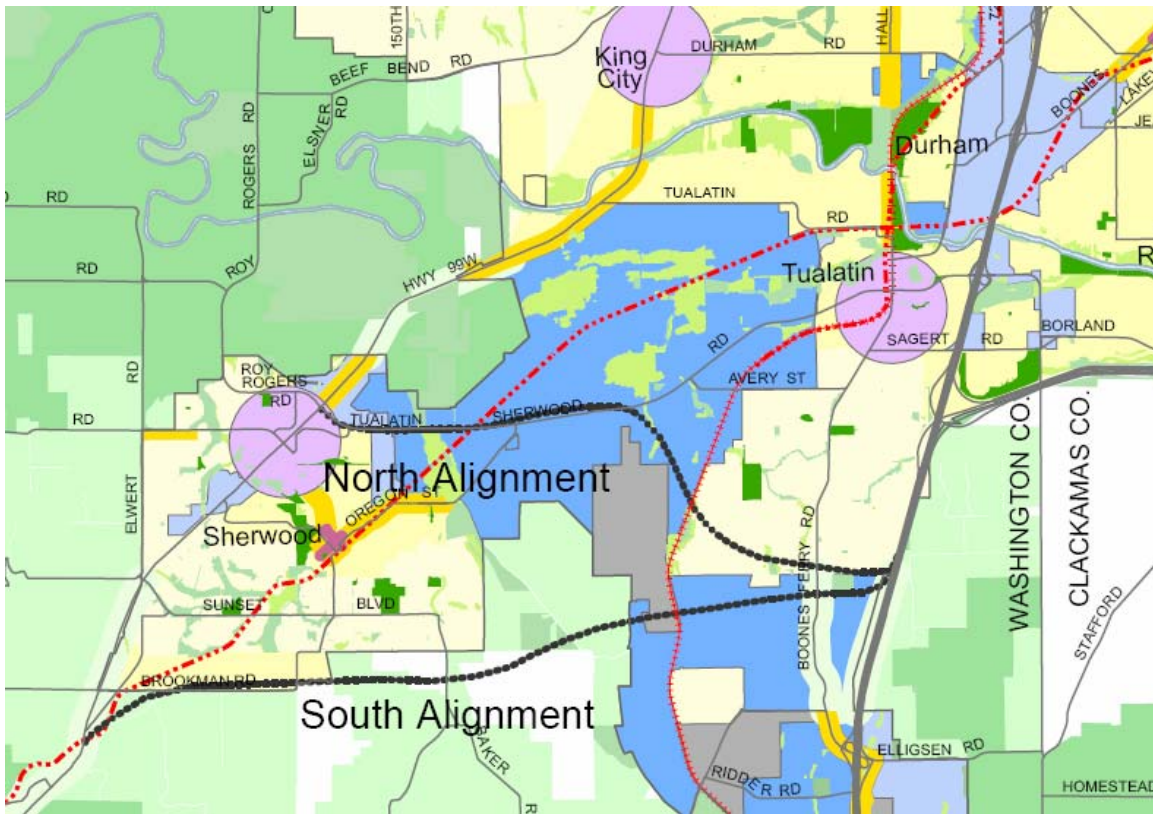
The concept for improving the state highway system connection between I-5 and OR 99W in the outer southwest quadrant of the Portland metropolitan area has its origin, in part, in two studies that focused on the need for improving north-south circumferential travel in western Washington County. The studies are the 1987 Southwest Corridor Study completed by Metro and the Western Bypass Study conducted by the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) in the early to mid-1990s. Although the Southwest Corridor Study recommended the construction of a new bypass from the City of Tualatin to the City of Hillsboro, the more recent Western Bypass Study concluded that the area's travel demand could be more effectively served by a combination of land use planning changes, transportation demand management, multimodal improvements, improvements to the existing roadway network, and a new expressway connection between I-5 and OR 99W in the Tualatin and Sherwood cities area. As a result of the Western Bypass Study findings, a new bypass concept was subsequently removed from the Metro RTP and a new expressway connection between I-5 and OR 99W south of Tualatin and north of the City of Sherwood was added.

In 1997, ODOT completed a siting feasibility study and fatal flaw analysis for constructing a state highway connection between I-5 and OR 99W, located within a broad 1.5-mile-wide corridor running diagonally through an area north of Sherwood and in the southern part of Tualatin. This study was conducted as a partnership between ODOT, Metro, Washington County, and the cities of Tualatin, Sherwood, and Wilsonville. The timing and motivation for this study was a directive from the Oregon Legislature to evaluate the "I-5 to 99W Connector" as one of two state projects for possible construction as a toll road using the concept of financial partnerships with the private sector. Feasible alignments were found in the study corridor; however, the use of tolling to fund construction through a public/private partnership was determined to be not feasible at that time.

Metro has both transportation and land use responsibilities and is required to have an integrated, long-term land use and transportation plan. The Metro Council, in adopting the 2040 Growth Concept, included an I-5 to Highway 99W Connector. A connector was first included in the 2040 Growth Concept as a northern corridor, and some of the possible alignments within the corridor were within the urban growth boundary (UGB). In 1999, a possible southern route outside the UGB was added. Each of these is shown on the current version of the adopted Metro 2040 Growth Concept Map, on the following page.

In 2001, Metro proposed an amendment to the Metro Regional Transportation Plan, being more explicit about the location of an I-5 to Highway 99W Connector. This amendment needed the approval of the Land Conservation and Development Commission (LCDC). With regard to the proposed I-5/Highway 99W Connector, in 2001 LCDC concluded that: "The Department agrees that Metro has established that there is a transportation need ... and that meeting this need requires a major new highway facility."

However, the decision also concluded that Metro had not demonstrated why an I-5 to Highway 99W Connector could not reasonably be located within the UGB (one of the tests for an exception to state planning goals to be granted for a highway located on rural lands is whether it is not "reasonable" to locate the facility within the urban area).



(Southwest Quadrant of the Metro 2040 Growth Concept Map)

In 2002, the Oregon Transportation Commission identified the I-5 to 99W Connector as one of six “Projects of Statewide Significance.” The purpose of this designation was to recognize that large, high-priority projects like a connector were not affordable under normal funding allocations. This designation emphasized funding the development of such projects so that they could either be phased in over time as funds became available, or could be in a state of readiness to compete for special funding opportunities.

Substantial and rapid urban growth in the project area during the late 1990s and into 2000 involving the cities of Tualatin, Sherwood, and Wilsonville, as well as increased growth in Yamhill County to the south, changed the travel demand patterns from those considered in the Western Bypass Study. The demand for travel service to these new growth areas has increasingly competed with the regional and intrastate travel needs of northwestern Washington County. As a result, an additional corridor for the I-5 to 99W Connector, with a more southern location and an east-west orientation, was included in the 2004 update of the Metro RTP.

In 2004, project development work began with an effort to define the type and identify the general location of transportation improvements needed to improve state highway system access and connectivity between I-5 and OR 99W in the area roughly bounded by the cities of Tualatin, Sherwood, and Wilsonville. This alternatives analysis is a product of that work.