



THE CITY OF RIDGEFIELD

230 Pioneer Street | P.O. Box 608 | Ridgefield, WA 98642

January 25, 2023

Washington State Transportation Commission

Attn: Reema Griffith, Executive Director

PO Box 47308

Olympia, WA 98504-7308

Regarding: Route Jurisdiction Transfer Request, SR 501/ Pioneer Street from WSDOT to the City of Ridgefield

Dear Transportation Commission:

The City of Ridgefield is requesting the jurisdiction transfer of State Route 501, otherwise known as Pioneer Street, from WSDOT to the City. The milepost limits of the requested transfer are between MP 16.91 and MP 19.88, entirely within the Ridgefield City Limits.

The City of Ridgefield is making this request for the following reasons:

- A desire to transition Pioneer Street into a multi-modal, City arterial “Main Street” from its current State Highway status
- A savings to both WSDOT and the City in reviewing project designs, design deviations and exceptions, and other components of the various City-sponsored projects along the corridor
- The ability to clean up the westerly portion of the corridor, mostly unbuilt, including the waterfront of the Port of Ridgefield, their recent railroad overpass project and their upcoming waterfront development plans
- Removal of maintenance responsibilities and thus a cost savings to WSDOT
- The City is already responsible for maintenance and operations on the westerly portion of this corridor
- The City will accept SR 501 after WSDOT restripes and provides minor pavement maintenance.
- The Port of Ridgefield is supportive of this request.



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The attached report verifies the request complies with all of the criteria established by RCW 47.17.001. The City of Ridgefield requests your endorsement of this request and transmittal through appropriate process to the State Legislature.

As part of the jurisdictional transfer, Ridgefield respectfully requests that WSDOT provide a preservation overlay of the corridor as well as refreshing the traffic striping and markings prior to the transfer.

If you have any questions, please contact Chuck Green, PE, Public Works Director, at 360-857-5022 or by email at Chuck.green@ridgefieldwa.us.

Sincerely,

Steve Stuart
City Manager

Enclosures: SR 501 Route Jurisdiction Transfer Request Justification Report

Copies:

Honorable Mayor Jennifer Lindsay

WSDOT SW Regional Administrator Carley Francis

WSDOT Local Programs Programs Engineer Michael Williams

Public Works Director Chuck Green, PE

SR 501 Route Jurisdiction Transfer Request

Justification Report

Why is this Route Jurisdiction Transfer being requested?

The City of Ridgefield has several projects underway along the Pioneer Street corridor. These projects are being planned in accordance with the City's Transportation Capital Facilities Plan, adjacent mixed use developments, and multi-modal expectations. With SR 501 being the only arterial state highway through the City, designing improvements to fit state highway standards would not meet the community expectations of Pioneer Street as a City arterial, an east-west "main street" connecting I-5 through the City's core into the waterfront area.

In downtown Ridgefield, Pioneer Street definitely has a "main street" feel to it, with two narrow traffic lanes and parking on both sides of the street, with buildings near the street, just behind sidewalks. Any project to widen this section of Pioneer Street to meet state highway standards would have significant impacts on the downtown business community. This area also has substantial pedestrians crossing the corridor, and providing an enhanced pedestrian environment is better served by planning the corridor as a city roadway instead of a state highway.

The vision of SR 501/ Pioneer Street being developed as the City's east-west "main street" is generally inconsistent with current WSDOT design standards. As development proposals and project planning continue throughout the corridor, the WSDOT design standards favor wider traffic lanes and center medians which favor vehicular traffic, while the City's vision is narrower traffic lanes within a roundabout corridor, thus allowing the city to narrow the center median while also providing strong improvements for bicycle and pedestrian travel, including multi-purpose trails, along the corridor. Additionally, the wider footprint of a state highway is inconsistent with the city's desire to minimize the corridor's footprint, which in turn helps the city reduce environmental impacts, especially to habitat and streams and wetlands, through these improvements.

The entire corridor is currently being operated and maintained under a joint Memorandum of Understanding between WSDOT and the City of Ridgefield, with Ridgefield having primary jurisdiction west of Gee Creek (western one-third of the corridor) and WSDOT having primary jurisdiction from Gee Creek to I-5 (eastern two-thirds of the corridor). The City maintains jurisdiction over development review and standards, with WSDOT providing review comments on the entire SR 501 corridor.

Transferring the entirety of SR 501 to the City of Ridgefield will reduce WSDOT costs and staff time by not having to operate, maintain or provide staff time to review development proposals along the corridor.

Additionally, the unbuilt segments of SR 501 west and south of the City limits will never be constructed, as much of the alignment falls within the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge. Just west of Main Avenue in downtown Ridgefield, Pioneer Street crosses the BNSF Railroad tracks and then turns into Randel Way as it enters the waterfront area owned by and planned for mixed use development by the Port of Ridgefield. This overpass and alignment of Pioneer Street into the Port's waterfront also precludes any direct, westerly extension of SR 501 to the west.

The Port of Ridgefield has indicated they support the City's jurisdictional transfer request as it will be in-line with their vision for the Waterfront area.

What are the limits of the transfer request?

The termini are milepost 16.91 on the west (city limits) to MP 19.88 on the east (I-5 interchange). The section of SR 501 being requested for jurisdictional transfer is entirely within the Ridgefield City Limits.

What are the characteristics of this roadway within these limits?

According to WSDOT's Corridor Sketch Summary for SR 501¹:

This three-mile long east-west corridor is located in the southwest corner of Washington near the Oregon border. The corridor runs between North Main Street in the city of Ridgefield and the Interstate 5 junction. The corridor travels through rolling terrain and is generally rural in character, primarily with residential land uses. There are commercial establishments in downtown Ridgefield, as well as highway commercial and industrial development near I-5. Near the I-5 interchange, major commercial development has begun to occur. There are concentrations of farmland near the I-5 interchange. Directly west of the corridor is the Ridgefield Wildlife Refuge and Columbia River. The Port of Ridgefield is located northwest of the corridor. Lake River is located at the west endpoint of the corridor. The route is also perpendicular to the BNSF Railway within Ridgefield. Vegetation along the corridor is comprised of farmland, manicured landscaping, and tree-filled sections.

SR 501's traffic volumes range from approximately 6,000 vehicles per day average daily traffic (ADT) on the west end to almost 20,000 ADT on the east end at I-5. Large trucks comprise approximately 10% of total vehicular traffic on the east end, reducing to between 3-5% on the west end.

The corridor is primarily used by residential users who live off of the corridor and retail users who shop at the establishments along the corridor. Other corridor users include recreational users, who use the route to access the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge and recreational events, such as the 4th of July Parade in downtown Ridgefield and the BirdFest and Bluegrass during the first weekend of October. C-TRAN provides a fixed route bus service in this area.

¹ <https://wsdot.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2021-10/CSS320-SR501-RidgefieldNMainSt-i5Jct.pdf>

Central Ridgefield has consistent sidewalks while the rest of the corridor has intermittent sidewalks. Bicyclists and pedestrians may use corridor shoulders where they exist; however, these are limited. The corridor is a mix of one or two travel lanes in each direction between 35th Avenue and I-5, and a single travel lane in each direction west of 35th Avenue. There are existing roundabouts at 35th Avenue, Royle Road (formerly 45th Avenue), and 56th Avenue, with a future roundabout planned at 50th Avenue.

There are several crossings of streams and critical habitat along the corridor, including Gee Creek.

Sidewalks and bicycle facilities are discontinuous along the corridor. The City's plans are for an interconnected set of bicycle and pedestrian facilities along the entire corridor, designed to match those of an urban arterial instead of a state highway.

What are the current responsibilities?

The SR 501/ Pioneer Street corridor currently functions under a Memorandum of Understanding between the City and WSDOT. WSDOT continues to own the SR 501 rights-of-way and ancillary assets along the entire corridor and has maintenance responsibility over the entire length. East of Gee Creek, WSDOT has primary responsibility for traffic operations and design standards. West of Gee Creek, the City has primary responsibility for operations.

What will be the result in change of responsibilities?

Jurisdictional transfer of this section of SR 501 from the state to the City would in turn transfer all listed state responsibilities and real property assets to the City. This includes the SR 501 rights of way and adjoining real property associated with the roadway corridor including the turnaround area adjacent to the old quarry at Reiman Road, accessways and stormwater facilities (not associated with I-5) between I-5 and west Ridgefield city limits to the west.

The single most significant financial responsibility would be to change future maintenance and operations of the roadway to the City.

What are the costs and risks in this change of responsibilities?

According to WSDOT's SR 501 Corridor Sketch Summary:

- Roughly 28% of surveyed pavements on the corridor are in poor to very poor condition;
- mudslides and slope failures have closed this route in the past;
- Fish passage barriers are present on the corridor.
- The corridor is rated moderate for climate vulnerability impacts.

WSDOT's maintenance history includes a modest level of pavement repairs and ongoing maintenance of signage and striping along the corridor. Although maintenance and repair cost history for this corridor is

not available, beyond the routine maintenance of the existing highway, there have been landslide events over the past decade that have required short-term, full closures of SR 501 in order for WSDOT crews to clear the debris, stabilize the adjoining hillside, repair guardrails and roadway structure, to reopen the highway. These events have ranged in cost from approximately \$100,000 to well over \$1 million for repairs.

As part of the transfer, the City would respectfully request that WSDOT provide a resurfacing of the corridor to maintain the lifecycle of the existing pavement, as well as provide a comprehensive refreshing of striping and markings of traffic control along the corridor.

Does this request meet the criteria for a change to the system?

RCW 47.17.001 designates criteria that must be met in order to make a change to the state highway system. As the Ridgefield urban area is now contained within the greater Vancouver metropolitan area subsequent to the 2020 Census, the urban highway criteria will be assessed here.

The following list shows the criteria for an urban highway route and whether or not SR 501 in the section being requested for route jurisdiction transfer meets those criteria.

- 3) An urban highway route that meets any of the following criteria should be designated as part of the state highway system:
 - a. Is designated as part of the Interstate system
No
 - b. Is designated as part of the system of numbered United States routes
No. Additionally, this segment of SR 501 is not included on the National Highway System.
 - c. Is an urban extension of a rural state highway into or through an urban area and is necessary to form an integrated system of state highways
No. The eastern (northern) terminus of SR 501 is at I-5. The western (southern) terminus is at the western Ridgefield city limits. The unbuilt portion of SR 501 to the south and west will never be built because it travels through the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge, a federally-protected area.
 - d. Is a principal arterial that is a connecting link between two state highways and serves regionally oriented traffic in urbanized areas with a population of fifty thousand or greater, or is a spur that serves regionally oriented traffic in urbanized areas.
No. The current population of the City of Ridgefield is 12,500 persons, as estimated by the US Census Bureau for 2021. SR 501 is not a spur serving regionally oriented traffic.

Additionally, the SR 501/ Pioneer Street corridor does not serve any routes which end in the states of Oregon or Idaho, as well as there are no endpoints within the Province of British Columbia. The route

does not provide any needed access to Washington state ferry terminals, state parks, major seaports, and trunk airports.

Based on the above criteria and assessment, SR 501 between I-5 and the western Ridgefield city limits does not meet the criteria for a state highway.

Summary

The vision of SR 501/ Pioneer Street as a City of Ridgefield “main street” arterial is not congruous with WSDOT’s design criteria for state routes. This presents a challenge for the City and state to cooperatively manage the future of the SR 501 corridor. Since the corridor does not serve a statewide function as a through route, does not meet the criteria for designation as a state highway, and the City has a clear and practical need to continue addressing and emphasizing context-sensitive and multi-modal friendly corridor development, while also reducing environmental impacts of future improvements, it is only logical to transfer jurisdiction to the City.

Additionally, the Port of Ridgefield staff have indicated their support of such a transfer. The City has initiated discussions with WSDOT Southwest Region staff to clarify roles and responsibilities for this process.

Therefore, the City of Ridgefield respectfully requests the Washington State Transportation Commission endorse this request and process the jurisdictional transfer request, including action by the Washington State Legislature.

Map

