

2023 REPORT OF FINAL FINDINGS

City of Ridgefield - SR 501
Route Jurisdiction Transfer Request

October 18, 2023

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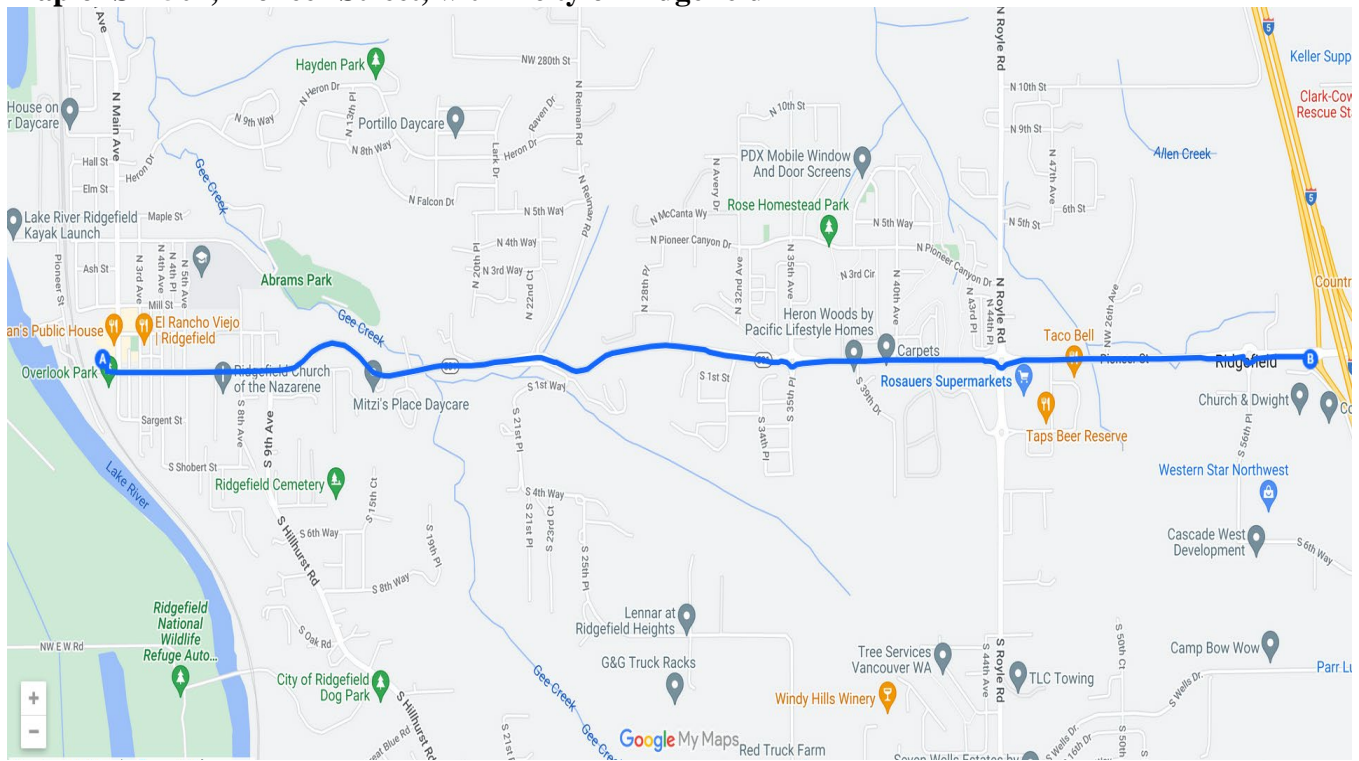
Introduction

Per RCW 47.01.425, the Washington State Transportation Commission (WSTC) receives and reviews petitions from cities, counties, or the Department of Transportation requesting any addition or deletion from the state highway system. The Transportation Commission manages the requests, and with technical assistance from the Transportation Improvement Board, provides an evaluation and assessment of each request. Once the evaluation is completed, the Transportation Commission provides its final finding and recommendations to the Senate and House Transportation Committees prior to the legislative session. The Legislature will codify jurisdictional transfers if it accepts the Transportation Commission’s recommendation consistent with state law.

Route Jurisdiction Transfer Request & Justification

The city of Ridgefield submitted a route jurisdiction transfer request to WSTC to transfer SR 501 between MP 16.91 and 19.88 from Washington State Department of Transportation to city of Ridgefield. The map below indicates the location of the subject corridor.

Map of SR 501, Pioneer Street, within city of Ridgefield



The city's vision of SR 501/ Pioneer Street is as the city's east west "main street". This vision is generally inconsistent with current WSDOT design standards. As development proposals and project planning continues 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 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. The requested transfer of jurisdiction from WSDOT to the city is consistent with current operations.

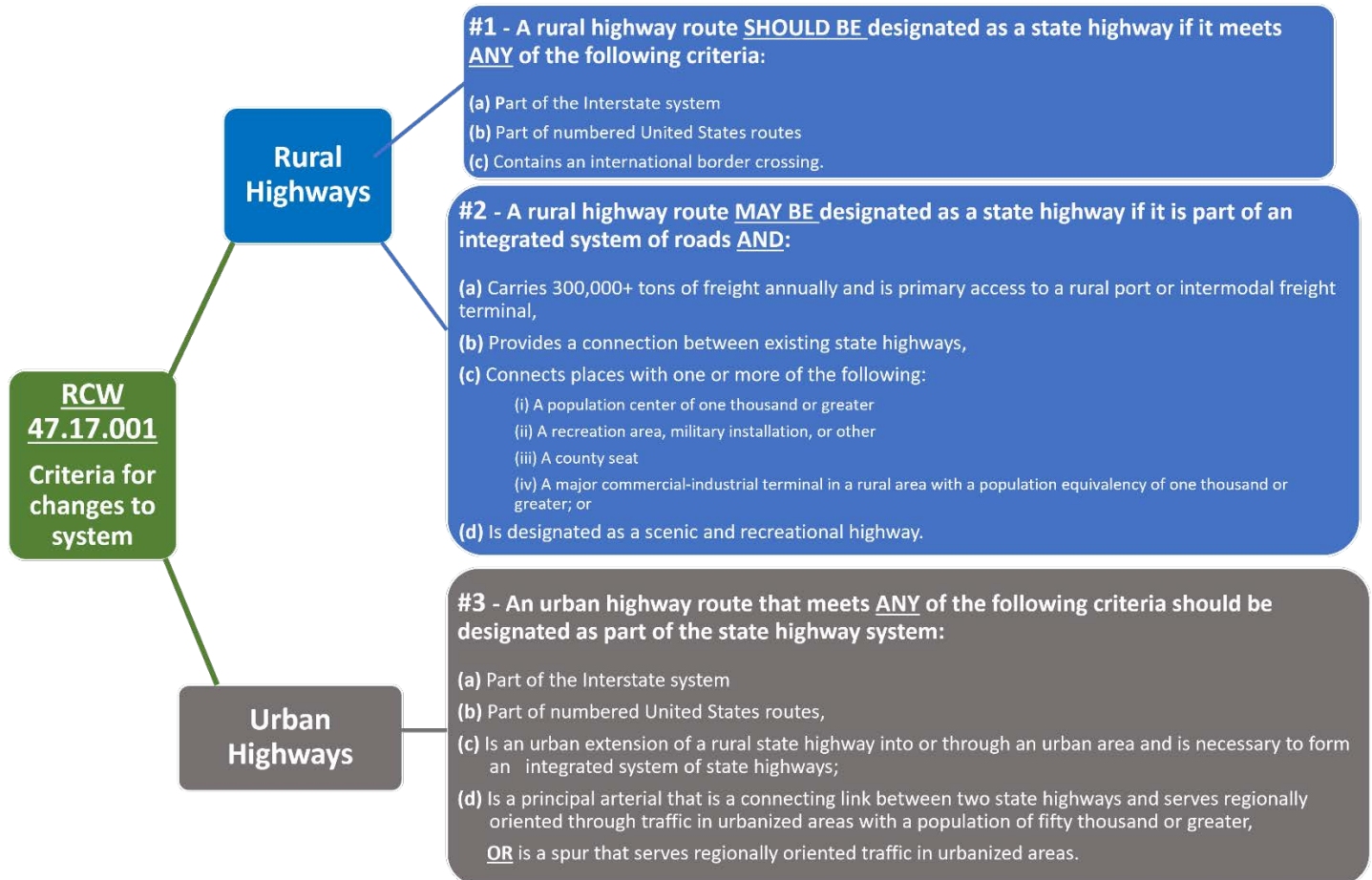
Criteria Used to Define a State Highway and Assess RJT Requests

State statute (RCW 47.17.001 Criteria for changes to system) defines the criteria of transferring routes between the Washington State Department of Transportation and cities or counties. See *Appendix B* for the full text of RCW 47.17.001.

There are three (3) criteria to be used by WSTC and the state legislature to help them determine if a route is a state highway.

The flow chart shown in *Figure 1* outlines the criteria in statute and shows how it is applied to both rural and urban roads and highways.

Figure 1. Flow Chart of Route Jurisdiction Criteria Determining a State Highway



Transfer Request Analysis

SR 501 corridor, also known as “Pioneer Street”, primarily serves residential traffic and provides access to the retail and services on the corridor. Traffic volumes on the corridor 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.

Ridgefield also submitted an agency evaluation of whether the route met the transfer criteria as detailed in state statute ([RCW 47.17.001](#)), specifically whether it met the Urban Highways criteria in Section #3. The city found that 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.

The corridor does not serve a statewide function as a through route and does not meet the criteria for designation as a state highway. Given the local primary use of the roadway, 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.

Public Comment Summary

On June 1, 2023, the preliminary findings and a notification letter requesting comment were sent to 2,000 stakeholders, property owners, business owners, elected officials and residents along the SR 501 and posted on the WSTC website. In addition, a legal ad for public comment as well as news articles were published in local news media.

WSTC received a total of five (5) comments throughout the legal 30-day public comment period. Three (3) comments expressed support for the transfer of SR 501 to city of Ridgefield. Two (2) commentors posed questions or concerns regarding potential increased costs to taxpayers.

WSDOT, the Port of Ridgefield, and elected officials have expressed support for the city's transfer request.

Conclusions:

The Transportation Improvement Board's assessment finds that SR 501 does not meet any of the Urban Highways criteria in statute shown in Figure 1 and listed below, and is therefore appropriate to reclassify this route as a city street:

RCW 47.17.001 Subsection 3:

- (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;
 - (b) Is designated as part of the system of numbered United States routes;
 - (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;
 - (d) Is a principal arterial that is a connecting link between two state highways and serves regionally oriented through traffic in urbanized areas with a population of fifty thousand or greater, or is a spur that serves regionally oriented traffic in urbanized areas.

Conclusion based upon analysis:

The city of Ridgefield's request does not meet any of the criteria set forth in RCW 47.17.001(3).

Additional Considerations:

- The city plans to transition SR 501/Pioneer Street into a multi-modal, city arterial "Main Street".
- As a result of this transfer, both WSDOT and the city will save staff time and resources reviewing the city's proposed project designs, design deviations and exceptions, and

other components of the anticipated city-sponsored projects along the corridor in the near and longer term.

- Noting that the city is currently responsible for the maintenance and operations on the westerly portion of this corridor, this transfer will enable the city to make improvements to the westerly portion to support their plans for their upcoming waterfront development.

WSTC Recommendation

Per the analysis in this report, the Washington State Transportation Commission, with technical assistance from Transportation Improvement Board, finds that the request by the city of Ridgefield to transfer jurisdiction of SR 501, known as “Pioneer Street”, between MP 16.91 and MP 19.88 and within the city of Ridgefield, does not meet the criteria for serving as a state highway as set forth in RCW 47/17.001, (3) and therefore recommends transferring the reference portion to the city’s jurisdiction and removing from the state highway designation list in law (RCW 47.17.640).

APPENDIX A - Route Jurisdiction Transfer Process Overview

The process for considering the city of Ridgefield's route jurisdiction transfer request is outlined below:

- **January:** The Commission received the Route Jurisdiction Transfer request from city of Ridgefield.
- **February – April:** Transportation Improvement Board (TIB) in coordination with the Commission conducted a technical assessment and analysis of the transfer request. presented preliminary findings determined.
- **May:** TIB presented preliminary findings to the Commission at their May meeting and the Commission approved them.
- **June – July:** The Commission opened a formal public comment period issuing legal notices and sending mailings to property owners and residents along the corridor to solicit feedback on the preliminary findings.
- **July:** The Commission heard presentations from the city and WSDOT and took public comment at their July meeting.
- **August – September:** TIB in coordination with the Commission reviewed public comment and drafted final findings.
- **October:** TIB presents final findings to the Commission at their October meeting.
- **November – December:** Transportation Commission issues final determination and recommendation and drafts a bill for the upcoming legislative session.

APPENDIX B - RCW 47.17.001 Criteria for changes to highway system

In considering whether to make additions, deletions, or other changes to the state highway system, the legislature shall be guided by the following criteria as contained in the Road Jurisdiction Committee Phase I report to the legislature dated January 1987:

- (1) A rural highway route should be designated as a state highway if it meets any of the following criteria:
 - (a) Is designated as part of the national system of interstate and defense highways (popularly called the interstate system); or
 - (b) Is designated as part of the system of numbered United States routes; or
 - (c) Contains an international border crossing that is open twelve or more hours each day.

- (2) A rural highway route may be designated as a state highway if it is part of an integrated system of roads and:
 - (a) Carries in excess of three hundred thousand tons annually and provides primary access to a rural port or intermodal freight terminal;
 - (b) Provides a major cross-connection between existing state highways;
 - (c) Connects places exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics:
 - (i) A population center of one thousand or greater;
 - (ii) An area or aggregation of areas having a population equivalency of one thousand or more, such as, but not limited to, recreation areas, military installations, and so forth;
 - (iii) A county seat;
 - (iv) A major commercial-industrial terminal in a rural area with a population equivalency of one thousand or greater; or
 - (d) Is designated as a scenic and recreational highway.

- (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;
 - (b) Is designated as part of the system of numbered United States routes;
 - (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;
 - (d) Is a principal arterial that is a connecting link between two state highways and serves regionally oriented through traffic in urbanized areas with a population of fifty thousand or greater, or is a spur that serves regionally oriented traffic in urbanized areas.

- (4) The following guidelines are intended to be used as a basis for interpreting and applying the criteria to specific routes:
 - (a) For any route wholly within one or more contiguous jurisdictions which would be proposed for transfer to the state highway system under these criteria, if local officials prefer, responsibility will remain at the local level.
 - (b) State highway routes maintain continuity of the system by being composed of routes that join other state routes at both ends or to arterial routes in the states of Oregon and Idaho and the Province of British Columbia.
 - (c) Public facilities may be considered to be served if they are within approximately two miles of a state highway.

- (d) Exceptions may be made to include:
 - (i) Rural spurs as state highways if they meet the criteria relative to serving population centers of one thousand or greater population or activity centers with population equivalencies or an aggregated population of one thousand or greater;
 - (ii) Urban spurs as state highways that provide needed access to Washington state ferry terminals, state parks, major seaports, and trunk airports; and
 - (iii) Urban connecting links as state highways that function as needed bypass routing of regionally oriented through traffic and benefit truck routing, capacity alternative, business congestion, and geometric deficiencies.
- (e) In urban and urbanized areas:
 - (i) Unless they are significant regional traffic generators, public facilities such as state hospitals, state correction centers, state universities, ferry terminals, and military bases do not constitute a criterion for establishment of a state highway; and
 - (ii) There may be no more than one parallel nonaccess controlled facility in the same corridor as a freeway or limited access facility as designated by the metropolitan planning organization.
- (f) When there is a choice of two or more routes between population centers, the state route designation shall normally be based on the following considerations:
 - (i) The ability to handle higher traffic volumes;
 - (ii) The higher ability to accommodate further development or expansion along the existing alignment;
 - (iii) The most direct route and the lowest travel time;
 - (iv) The route that serves traffic with the most interstate, statewide, and interregional significance;
 - (v) The route that provides the optimal spacing between other state routes; and
 - (vi) The route that best serves the comprehensive plan for community development in those areas where such a plan has been developed and adopted.
- (g) A route designated in chapter [47.39](#) RCW as a scenic and recreational highway may be designated as a state highway in addition to a parallel state highway route.

APPENDIX C – City of Ridgefield, Council Resolution 632

RESOLUTION NO. 632

A RESOLUTION OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF RIDGEFIELD, WASHINGTON SUPPORTING THE TRANSFER OF ROUTE JURISDICTION OF PIONEER STREET (STATE ROUTE 501) FROM THE WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION TO THE CITY OF RIDGEFIELD

WHEREAS, Pioneer Street is the major east-west gateway into downtown Ridgefield and the Port of Ridgefield, and is designated pursuant to Section 47.17.640 of the Revised Code of Washington as State Route No. 501, and

WHEREAS, the milepost limits of State Route 501 between MP 16.91 and MP 19.88 are entirely within the Ridgefield City Limits and owned and maintained by the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT); and

WHEREAS, since 2004 the City and WSDOT have been operating under a Memorandum of Agreement, last amended in February 2020, for the maintenance and operations, and future development of SR-501/Pioneer Street corridor; and

WHEREAS, the segment of State Route 501 west and south of the Ridgefield City Limits to the northern extent of Lower River Road travel through the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge and is highly unlikely to be developed as a state highway; and

WHEREAS, the segment of State Route 501 through the City of Ridgefield, otherwise known as Pioneer Street, functions as a local arterial instead of a state highway, and

WHEREAS, the City's Transportation Capital Facilities Plan and comprehensive vision for the City is to transition Pioneer Street into a multi-modal, City arterial "Main Street" from its current State Highway status, and

WHEREAS, on January 25, 2023, the City Manager transmitted to the Washington State Transportation Commission (WSTC) a request for an inquiry into the possible transfer of SR 501 right-of-way and accompanying assets to the City of Ridgefield; and

WHEREAS, RCW 47.17.001 defines the criteria of transferring routes between the Washington State Department of Transportation and cities or counties, and

WHEREAS, an assessment by the Transportation Improvement Board found that "With the exception of the original legislative designation, SR 501 does not meet any of the state highway urban route criteria"; and

WHEREAS, the WSTC opened a public comment period in June 2023 and found general support for the route jurisdiction transfer as well as not receiving any substantive opposition to the request, and

WHEREAS, Ridgefield city staff conducted a comprehensive assessment of the benefits and impacts of the potential route jurisdiction transfer and concluded that, with investments in pavement preservation and landslide protection prior to completion of the transfer of assets, there will be a net

overall benefit to both the City by localizing project design decisions and deviations and to WSDOT for removal of ongoing maintenance and repair responsibilities for the corridor, and

WHEREAS, the WSTC will be taking final action on the route jurisdiction transfer request at their October 2023 meeting. If approved by the WSTC, it is the intent of the City of Ridgefield to seek funding from the State Legislature to provide \$1.75 Million for pavement repairs and slide protection/prevention for the section of Pioneer Street/ SR 501 from Main Avenue to the 35th Avenue roundabout.

NOW THEREFORE, THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF RIDGEFIELD, WASHINGTON DOES HEREBY RESOLVE AS FOLLOWS:

- 1. Public Interest.** The Ridgefield City Council finds it to be in the public interest for the citizens of Ridgefield to transfer the right-of-way and accompanying assets of State Route 501 to the City of Ridgefield.
- 2. Demonstration of Support to the Washington State Transportation Commission.** The City Council, by adoption of this resolution, demonstrates its support for the transfer of jurisdiction to the City for those portions of SR 501 within the Ridgefield City Limits and requests the Washington State Transportation Commission and the Washington State Legislature approve the improvement and transfer of this route to the City.
3. The City Manager is directed to transmit this resolution to the WSTC immediately upon its adoption by the City Council.

PASSED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF RIDGEFIELD, WASHINGTON THIS 28th DAY OF SEPTEMBER, 2023.

Approved:

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Rob Aichele, Mayor Pro Tern

Attest:

DocuSigned by:
Julie Ferriss
BA35ACBCC0B14B1

Julie Ferriss, City Clerk

APPENDIX D – Public Comment Letter to WSTC from WSDOT



Southwest Region
11018 Northeast 51st Circle
Vancouver, WA 98682-6686
360-905-2000 / FAX: 360-905-2222
TTY: 1-800-833-6388
www.wsdot.wa.gov

June 27, 2023

Roy Jennings, Chairman
Washington State Transportation Commission
P.O. Box 47308
Olympia, WA 98504-7308
Transmitted via email: TransC@WSTC.WA.GOV

Dear Commissioner Jennings,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the proposed Route Jurisdiction Transfer for SR 501 in the City of Ridgefield.

There are two segments of SR 501 in Clark County. SR 501 in the City of Vancouver runs from I-5 to the Port of Vancouver and Frenchman's Bar Regional Park. SR 501 in the City of Ridgefield, the subject of this request, runs from I-5 to the westerly extent of the City of Ridgefield. Historically, it was envisioned that these portions would eventually be connected through building a new roadway between their termini along the Columbia River through portions of the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge. WSDOT currently has no plans to connect these two highway portions together. The sensitive environmental corridors that a new highway would need to pass through, make it unlikely that a connection of these two segments is feasible now or in the future. The current configuration of the two state routes contributes to confusion of motorists on I-5 who encounter two SR 501 roadways located 14 miles apart without the roads connecting.

SR 501 in the City of Ridgefield is classified as a rural major collector.

With regards to RCW 47.17.001, WSDOT's review has concluded this that section of SR 501 does not meet criteria for when roadways should be designated state highways. It is not part of the Interstate Highway System, part of the system of numbered United States Routes nor does it encompass an international border crossing open twelve or more hours a day. This section of SR 501 is completely contained within the boundary of the City of Ridgefield and connectivity to the population center is provided by I-5. The highway also does not provide cross connection between state highways.

WSDOT is supportive of the City of Ridgefield's request for route jurisdiction transfer of this section of SR 501 to the City of Ridgefield. As the community has grown, SR 501 has transitioned from a rural roadway that connected a population center, to an urban arterial that falls completely within a rapidly growing community. Removing the SR 501 designation from the roadway will allow the City of Ridgefield to manage the

Roy Jennings
June 27, 2023
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roadway to meet community needs while removing confusion for motorists traveling along I-5.

Sincerely,



Carley Francis
WSDOT Southwest Regional Administrator

cc:
Scott Langer, WSDOT Assistant Regional Administrator – Operations and Planning
Reema Griffith, WSTC Executive Director
Paula Reeves, WSTC Senior Policy Analyst