

APPENDIX E

Pierce County Executive's Memorandum



November 14, 2007

To: Pierce County Council

From: John W. Ladenburg
County Executive

Sub: Rhodes Lake Road Corridor Study EIS and Establishment – Alderton McMillin
Community Plan

The purpose of this memo is to provide my perspective on the potential impacts of the Rhodes Lake Road Corridor study and the Alderton-McMillin Community Plan. I also offer a number of strategies by which we can fulfill the intent of the community plan and address the mobility issues of the area.

The Rhodes Lake Road Corridor study is comprised of two parts – the Final Programmatic Environmental Impact statement (FEIS) which is due out at the end of the year and the county engineer's report which will be presented to the County Council in the first quarter of 2008. Once both parts are completed, I will be forwarding to the Council a proposal to establish the corridor. The Alderton McMillin Community Plan (Proposal 2007-41s), which references the Rhodes Lake Road Corridor study, is working its way through council subcommittee and is tentatively scheduled for adoption on December 10, 2007.

Background

In 2001, the Pierce County Council directed the Public Works and Utilities Department to conduct a corridor study for Rhodes Lake Road Corridor (Resolution R2001-80). A corridor study is meant to evaluate proposed alignment routes for a county road. It is not meant to be a comprehensive evaluation and plan for the regional transportation network. However, much of the analysis done in conjunction with the corridor study, has provided valuable information about the transportation system on the Bonney Lake Plateau that will assist in the planning for the transportation network in the area.

The Council's direction to study and establish the corridor was in direct recognition that the Bonney Lake Plateau area is one of the fastest growing areas of Pierce County. The area is predominately designated urban with a mixture of commercial, employment and residential land uses. A number of roadway improvements near the Rhodes Lake Road corridor have already been required of several developments on the Plateau. For example, the future phases of the planned community of Cascadia require an eventual connection to SR 162.



Over the course of the last six years, various alignments for the Rhodes Lake Road have been discussed with the community in a series of open houses, newsletters and presentations. The project has also benefited from the involvement of the Project Leadership Team (PLT) which was comprised of representatives from Washington State Department of Transportation, Pierce County, and representatives from the cities of Orting, Bonney Lake Sumner and the Puyallup Tribe. The PLT also received input from Tacoma Public Utilities, Puyallup Valley Preservation Group, Cascadia Development and Falling Water Development.

In 2006, the Department initiated a programmatic environmental impact statement process which resulted in a draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) in June 2007. For purposes of the DEIS, "Alignment D" was identified as the preferred alignment. This route brings traffic off the Bonney Lake Plateau and connects to SR 162 in the Orting Valley at 128th Street East, south of the intersection of SR 162 and Military Road. The DEIS presumes many related WSDOT and County transportation network improvements will occur during the 20 year planning horizon, however, the DEIS does not presume any timing or funding for those improvements.

The Department **will** be issuing the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and developing a County Engineer's report, all of which **will** be transmitted to the Council. The Council will then consider whether to select an alignment and formally establish the corridor. If an alignment is to be pursued, the Department will prepare a project EIS for the selected alignment that **will** contain specific mitigation measures regarding farming and other environmental **impacts**.

Potential Challenges – Planning Policies, Improvement of SR 162, and the Alderton-McMillin Community Plan

The construction of this corridor is by no means the ultimate solution to Plateau transportation issues, and in fact may run contrary to the County's existing County Wide Planning policies. However, a "no build" alternative is not feasible given current and future growth projections. Pierce County will be required to absorb a portion of the projected 1.4 million new residents to the Puget Sound region and the current demand for new affordable housing is not waning. Plateau developments such as Cascadia and Plateau 465 will accommodate new population. Improvements to SR 162 may also increase the conversion pressures from rural to urban land uses along that state highway and measures must be in place to protect these important rural and resource lands.

Recommendation

I recognize that the construction of the new the Rhodes Lake Road Corridor has the potential to focus even more pressure on land in the Orting Valley to convert from agricultural to residential uses. I also know that planned growth on the Plateau will generate additional traffic. Therefore, we must apply our best efforts to accommodate this new traffic while simultaneously maintaining the rural character of the Plateau and Orting Valley. There are a number of potential tools the County can utilize to meet these two important policy

objectives. I will be asking staff to evaluate the following strategies and to make recommendations to me regarding implementation:

1. Examine the potential to strengthen existing development regulations to restrict the conversion of farmland.
2. Use the Rhodes Lake Corridor Study analysis to formulate and implement, through the transportation planning process, other projects that will strengthen the transportation network and mitigate the traffic impacts of the Rhodes Lake Road Corridor.
3. Encourage WSDOT to update the SR 162 route development plan consistent with County's land use to ensure that any future improvements to the route will minimize impacts to farm operations. We will be strongly encouraging WSDOT to evaluate the improvement of SR 162 using a process that solicits and is reflective of the community's desires to improve efficiency, enhance safety, and protect farmland. Examples of this would be to attempt to minimize the areas of impervious surface, provide for farm access to and across the highway, and use roadway illumination sparingly.
4. Purchase of development rights and access rights to limit direct access to the Rhodes Lake Road Corridor and SR 162. These costs would be estimated in the County Engineer's report as part of the construction costs associated with new corridor.
5. Evaluate design standards for the spacing of driveways. Make certain that we do not hinder the capacity and operations of the new roadway through the placement of closely spaced driveways.
6. Work with WSDOT in advance of the SR 162 widening to assure that adequate right of way will be available to widen the state highway and to assure that their driveway spacing minimizes the potential of additional high levels of development.
7. Require the visual/aesthetic impacts of the proposed Rhodes Lake Road Corridor be mitigated through the design and engineering process.. The county will locate and design the roadway within the selected alignment to make it less visible. The provision of landscaping buffers will be explored in the County Engineer's report.
8. Include a detailed monitoring program in the County Engineer's report to measure the progress of development along the route, as well as the adequacy of the roadway. Using the principles of the county's transportation concurrency management system, develop a more innovative and systematic review of the development levels on the plateau and the adequacy of the existing roadway capacity. This approach would respond to the concerns that the plateau

development may not be able to internalize sufficient travel within the development area.

9. Coordinated timing of improvements to Military Road with the construction of the Rhodes Lake Road Corridor so as to not create a bottleneck of urban traffic in prime agricultural growing areas.

Conclusion

We face numerous challenges in preserving farmland while planning and constructing congestion-relieving corridors. We must do everything possible to implement regulatory controls and design standards that will limit that development pressure while meeting the transportation needs of the surrounding communities.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

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