

# CROSSBASE CORRIDOR STUDY

## COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

June 1999

The CrossBase Corridor Study is reviewing alternative methods to improve east/west travel between the I-5 corridor and mid-Pierce County, through McChord Air Force Base and Fort Lewis. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was completed on May 15, 1998, with a Final EIS expected in early 2000. This newsletter summarizes activities conducted over the last year.

### Project Update

**PUBLIC OPEN HOUSES** held in June 1998 in American Lake Gardens and Spanaway were well attended and provided an opportunity for citizens to review the project, ask questions, and comment on project issues. Over 150 comment letters were received on the Draft EIS during the 45-day comment period, which ended June 30, 1998. The comments have been reviewed and all will be responded to in the Final EIS.

**NEW STUDIES** related to the western gray squirrel and oak habitat in the McChord Air Force Base and Ft. Lewis area were recently completed (see next article). The co-lead agencies (Federal Highway Administration, Washington State Department of Transportation, and Pierce County) have met with agency representatives including the regional administrator for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the state Department of Fish and Wildlife to discuss the results of the studies and reasonable mitigation measures.

**PIERCE COUNTY** recently received \$490,000 in federal funding for the project from the Transportation Efficiency for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TEA-21). The funding will be used to complete the project's environmental documentation.

### Next Steps

Additional studies will be undertaken this year to respond to comments received on the Draft EIS. Work to be completed this year includes:

- Off-site habitat identification to determine if there are suitable sites to establish new western gray squirrel populations in south Pierce and north Thurston Counties.
- Evaluation of wetland buffer impacts on McChord and Ft. Lewis military bases.
- A household survey to gather socio-economic information in American Lake Gardens along the three southern alignments of the proposed highway.
- Additional study to evaluate impacts to fish in the Spanaway Marsh/Coffee Creek area.

Results of these studies will be used in discussions with the military bases, the Environmental Protection Agency, and state Fish and Wildlife Department to develop measures to reduce impacts of the project. Mitigation plans will be fully described in the Final EIS, scheduled to be released in early 2000.

### Questions?

Please contact Pat Baughman, Pierce County Public Works, (253) 798-7250 or (800) 992-2456.



**Pierce County**  
Pierce County Public Works and Utilities

Cross-Base Highway Project  
2401 S. 35th St., Room 150  
Tacoma, WA 98409



## Studies Provide Additional Information

As part of the EIS process, two studies were recently completed to gather more information on potential impacts of the new roadway on the western gray squirrel, which is listed as a threatened species by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. The Draft EIS (issued in May 1998) committed to a genetic analysis of the western gray squirrel and a detailed mapping and evaluation of oak woodlands in the project area. The results of these technical studies will help determine what measures should be taken to lessen the impacts of constructing the roadway. These measures will be detailed in the Final EIS.

### Results of the Studies

A genetic analysis of the western gray squirrel indicated that the local population is closely related to other squirrel populations in Washington and Oregon. These results suggest that introduction of squirrels from other areas may be an option as part of the mitigation measures for the new highway.

The study of the oak stands in the project area provided information on the amount of oak habitat as it exists now, and projected its growth over the next 50 years. Currently there are approximately 57 acres of oak stands in the project area. These types of oak stands are considered to be critical habitat for the western gray squirrel. Fifty years from now this could increase to 64 – 87 acres. While oak trees are critical, squirrels also use other types of vegetation found in the area.

## To Review the Studies

Complete documentation of the additional technical studies is available for public review at the following locations:

**Pierce Co. Public Works & Utilities**  
Pierce Co. Annex, Room 150  
2401 S. 35<sup>th</sup> St, Tacoma

**Parkland-Spanaway Library Branch**  
13718 Pacific Ave. S., Tacoma

**Lakewood Library Branch**  
6300 Wildaire Rd. SW, Lakewood

## Comments Accepted on Studies

Comments on these two additional studies are now being gathered and will be addressed with other comments already received on the Draft EIS. **Please send your comments by August 31, 1999** to one of the following individuals:

**Jim Leonard**  
Federal Highway Administration  
711 S. Capitol Way, Ste. 501  
Olympia, WA 98501-1284

**Kenneth Stone**  
Washington State  
Department of Transportation  
Olympic Region  
P.O. Box 47440  
Olympia, WA 98504-7440

**Patrick Baughman, P.E.**  
Pierce County Public Works  
2401 S. 35<sup>th</sup> St., Room 150  
Tacoma, WA 98409

