



February 2, 2026

TO: Puget Sound Regional Council

CC: Seattle City Councilmember Alexis Mercedes Rinck  
Port of Seattle Commissioner Toshiko Hasegawa

**RE: Lid I-5 comment on the draft 2026 Regional Transportation Plan**

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Staff and leadership of the Puget Sound Regional Council,

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the draft 2026 Regional Transportation Plan.

We are Lid I-5, a volunteer community group working to reconnect communities and expand public land. Lidding urban freeways has emerged as a national best practice, with nearly 100 projects completed and planned. Locally, since 2015 we have engaged with thousands of people, raised media awareness, and received endorsements by elected leaders.

**We are disappointed to see the Lid I-5 Seattle project is not mentioned in the draft, especially after it was included in the [2024 RTP \(page 182\)](#) as a “big idea.”** The Downtown project is actively moving forward using over [\\$2 million in WSDOT and FHWA funding](#) for design and community engagement, it is endorsed by [Seattle’s comprehensive plan and city council policy](#), and it is included in the Washington State Transportation Improvement Plan. The U District effort is similarly moving forward with federal and city funding. The Lid I-5 projects in Downtown and the U District deserve continued recognition at the regional level.



Figure 1 - Conceptual renderings of what lidding I-5 could look like in Central Seattle with a mix of parks and development

At this early stage of development the Downtown project may be considered “unconstrained.” It has flexibility on project sponsorship, it has an approximate location on I-5 between Thomas Street to S. Main Street, and an estimated cost range of \$1-2.5 billion (as of 2020). The U District project is approximately located between NE 45th Street and NE 50th Street. Acknowledgments in the Regional Transportation Plan are essential to keeping these two projects elevated and raise opportunities for additional state and funding.

In 2020, the City of Seattle published the [I-5 Lid Feasibility Study](#) which found a lid over Interstate 5 in Downtown Seattle up to 17 acres in size is both feasible and worthwhile for its significant public benefits. Due to the project location at the region’s most intensively traveled freeway segment and the potential for regional social and economic benefits, we are requesting the project to be returned to the RTP and have an expanded description.

Lidding I-5 in Downtown is a win-win project that addresses several regional issues at once:

- **Rebalancing the regional inequities of current freeway lids**, which are primarily in affluent and low-density neighborhoods (see Figure 2). A 2018 University of California [research study](#) determined that freeway lids located in Central Seattle are more equitable than others in King County due to the greater benefits to people of diverse race and ethnicity and the prevalence of lower and more mixed incomes. As of 2020, in the Central Seattle neighborhoods bordering I-5 the population is 45% people of color, 82% of households are renters, and the median income is 25% less than Seattle as a whole.

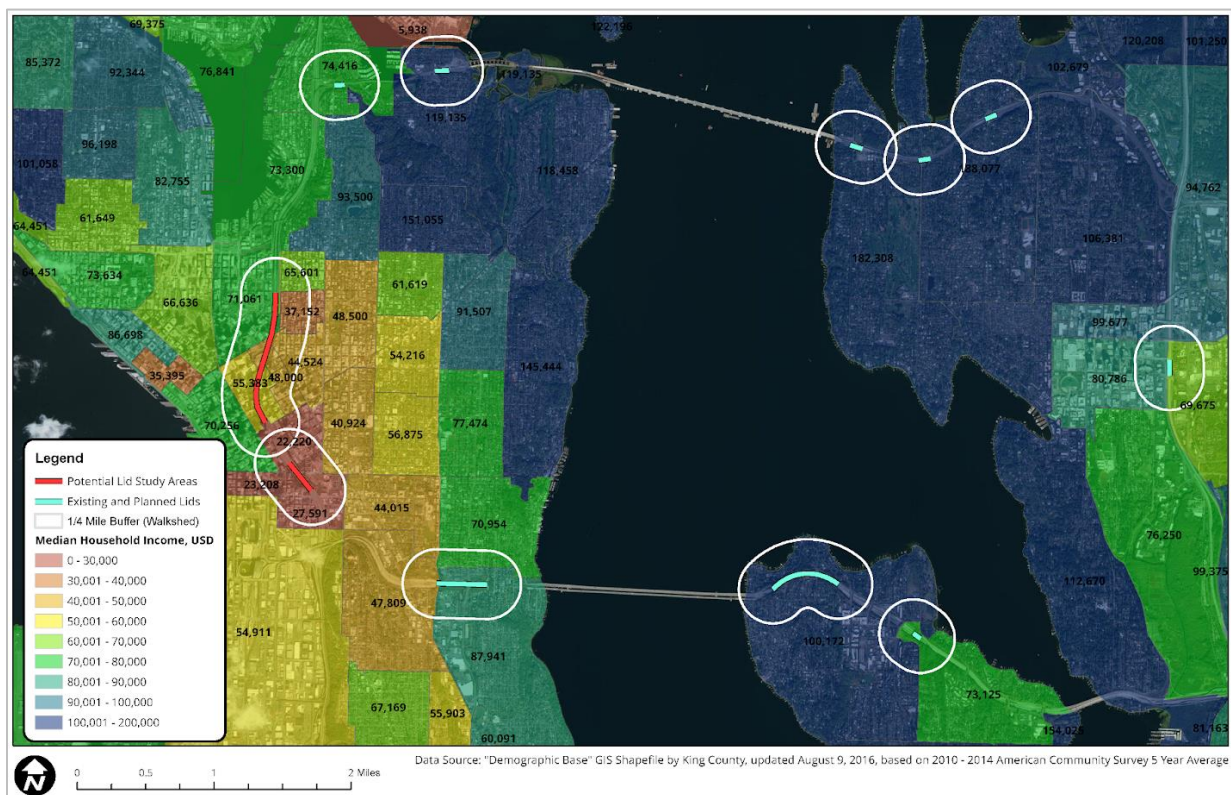


Figure 2 - Median household incomes per the U.S. Census (data from King County, map by Lid I-5)

- **Improved regional through-traffic** with the potential removal or relocation of ramps in Central Seattle. Some ramps are too closely spaced or have other obsolete designs that cause congestion, unsafe merging, and pedestrian safety conflicts. WSDOT leadership has indicated openness to ramp changes for the benefits of through-traffic. Further, 77% of Seattle voters support relocating some of the I-5 ramps if this were determined to be feasible for improving traffic congestion and safety issues.
- **Improved multimodal connectivity by reconnecting the street grid.** Nine of eighteen streets in the area remain broken off by I-5, and reconnecting them will encourage more walking, biking, and transit use, including connections to future Sound Transit light rail stations.

- **Revitalizing the post-pandemic economy of Downtown Seattle** with opportunities for new residential development (including affordable housing), new small business and entertainment spaces, and improving the environment for existing uses. The lid project could have annual economic impacts of \$1-3 billion per year (direct and indirect) depending on the amount of real estate activity on the lid.
- **Encouraging urban, carbon-light living** by adding important family-friendly amenities like parks, schools, and community centers that attract and support people living in dense, transit-oriented neighborhoods. There is a significant potential for reducing carbon emissions both from improved bike and pedestrian connectivity and carbon capture of freeway traffic.
- **Improved air and water quality** by reducing the local urban heat island effect 3-4 degrees and potentially treating up to 30% of local stormwater runoff before it reaches marine waters.
- **Sparking discussion on maintaining and preserving central I-5**, which is known to be past the end of its expected service life, seismically vulnerable, and inadequately configured for today's transit and freight transportation needs. A majority 82% of Seattle voters are concerned about the capability of I-5 to survive a major earthquake in Seattle and be available for emergency use. A catastrophic earthquake event could cut off access to the most important medical hub in the state unless I-5 is properly planned for and preserved.



Figure 3 - Excerpt from the I-5 Lid Feasibility Study showing one of the test case land use scenarios, with a mix of parks (green), mid-rise buildings (red and light blue), and high-rise buildings (dark blue)

Locally, lidding I-5 is supported by Seattle policies:

- Seattle City Council [Resolution 32100](#) (adopted 2023)
- Seattle [Downtown Regional Center Plan](#) (draft as of this writing)
- Seattle [Comprehensive Plan](#) (adopted 2025):
  - Land Use Policy 2.12
  - Transportation Policy 3.17
  - Parks Policy 1.24

Thank you for your planning work and consideration of the importance of the Lid I-5 Seattle project. We appreciate PSRC's careful consideration of solutions that prioritize the safety, health, and access to opportunity for everyone in the Puget Sound region as well as the beauty and health of our unique environment. We are available should you have questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,

**Lid I-5 Steering Committee**

Scott Bonjukian, co-chair  
Jim Castanes  
John Feit, co-chair  
Bruno Lambert  
Yinan Liu

Rob Eason  
Paul Owen  
Kevin Clement  
Jessica Lotz

**Lid I-5 Coalition Partner Organizations**

Allied Arts  
American Institute of Architects Seattle  
American Society of Landscape Architects Washington  
Bellwether Housing  
Capitol Hill Ecodistrict  
Central Seattle Greenways  
Community Roots Housing  
Downtown Seattle Association  
Elektra Condominium Homeowners Association  
First Hill Improvement Association  
Futurewise  
Freeway Park Association  
Greater Seattle Business Association  
Martin Luther King, Jr. County Labor Council  
Melrose Promenade  
Meridian Condominium Homeowners Association  
Northwest Progressive Institute  
Parents for a Better Downtown Seattle  
Pike/Pine Urban Neighborhood Council  
REI Co-Op  
Seattle Building & Construction Trades Council  
Seattle Convention Center  
Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce  
Seattle Parks Foundation (fiscal sponsor)  
Seattle YIMBY  
The Urbanist  
Urban Land Institute Northwest