

PROJECT BRIEFING MEMO

Port of Tacoma Commission



Item No: 10A
Meeting Date: 5/7/26

DATE: 4/27/2026
TO: Port of Tacoma Commission
FROM: Eric Johnson, Executive Director
Sponsor: Deirdre Wilson, Director of Planning & Permitting
Project Manager: Ryan Medlen, Senior Planner
SUBJECT: Port of Tacoma Harbor Transportation Briefing

A. BRIEFING PURPOSE

This briefing is to provide the Commission with an update on port priority projects and information regarding the Tacoma Tidelands road network.

Strategic Plan Implementation Strategies:

- **TA-1** Support bridge and road projects that improve freight mobility and travel time reliability, prioritizing the SR 167 Gateway Project, the Port of Tacoma Road/I-5 interchange, Fishing Wars Memorial Bridge reopening, Portland Avenue corridor and Taylor Way/54th Avenue intersection projects.
- **TA-2** Advocate for the transportation infrastructure, system management, and advanced clean energy needs of Port-related businesses in the Tidelands and Pierce County.
- **TA-4** Be a resource for freight mobility expertise and knowledge for transportation projects and programs that support Port-related activities.

B. SYNOPSIS

Port operations rely on reliable and fluid access between Port of Tacoma properties and area supply chain facilities. For this reason, the port has a vested interest in engaging and supporting investment in the regional transportation system. This briefing is intended to provide an update on the transportation system as it relates to port business and discuss port priority and supportive projects.

C. CITY OF TACOMA STREETS INITIATIVE

The City of Tacoma plans to place the Connect Tacoma: Safe Streets and Sidewalks initiative before voters on the August 4, 2026 ballot. Please see Alice McDaniel's April 30th commission memo providing a comprehensive review on this subject. Funding from the initiative would be allocated among three categories of roadway investments; however, it does not include commitments to specific projects or geographic areas. As a result, staff cannot determine how the initiative would directly affect port priority projects or the other projects discussed in this memo.

If the initiative is approved, staff will coordinate with the City to identify opportunities where port-supportive projects align with the initiative's stated goals, as part of ongoing efforts to advocate for transportation system improvements in the Tideflats.

D. BACKGROUND

In November 2022, the Port of Tacoma Commission approved a list of port priority projects. Since that time staff have worked with the different project sponsors to advance these projects. Support is accomplished through political, technical, or financial means, or a combination thereof. These projects are identified in strategic plan strategy TA-1.

In addition to these priority projects, staff monitors other projects and information about the transportation system that affect the Port of Tacoma harbor. This work is completed by Government Relations and Planning staff by coordinating with area partners as well as data collection and analysis. Recent activities have included 2025 distribution mapping of port trucks, an update to a 2007 analysis that was used to support planning of major projects under construction today, as well as procuring telemetric (GPS) data to identify typical areas of congestion during port hours of operation. Taken together, this information is used to maintain an understanding of transportation infrastructure in support of strategies TA-2 and TA-4.

E. KEY FINDINGS

The information and analysis presented in this meeting comes to the following conclusions:

- The Port's priority projects (TA-1) adopted in 2022 and included within the 2026-2030 Strategic Plan continue to support locations where access to the Port of Tacoma harbor area overlaps with areas of congestion during port business hours.
- All the port priority projects are advancing; however, the status of implementation is different for each of the priority projects and they all continue to advance based on available sources of funding.
- Other transportation projects that are supportive of the Port's lines of business are also advancing. Staff will consult with executive leadership and the commission about whether opportunities emerge or if the priority project list should be reevaluated.
- As conditions change or priority projects are completed, staff will engage the Executive and Commission on recommended changes to the list of priority projects.
- Portland Avenue and Port of Tacoma Road are the top two corridors for inbound port traffic.
- The roundabout at Wapato Way and Pacific Highway is the top point of exit from the harbor area for outbound port traffic.
- About 20% of the trips from port facilities are local trips within the Port of Tacoma harbor.
- Main areas of congestion are the I-5 interchanges at Portland Ave, 54th Avenue, and Port of Tacoma Road.

F. TRANSPORTATION CONDITIONS

In July 2025, staff procured port truck distribution counts in the Port of Tacoma Harbor, with a focus on locations where trucks either enter or exit the general harbor area. These locations are the corridors that connect drayage trucks with the regional highway network or access the nearby warehousing areas in Fife and Puyallup. The port truck distribution counts were done using video technology to allow for a focus on trucks engaged in port-related business within the harbor.

Counted trucks included 1) bobtails (cab only), 2) trucks towing an empty chassis, 3) trucks with a container, and 4) trucks carrying autos.

Attachment 1 and Attachment 2 to this memorandum show the detailed counts collected. Table 1 below summarizes the data in those attachments to five major points of harbor access. Portland Avenue and Port of Tacoma Road are the top two corridors for inbound port traffic, but the roundabout at Wapato Way and Pacific Highway is the top connection point for port traffic headed outbound from the harbor. The discrepancy at the Wapato Way roundabout between inbound and outbound traffic is the high percentage of port trucks that continue north on Pacific Hwy to South 348th Street in Federal Way. This route provides a connection to Northbound I-5 and Eastbound SR-18. Pacific Hwy is a way around congestion at the I-5 and SR-18 interchange as well as a corridor with more favorable grades to the parallel section of I-5.

HARBOR ACCESS POINT	INBOUND	OUTBOUND
WAPATO WAY ROUNDABOUT	19%	31%
I-5 AT 54TH AVE	14%	10%
I-5 AT PORT OF TACOMA RD	26%	21%
PORTLAND AVE	30%	28%
SR 509 AT I-705	10%	10%

In the process of completing these counts, the analysis estimated that approximately 20% of the trips from port facilities are local in the Port of Tacoma harbor. The Northwest Seaport Alliance is in the process of completing a similar effort in the Port of Seattle (Duwamish) harbor which will provide a comparison, but 20% is expected to be a good rate of trips being local to the harbor area. Encouraging port traffic to stay localized in the harbor area by providing warehousing services and local transportation facilities means the Port of Tacoma reduces impacts on the state highway system and reduces regional emissions by lowering the number of vehicle miles traveled (VMT) by drayage trucks to conduct their business.

In addition to measuring where trucks go within the harbor area, it is important to consider where areas of congestion are located. There are multiple ways to measure congestion, and there is no single correct way to determine whether a corridor is congested. Generally, areas of congestion are either modeled based on expected future conditions or data is collected to determine where vehicle speeds are abnormally low or inconsistent. The latter has become more cost effective as telemetric data has become available via location sharing on GPS units and people's mobile phone applications.

Staff reviewed data from a subscription service, Streetlight, that provides some information specific to heavy trucks, which includes drayage trucks. Congestion is measured as the percentage of time when the trucks travel at speeds less than free flow conditions. That data was from weekday hours of peak port activity during January 2025 to March 2025.

These months were selected due to increased cargo activity ahead of the implementation of tariffs. The main areas of concern with regards to congestion during this time were the 3 Interstate-5 interchanges – Portland Avenue, Port of Tacoma Road, and 54th Avenue. Other areas either saw less frequency of congestion or are road segments where the data is likely capturing truck movements related to warehouse access or other business activities.

G. STATUS OF PORT PRIORITY PROJECTS

The information collected via the port truck distribution mapping and through Streetlight, a data provider, is new analyses completed after the current list of port priority projects was originally adopted. However, the findings are that these projects continue to support areas of traffic congestion in the harbor area of the Port of Tacoma that are connected to the Port of Tacoma’s lines of business.

Project	Does it support a key harbor access point?	Does it address an area of congestion?	Status of Implementation
SR 167 Completion	Yes	Yes	Under construction
Port of Tacoma Road / I-5 interchange	Yes	Yes	Advancing to construction
Fishing Wars Memorial Bridge	Yes	Yes	30% design in process
Milwaukee Way / Pacific Hwy	No	Yes	Advancing with the Fishing Wars Memorial Bridge
Taylor Way / 54th Avenue	No	Yes, but not during hours of peak drayage	Funded for design
Portland Avenue Corridor	Yes	Yes	Seeking funding

Staff from Planning and Government Affairs regularly discuss these projects with the project sponsors and provide letters of support for grant applications, technical support in design (TA-4), and information to help build a narrative around how these projects are beneficial (TA-2). For some of the projects the Commission has provided construction dollars to support their implementation. The status of implementation is different for each of the priority projects but as summarized below they all continue to advance based on available sources of funding.

- The two major projects that are expected to address the busiest points of access, **SR 167** and **Port of Tacoma Road Interchange**, both of which are expected to be under construction for their final phases by later this year or early next year.
- **Fishing Wars Memorial Bridge** project now includes the intersection of **Milwaukee Way and Pacific Highway** in early design, as the improvement of one affects the other. Both projects will support a new access point to the harbor and provide resiliency for the network.

As these projects advance, the City of Tacoma may look at options to build the Milwaukee intersection improvements early.

- The intersection of **54th Avenue/Taylor Way and SR 509** is a priority project to increase capacity for vehicles turning at this intersection to head south on SR 509. The project is funded for design by an earmark. The intersection was not found to be consistently congested during peak hours of port operations but is congested during the PM peak hour with general traffic. Staff will monitor this intersection as the first phase of SR 167 opens to traffic to determine whether it remains important to port truck traffic.
- The **Portland Avenue Corridor** is divided into three sections: 1) intersection improvements at Portland Avenue and Lincoln Avenue, 2) from Puyallup Avenue to Lincoln Avenue or “Portland Avenue Freight Access”, and 3) Puyallup Avenue to I-5. Options to consider all sections are explored as opportunities arise. The intersection improvements are pursuing alternative analysis and design funds where possible. The Portland Avenue Freight Access project is on contingency lists for funding but has not had construction funds confirmed. The remaining section is in the future construction area of a transit station that is part of Sound Transit’s Tacoma Dome Link Extension. Improvements may be completed as part of that project’s station area development.

H. **OTHER ROADWAY PROJECTS OF INTEREST**

Local partners continually plan transportation projects and update their transportation improvement programs. Attachment 3 shows projects that are known to staff and potentially relevant to port business. Attachment 4 shows the same for major regional projects. Many of these projects do not have funding for all phases but are listed in a transportation program. Given the early stage of these projects, it is not yet known the level of impact they would be expected to have on Port of Tacoma lines of business upon completion. Staff has provided or continues to provide technical support on many of these projects and will engage Port leadership and the Commission if any changes to the Port’s priority list are necessary.

Select regional projects

- **SR-18 Widening:** SR-18 to I-90 is the most efficient regional route from the Port of Tacoma to the agricultural areas in eastern Washington. Currently a large section of SR-18 is one lane in each direction between Issaquah-Hobart Road and I-90. Widening it to be a highway with a continuous two lanes in each direction will support system resiliency and travel time reliability.
- **I-5 Marvin to Mounts Road:** This new viaduct will widen I-5 between DuPont and Lacey, enable environmental enhancements to the Nisqually River Delta, and support resiliency in the regional system. This corridor supports connecting Port of Tacoma trucks to areas of warehousing to the south, which have some of the highest levels of planned and potential development in terms of warehouse square footage. A draft NEPA report for public review is expected to be released as early as late summer of this year.
- **SR 509 Completion:** Streetlight Origin and Destination mapping shows the Port of Seattle and Port of Tacoma harbors to be mutually important destinations. Completion of SR-509 will provide increased redundancy in the connection between these harbors.

Select local projects

- **Tacoma Tideflats ITS:** Installation of new fiber optic line and signal detection equipment to improve coordination between traffic signals. The benefit will be better emergency response preparedness as well as improved traffic signal coordination.
- **Canyon Road Extension:** A long-planned project being completed in phases to provide an alternative connection from the Port of Tacoma to the Frederickson MIC, as well as a redundant north-south connector for residents in Pierce County.
- **I-5 Interchange at 54th Avenue:** A redesign of this interchange like the one being completed at Port of Tacoma Rd. Whether there is a strong connection to the Port of Tacoma lines of business will become clear once SR 167 is completed, but at a minimum it will support better access to warehousing in Fife and reduce congestion on Pacific Hwy.
- **Wapato Way Extension:** An unfunded concept identified in the City of Fife transportation improvement program (TIP) to provide a bypass route connected to the Wapato Way roundabout around the future light rail station and City Center area. This project is at an early stage in the planning process.
- **Puyallup Avenue Corridor Improvements:** A multimodal, freight, and pavement improvement project to Puyallup Avenue between Portland Avenue and East D St in Tacoma. The city coordinated with port staff during its design to help protect freight interests while also improving accessibility in the area around the Tacoma Dome station. The project is funded and advancing toward construction.
- **Maintenance:** As the missing links in the system are completed and transportation budgets remain constrained, the cities, counties, and State are focusing on prioritizing maintenance within their budget. This will help make sure the system remains functional going forward.

I. **CONCLUSIONS**

- Current port priority projects are expected to improve system performance at key points of harbor access and congestion. No changes to the project list are proposed at this time.
- All port priority projects are advancing.
- As projects come online, staff will continue to monitor changes in traffic patterns and needs.
- Agency partners continue to plan future projects to address known and expected needs in the harbor area transportation system.
- As needs change or opportunities arise, staff will regularly engage the Executive and Commission on recommended updates to the list of priority projects.

J. **ATTACHMENTS**

- 1) Map of Outbound Port Trucks
- 2) Map of Inbound Port Trucks
- 3) Map of Harbor Area Projects
- 4) Map of Regional Projects