Lid I-5 Steering Committee
Seattle, WA
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August 20, 2023

TO: Rico Quirindongo, Director, Seattle Office of Planning and Community Development

CC: Deputy Mayor Greg Wong, Councilmember Andrew Lewis, Councilmember Teresa Mosqueda, Marco Lowe, Lyle Bicknell, Rebecca Bear, Jon Scholes, Doug Holtom

RE: Applying for the Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhood Access Grant for Lid I-5

Dear Director Quirindongo,

Our team at Lid I-5 is looking forward to collaborating with the Seattle Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) on applying for a Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhood Access (RCN) grant through the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT). For this year the application was made available on July 5 and the coming application deadline is September 28.

We are writing to document a shared understanding between the Seattle community, Lid I-5, and OPCD with regards to project eligibility, implementing Resolution 32100 and other City policies, and fulfilling a commitment to apply. We look forward to moving forward expeditiously and cooperatively on the grant application. We are open to continued communication at any time.

This letter covers these main points:

1. The diverse population demographics and economic barriers in the central Seattle I-5 lid study area meet and exceed the grant application criteria.
2. The presence of street overpasses does not disqualify the central Seattle I-5 lid study area from the grant program, and numerous ramps also limit connectivity.
3. Lidding I-5 is an equitable project that meets the City's stated policy goals and there are multiple next steps in project development that require funding.

Detailed supporting information are organized in the following sections:

1 - Background and OPCD's Commitment

The Lid I-5 community organization is now part of a national coalition that formed in 2021 and advocated for the United State Congress to fund solutions for communities divided by infrastructure barriers (see archived coalition letters). Together, with advocates from cities across the country, in 2021 and 2022 we secured an unprecedented $4.15 billion for pilot programs specifically designed to repair the harms caused by urban freeways and other historical transportation projects. The Lid I-5 group committed our energies to the national movement because we knew the new programs would be available to this lid project in Seattle.

Lid I-5 is an equity-minded partner in the City of Seattle's planning goals. After the first-round Reconnecting Communities application opened in June 2022, by August 2022 the Lid I-5 team agreed to withdraw pursuit in favor of OPCD applying for the disadvantaged neighborhood of South Park and its efforts to address the impacts and opportunities of Highway 99. The commitment made at the time by OPCD staff and leadership was that OPCD would apply for the Lid I-5 project this next year (2023). Lid I-5 with Seattle Parks Foundation is eligible to apply independently as a non-profit entity, but we do not yet have the capacity to do so and are reliant upon collaboration with OPCD.

The results of our collaboration have been significant: in February 2023 the Reconnect South Park project was awarded $1.8 million to complement $600,000 in state funding.

Now Lid I-5 is ready to work with OPCD on fulfilling the commitment. This year the Legislature provided $200,000 to Seattle OPCD for the I-5 lid project, which is partly intended to be used as a local match for the grant application. This year, the Reconnecting Communities program and the new Neighborhood Access program (created through two different acts of Congress a year apart) are combined with a single application available for both programs. Applicants are allowed and encouraged to submit applications that meet the statutory requirements for both programs to maximize their potential for receiving federal support.

Seattle has strong prospects to secure another grant because the amount available for planning grants this year has nearly quadrupled to $185 million, up from $47 million last year. In the first round of the RCN program, 11 of 16 freeway lid projects that applied for funding were successful. The 11 winning projects, including two lid construction projects, represent one-quarter of the 45 projects that received funding. This is a strong showing demonstrating freeway lids in communities of all types are eligible.

We also know that Congress and USDOT are interested and supportive of lids because the Federal Highway Administration was commissioned to create a report on freeway lids, which was published in December 2022 and confirms a number of public benefits from lids.

There are a limited number of other in-progress freeway lid projects across the country and few of them will apply or re-apply for the RCN program (either because they already won, are not advanced enough or positioned to apply, or are unaware of the program), meaning the competition for planning funds is even further reduced in this second round.

In the Neighborhood Access side of the combined program, 40 percent of funding is reserved for "economically disadvantaged communities." Seattle's application will be considered for the total $185 million funding pool because, as described below, the central Seattle I-5 lid study area meets the definition of an economically disadvantaged community. Even if USDOT were to determine otherwise, a large and majority amount of the planning funds are still open to Seattle.

2 - Grant Application Criteria and Equity Population Data

The RCN Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) says USDOT "welcomes applications from eligible applicants from diverse local, tribal, and regional communities regardless of size, location, and experience administering Federal funding awards" (page 2). Proposed solutions of "Cap, Deck, or Lid" are explicitly listed as an option for program eligibility without further conditions.

It is not required that project applications represent an economically disadvantaged community, but the Lid I-5 project does, which boosts the chances of funding. An economically disadvantaged community is defined as Census units that meet one or more of the following criteria (NOFO page 40):

A. Is economically disadvantaged, underserved, or located in an area of persistent poverty;
B. Has entered or will enter into a community benefits agreement with representatives of the community;
C. Has an anti-displacement policy, a community land trust, or a community advisory board in effect; or
D. Demonstrated a plan for employing local residents in the area impacted by the activity or project proposed under this section.

Any one of four these criteria may be met to meet the definition of an economically disadvantaged community. The 2020 I-5 Lid Feasibility Study contains all of the necessary data demonstrating compliance at least with criterion (A), which most clearly applies to the lid study area. Seattle as a city also may meet (C) since it has several types of anti-displacement programs in place such as the Mandatory Housing Affordability inclusionary zoning program and the Equitable Development Initiative. Criteria (B), (C), and (D) can further be met through the scope of work and future phases of work, including development of anti-displacement tools.

"Economic disadvantage" is measured using several tools published by federal government. The results from these tools listed below are based on the "study area" (15-minute walkshed or approximately ½ mile) used in the 2020 I-5 Lid Feasibility Study (Figure 7-2), finding that multiple Census units qualify. There is no minimum threshold for a number, ratio, population size, land area, or other quantitative measurement of Census units required to be considered an economically disadvantaged community.

These findings do not yet reflect extension of the lid study area north to Thomas Street or south to Yesler Way, but as we move forward with the application additional Census units will be added to these results.

Resource	Result	Additional findings
EPA Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping tool (EJSCREEN)	*Socio-economic indicator for **low income**, block groups in the 80th percentile or above, compared to the State (defined as households with incomes less than twice the federal poverty level)* Block group 530330073012 Block group 530330085003 Block group 530330081022	*Socio-economic indicator for **people of color**, block groups in the 80th percentile or above, compared to the State (defined as people who list their race as other than white alone and/or list their ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino)* Block group 530330073013 Block group 530330074062 Block group 530330073022 Block group 530330073021

Resource	Result	Additional findings
	Block group 530330092001 Block group 530330092002 Block group 530330080021 Block group 530330086004	Block group 530330073023 Block group 530330082001 Block group 530330084011 Block group 530330085002 Block group 530330085003 Block group 530330092001
Areas of Persistent Poverty	***Areas of persistent poverty*** Census tracts 81 and 92	***Historically disadvantaged communities*** Census tracts 81, 83, 85, and 92
USDOT Equitable Transportation Community (ETC) Explorer	Census tract 53033008102 Census tract 53033008500 Census tract 53033009200	Disadvantaged characteristics for these tracts compared to the state: • 95 percentile climate and disaster risk burden • 98 percentile environmental burden • 78 percentile social vulnerability
FHWA HEP GIS	Key findings in study area: • 12% in poverty • 49% of households have no vehicles • 24% of people do not primarily speak English at home	
Seattle Racial and Social Equity Composite Index	***Highest priority for equity*** Census tracts 74.05, 81.01, 81.02, 85, 92	***Second highest priority for equity*** Census tracts 73.01, 73.03, 74.06, 80.02, 83

Figure 1 - Economically disadvantaged community Census units

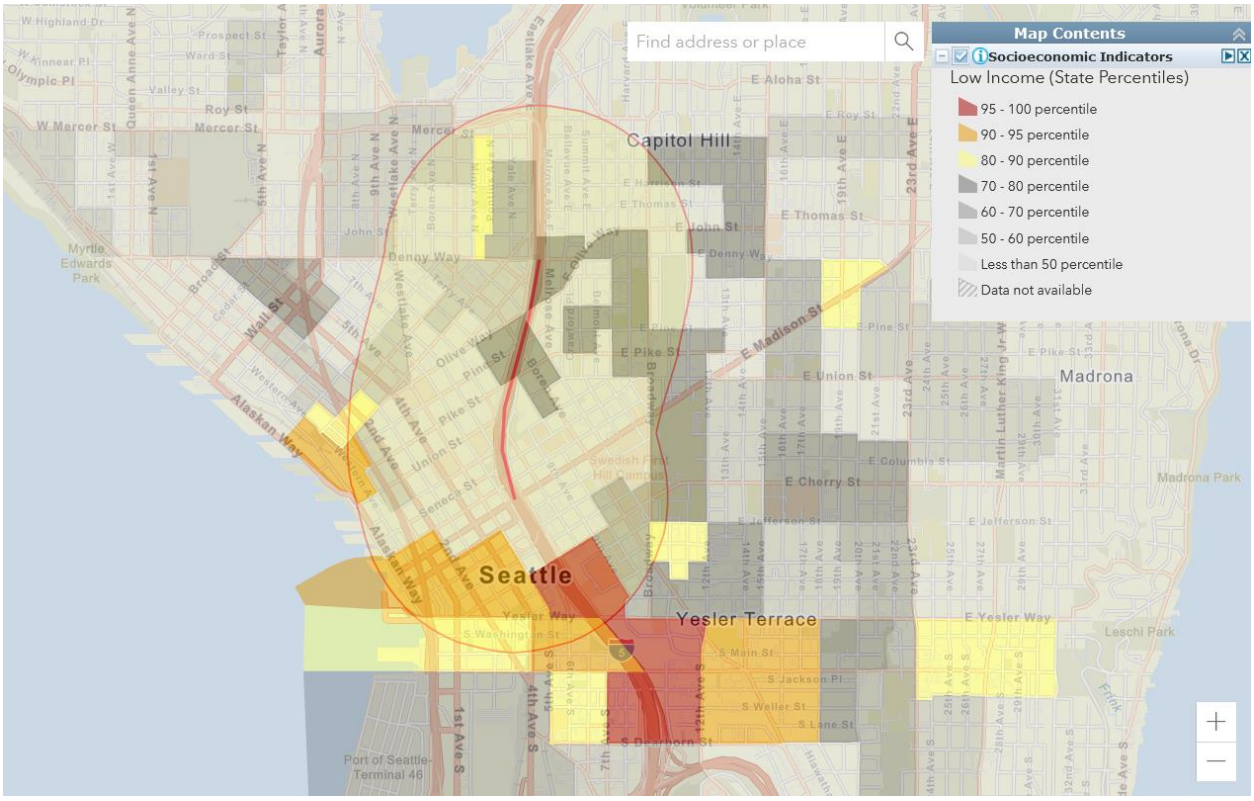


Figure 2 – EJScreen map showing low-income percentiles compared to the state in the 2020 I-5 Lid Feasibility Study Area

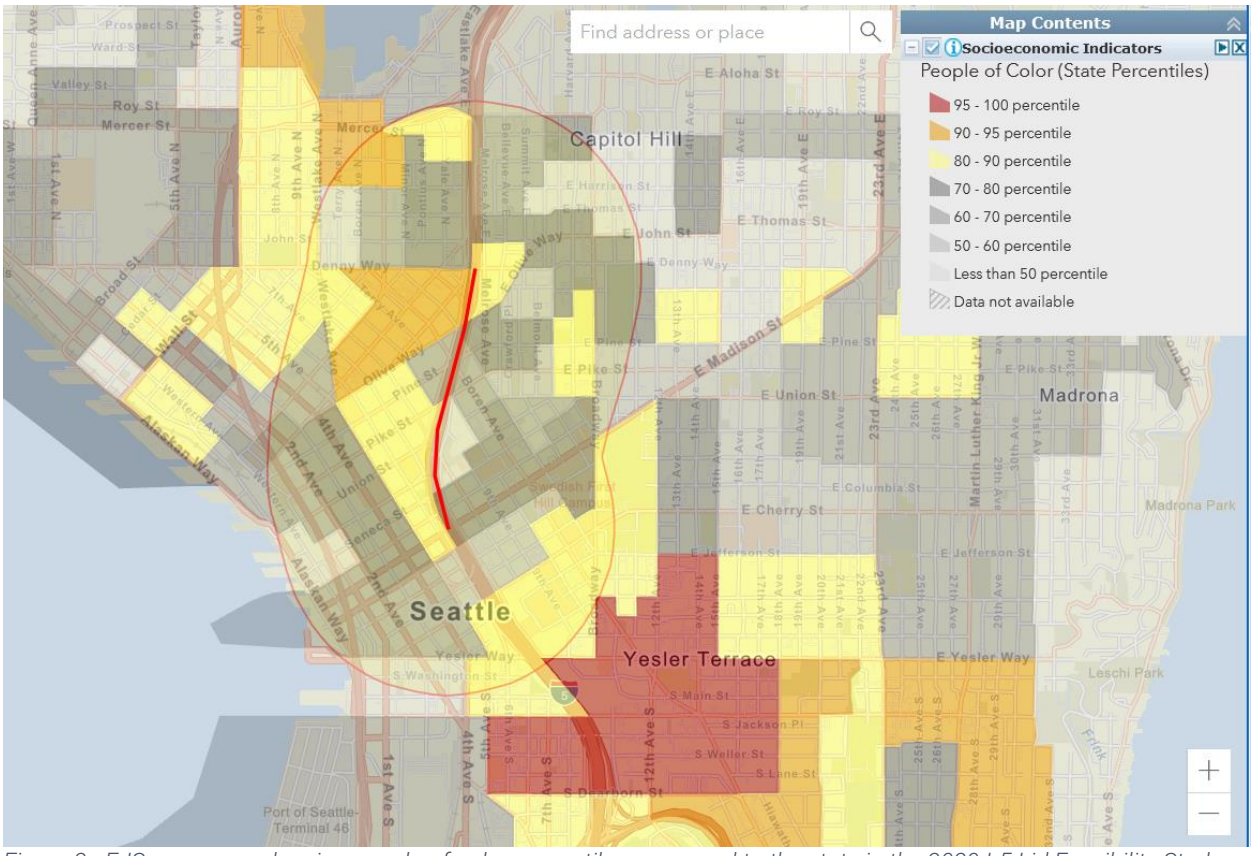


Figure 3 - EJScreen map showing people-of-color percentiles compared to the state in the 2020 I-5 Lid Feasibility Study Area

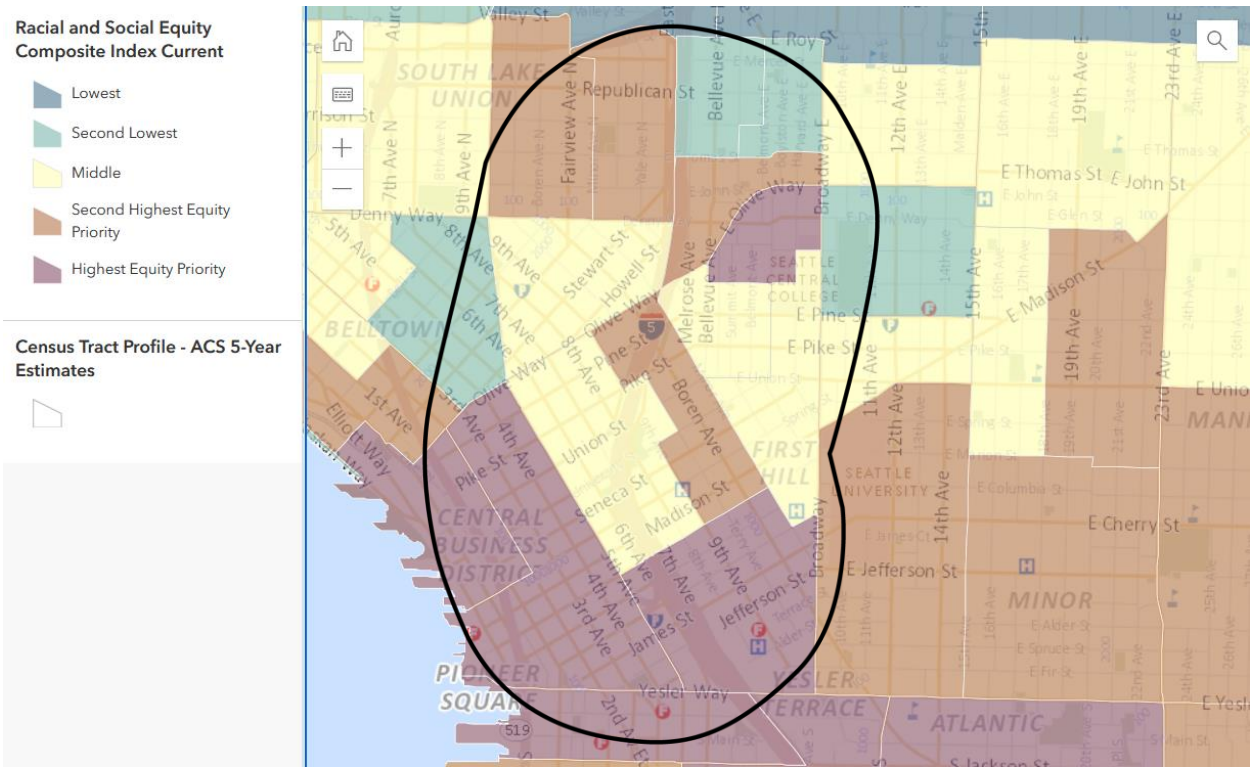


Figure 4 – Seattle Racial and Social Equity Composite Index map in the 2020 I-5 Lid Feasibility Study Area

There are many other disparities in the study area. For example, several block groups are housing-cost burdened in the 80-90 percentile (spending more than 30% of income on housing while earning less than 80% of area median family income). Several block groups are in the 80-100 percentile for persons with disabilities, the highest percentile in Seattle; First Hill has a large population of seniors in assisted and independent living communities. Capitol Hill has long been the center of Seattle's LGBTQ+ community and queer culture.

Following are additional facts about the study area population that support this being an equity project.

Over 40,000 people live within the lid study area. These residents are living in the most densely populated area of anywhere in Seattle and the state, and population continues to increase without fair and commensurate access to green space, schools, community centers, and other amenities required for urban neighborhoods to meet their full potential (as compared to many of our regional and national competing cities such as Bellevue, Spokane, Portland, Boise, Denver, Minneapolis, and Washington, D.C.).

The study area has limited access to affordable, full service grocery stores (e.g. with delis, bakeries, meat department, home goods, etc.). People living within a few blocks of I-5 must travel some distance, usually involving an uphill trek, to reach larger grocery stores with affordable options, full services, and a wide selection of fresh food (e.g. QFC, Safeway).

The study area is a challenging place for families to live; while there are 4,800 children in the study area, this is perhaps the lowest ratio of households with children in Seattle. This must be improve to support the area's post-pandemic economic recovery and mixed-use future.

With respect to race and ethnicity, the area is more diverse than Seattle as a whole. Using the latest Census data, approximately 41 percent of residents citywide and **46 percent of residents in the central neighborhoods bordering I-5 are people of color.** Going beyond the statistics, one can see the diversity in the central neighborhoods by simply walking the streets.

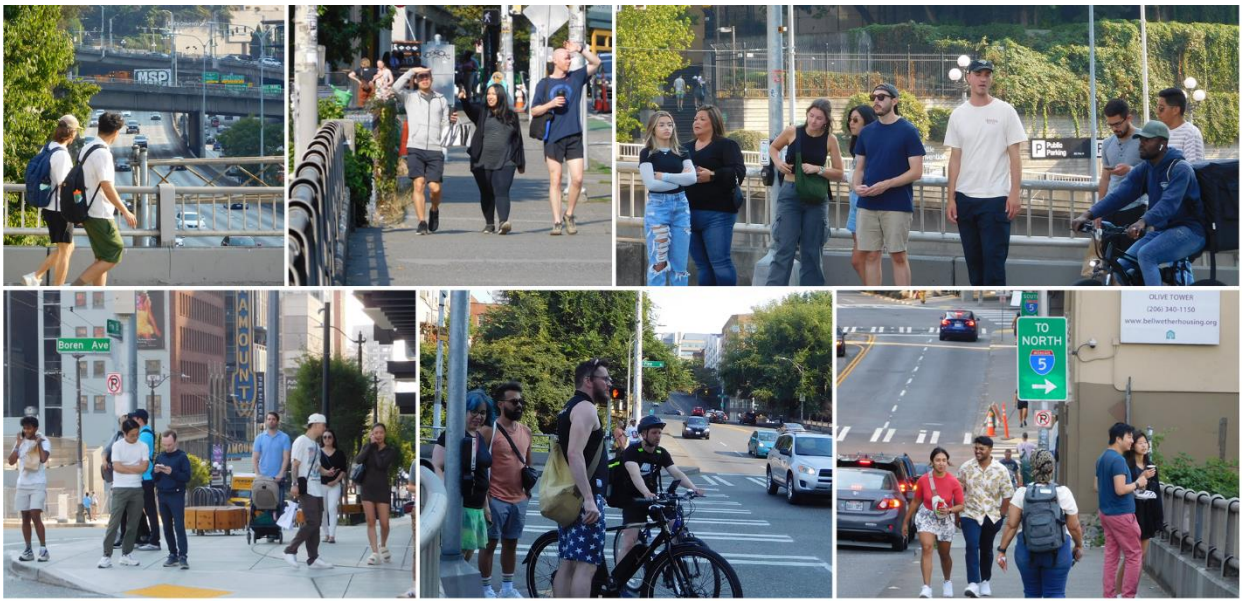


Figure 5. - People crossing over Interstate 5 in central Seattle. Photos taken in August 2023.

There would likely be even more people of color living in the lid study area if Capitol Hill and First Hill had not been systemically and unjustly redlined for decades in the early 20th century. The effects of redlining have been documented to extend to the present day, and may partly explain why the central Seattle I-5 lid study area is dominated by rental housing and few homeownership opportunities for building intergenerational wealth.

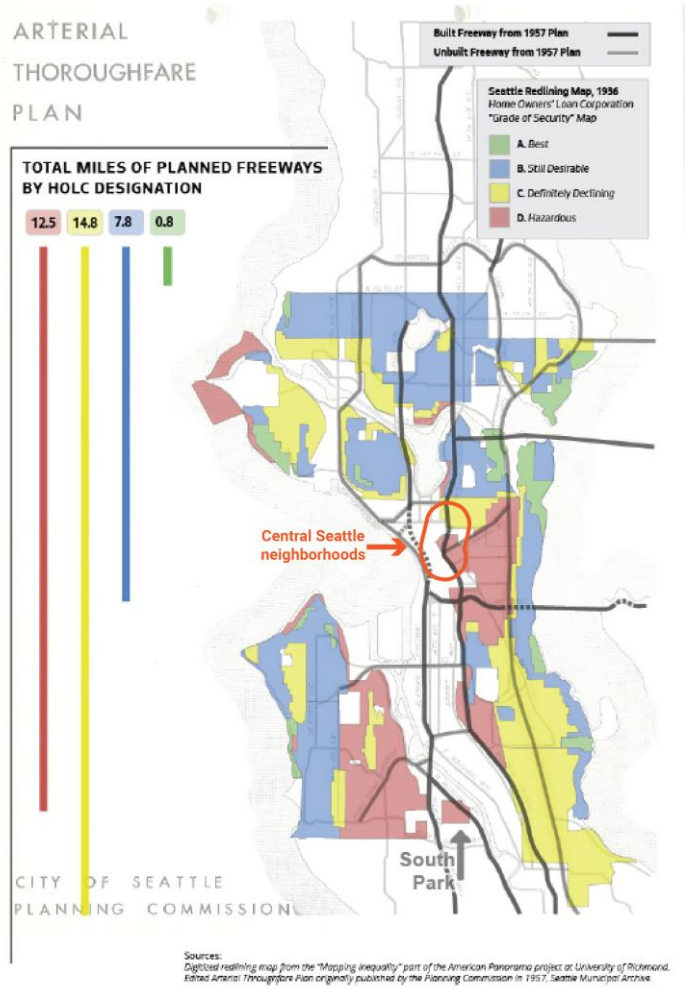


Figure 6 – Freeways and redlining in Seattle, 1956-1957. Map courtesy of Seattle OPCD.

About 82 percent of residents in the I-5 lid study area are renters, compared to 56 percent rental tenure citywide. This is linked to the fact that the study area median annual household income is significantly lower - about $64,000 compared to $85,000 citywide. Over 15 percent of people were living below the poverty level in 2018, which was higher than the citywide 12 percent. Approximately 11,700 households within the study area are considered low-income.

The study area has the highest concentration of subsidized low-income housing in Seattle, with about 2,150 such units, and 600 of those are in buildings within one block of Interstate 5. Those 600 families are living in high-density apartment buildings and forced to breathe in the fumes and sleep with the noise caused by freeway traffic. Their plight is magnified by poverty, lack of green space for respite and recreation, high traffic volumes, and lack of affordable grocery options. For these reasons, in support of the grant application Lid I-5 is specifically engaging with residents at Seattle Housing Authority, Bellwether Housing, and Community Roots Housing over the next few weeks to listen to their experiences and collect their vision for lidding the freeway.

Figure 7 - Left: Olive Tower (Bellwether Housing). Right: Denny Terrace (Seattle Housing Authority). Over 300 low-income households at these two buildings are especially impacted by I-5 and have among the most to gain from lidding I-5.

There is little to no additional publicly-controlled land in the study area which can provide more public housing that is isolated from market forces. The 2020 I-5 Lid Feasibility Study found that lids could lead to a significant increase in the city's publicly-controlled housing supply, in an area where little land is available near Seattle's jobs centers. Building ample housing of all types is proven to be one of the most effective ways to combat gentrification and displacement.

Indeed, the 2020 I-5 Lid Feasibility Study found, "The lid could provide affordable space to marginalized communities in an area with the highest access to opportunities. Equity is a major priority for Seattle, and with escalating rents, displacement is pushing out the most vulnerable people and businesses from urban neighborhoods. **The lid could create physical space and catalyze investment in communities that have been disenfranchised to improve outcomes for populations that have been hardest hit by historical disinvestment, displacement and gentrification."**

3 - Economic Development Barriers and Risk

According to the NOFO (page 41), facilities eligible for intervention in the grant program must meet at least one of the following descriptions:

- A highway or other transportation facility that creates a barrier to community connectivity, including barriers to mobility, access, or economic development, due to high speeds, grade separations, or other design factors.
- A dividing facility: a surface transportation facility that creates an obstacle to community connectivity by high speeds, grade separation, or other design factors;
- A burdening facility: a surface transportation facility that is a source of air pollution, noise, stormwater, or other burden to a disadvantaged or underserved community.

Interstate 5 meets all of these definitions as a transportation facility that creates barriers to mobility, access, and economic development due to its lack of complete pedestrian and bicycle connectivity, grade separation, traffic volumes, and being a source of air and noise pollution.

Physically, Interstate 5 creates a barrier to long-term economic development because there is almost no vacant land remaining for new residential and commercial development in the study area – especially public land that can be used as a stimulus for private investment – and the freeway occupies many acres that could otherwise be put to productive use such as by hosting brick-and-mortar businesses, generating increased foot and bike traffic for the study area in general, and increasing the City's tax base. There is $2.5-3.7 billion of annual economic activity not yet happening because Interstate 5 is not lidded, including a minimum of 500 permanent direct and indirect jobs that do not yet exist (created with a low-intensity park use scenario).

It possible and likely that construction of lids will be integrated with seismic retrofit improvements to existing freeway structures (pending the results and recommendations of WSDOT's ongoing seismic study). Until then, the lack of lids and modern, seismically-resilient structures is a long-term economic risk because of potential transportation disruptions caused by an earthquake or other disaster. The risk of cross-streets not being open for months or years after a disaster would be a serious impediment to freight and commuter movements and general economic activity. Relatedly, Seattle's hospitals are clustered east of I-5 and geographically isolated by bridges from much of the rest of the city.

Warming air temperatures from climate change are also an economic risk. **The central neighborhoods near I-5 are experiencing the greatest effect of [Seattle's urban heat island](), with daytime temperatures up to 12 degrees higher than it would naturally feel.** Excessive heat leads to reduced economic productivity from sickness and dangers of working and recreating outdoors, and increased public health problems such as increased mortality for seniors. With dozens of acres of unmitigated concrete, Interstate 5 is a major cause of the urban heat island effect in this area and lids with vegetation (e.g. street trees, parks, and green roofs) would reduce it by 3-4 degrees, according to the 2020 I-5 Lid Feasibility Study.

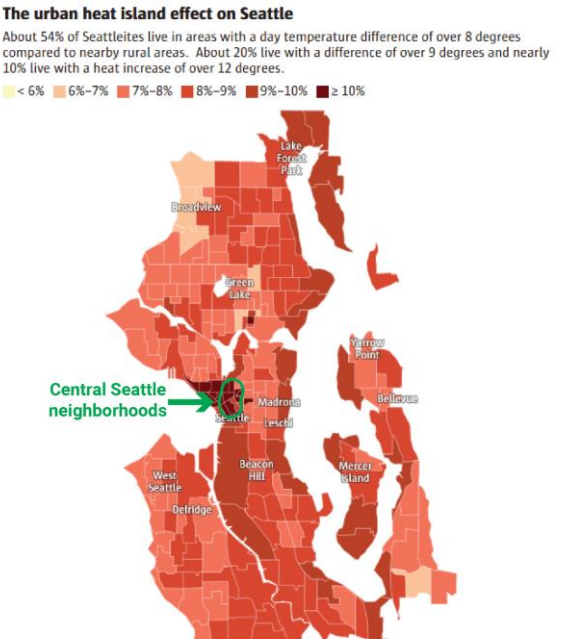


Figure 8 –Map by The Seattle Times and Climate Central (August 2023)

The costs associated with the public health impacts of I-5 are also considerable barriers to societal and personal economic development. In a 2017 [public health study]() from Columbia University, researchers modeled a hypothetical 27-acre, 2.4 mile-long lid over the Cross-Bronx Expressway in New York City. A large share of New York's population lives in the Bronx borough. **The study found a net positive value of over $1,600 per capita, measured through increased property values, lower medial costs, and an extra two months of quality-adjusted life years** (a measure of health and lifespan). Improved health came from lower pedestrian-vehicle interactions, lower air and noise pollution, and more opportunities for exercise. These gains more than make up for the hypothetical project's capital cost.

These variety of issues is why the proposed RCN grant scope of work includes performing a benefit-cost analysis of economic benefits like air quality, green space, and improved mobility.

Physiologically, Interstate 5 is also a barrier to economic development on a daily basis. The intimidating and unsightly noise, exhaust, and exposed concrete structures causes these effects in area with many types of disadvantaged and underserved communities:

- Depressed land values and therefore limited incentives for homeownership housing to be developed near the freeway. Within 1,000 feet of I-5 property values are artificially constrained by an estimated $43 million to $129 million, according to the 2020 study.
- Reduced number of people supporting Downtown's post-pandemic economic recovery, leading to millions of square feet of vacant and underutilized office space and storefronts. For example, office workers people who live in Capitol Hill and have a South Lake Union-based job have little incentive to walk to work when they can work remotely and avoid the poor experience of crossing Olive Way or Denny Way each day.
- Reduced number of potential tourists and business patrons crossing the freeway. For example:
    - It takes people living in the areas between Denny Way and Mercer Street extra time to walk between neighborhoods due to lack of pedestrian crossings over I-5 for two-thirds of a mile. Lids north of Denny Way could include new mobility options to reduce travel times and encourage more business activity.

- Tourists walking from the waterfront experience a clear boundary when approaching First Hill, and therefore may never experience the Frye Art Museum or neighborhood restaurants until a continuous streetwall or green space encourage them to continue.
- People in First Hill and Capitol Hill are less likely to walk to Pike Place Market for groceries or other goods when they need to cross I-5 twice.
- The new cafes and restaurants at the Convention Center Summit building will be negatively impacted by the unpleasant walks on Pine and Boren Streets and the tremendous noise experienced at outdoor patios.
- The Paramount Theatre could design a variety of outdoor programming opportunities if the exterior of the theatre was quiet enough to hold a normal conversation, let alone an amplified one.
- The near-universal condition of small, Downtown coffee shops and other eateries being closed on weekends is a hint that not enough residents are crossing I-5 from Capitol Hill and First Hill to sustain those types of businesses.

4 - Connections Over I-5

There has been some question of whether the existing overpasses make the study area "connected" and therefore not eligible grant funding. A close read of the NOFO finds that the presence of a limited set of vehicular-oriented street overpasses over the freeway does not disqualify the central Seattle I-5 lid study area from the RCN grant program. There is no reference to overpasses or related criteria in the NOFO. Proposed solutions of "Cap, Deck, or Lid" are listed as an option for program eligibility without further conditions.

No less than 9 of 18 street connections in the study area were destroyed by the construction of Interstate 5 (as found by the 2020 I-5 Lid Feasibility Study), severely limiting transportation routes for all modes for the past half-century. The recent growth of the Capitol Hill, First Hill, and South Lake Union neighborhoods has made reconstruction of the lost connections increasingly important, especially for walking, biking, and transit.

The street connections that remain are sometimes steep and are often missing sidewalks and legal crosswalks (e.g. 7th Avenue, Spring Street, Olive Way, Denny Way). Multiple freeway on-ramps and off-ramps at these same overpasses (especially at Spring, Seneca, Pike, and Olive) create geometrically-challenging intersections, chaotic and congested traffic conditions, and vehicle volumes which intimidate pedestrians and delay transit used by low-income riders.

From the Ship Canal to Chinatown-International District, a distance of 4 miles, there is only a single fully separated, bi-directional bicycle connection between the east and west side of I-5 that extends at least a block beyond the freeway (at Pike Street).

Children living on the west side of the freeway must navigate dangerous and uncomfortable freeway crossings to get the nearest schools on the east side of the freeway. Low-income and elderly residents crossing back and forth on I-5 to reach medical appointments, social services, community centers, and religious institutions must likewise deal with an incomplete pedestrian network and the environmental pollution of I-5 traffic.

The people of Seattle knew the freeway would cause disconnections before it was constructed, which is why the earliest campaign for lidding I-5 in the 1950s cited the potential for aesthetic improvement and economic development opportunities (with a similar target area from Madison Street to Olive Way). In 1967 the freeway opened without mitigation features.

Generations later, Seattle's community verifies the continued lack of connectivity, which has grown only more obvious with population growth and increased density of development. The below survey responses, collected in August 2023, are from people who live near I-5.

> *"I love taking walks. I never walk west because I don't want to walk closer to the freeway. It's unpleasantly loud and it can trigger my asthma. If the freeway wasn't there, I would be going for walks downtown a lot more often. Having the freeway to the west makes me feel boxed in. It limits where I go in the city."*
>
> – Samwise, a resident in Capitol Hill

> *"I usually go out of my way to cross on Seneca next to Freeway Park rather than Spring, since crossing Spring is so loud and makes you feel like you're suffocating in exhaust. The on/off ramps on 6th Avenue make it unnecessarily difficult to cross the street. There is no safe way to bike from First Hill into Downtown without taking the sidewalk, which is too narrow."*
>
> – June, a renter in First Hill living one block from I-5

> *"Every time I walk to Capitol Hill, I cross the I-5 exit onto Olive Way. Cars are supposed to stop for pedestrians, but rarely do. There's poor visibility to fast oncoming cars on that corner, especially at night. I feel afraid on my regular commutes. I regularly walk along Boren, Pine, and Olive to commute to Capitol Hill. I plug my ears when I walk over or along the highway. If I'm with friends, we either yell over the noise or stop talking altogether."*
>
> – Kat, a renter in South Lake Union living two blocks from I-5

> *"I bike many places and whenever I need to get to South Lake Union or points west I must go out of my way to cross I-5. Either way to the north, risk my life on Denny Way, or way to the south on Pine (Olive is one-way). It's annoying and discouraging for bike travel."*
>
> – An anonymous renter in Capitol Hill living three blocks from I-5

> *"I love that I live near all the businesses and nightlife of Capitol Hill, but I would go there a lot more often if crossing I-5 wasn't so miserable (loud, zero shade, smelly, ugly, etc). The Express lane entrance/exit by 9th & Pike is a hazard for a pedestrian, and the light cycles are fairly slow so crossing takes a long time."*
>
> – Jer, a moderate-income renter in Downtown living one block from I-5

> *"Living close to I-5 has impacted my mobility and safety as someone who walks, bikes, and takes transit everywhere. On my bike trying to go west, I either have to go all the way down to Pine into downtown, then north, adding 10+ minutes of travel, or attempt to cross I-5 via Denny, an extremely steep hill with heavy traffic, and no bike infrastructure. None of these crossings are accommodating for people on foot or bikes."*
>
> – Marissa, a renter in Capitol Hill

> *"I'm frequently nearly run over by people speeding to the access streets. Local transit is often blocked by out-of-town commuters queuing for on-ramps. The massive freeway is ugly and demoralizing."*
>
> – Kate, a renter in Downtown living one block from I-5

> *"Olive and Pine's I-5 overpasses leave much to be desired. I feel uncomfortably close to traffic even as a pedestrian, and as a bicyclist I would feel unplanned for (simply looking at the current infrastructure deters me from even trying to bike in this area). This is exacerbated by the traffic behavior in this area: as a pedestrian/bicyclist, cars feel impatient and dangerous, especially those going downhill on Boren attempting to get onto I-5."*
>
> – Melanie, a renter in Downtown living two blocks from I-5

These fears, avoidances, and negative experiences – amplified by poor street infrastructure and freeway-related traffic – demonstrate a serious lack of connectivity, regardless of the physical presence of overpasses. Neighborhoods are not "fully connected" by the overpasses.

In the first round of the RCN program, the majority 11 of freeway lid projects that applied for funding were successful. The 11 winning projects represent one-quarter of the projects receiving funding. This is a strong showing that demonstrates freeway lid projects in communities of all types are eligible, including those with existing street crossings.

We examined crossing conditions at some of those successful freeway lid projects:

- Oak Park, MI. Construction grant of $21.7 million to replace an existing lid. This community is fully connected by that existing lid (and two other adjacent lids) and yet received funding to get "reconnected" again.
- Little Rock, AR. Planning grant of $2 million for a lid feasibility study on a portion of I-30 that is actively being reconstructed. The study area is small and already crossed by two overpasses at 6th and 9th Streets and yet the project received a grant.
- Indianapolis, IN. Planning grant of $2 million for a lid design study on a portion of Interstate 65/70. This is currently an elevated freeway with streets crossing under the freeway at every block between in the study area, so the community is already physically well-connected and yet received a grant. The surrounding properties are parking lots and commercial buildings with no residencies immediately nearby.
- Philadelphia, PA. Planning grant of $1.8 million for a feasibility study around lidding Interstate 676 (Vine Street Expressway). This expressway is below-grade and has street overpasses at every block in the study area, so the community is already physically well-connected.
- Austin, TX. Planning grant of $1.1 million for evaluating potential lids over Interstate 35. This is currently an elevated freeway with streets crossing under the freeway at almost every block between in the study area, so the community is already physically well-connected.
- Atlanta, GA. Planning grant of $1.1 million for continued studies of lidding Interstate 75/85, a 14- project similar in scale to this Seattle project. This freeway is below-grade and already has street overpasses at every block in the study area, so the community is already physically well-connected.
- Portland, OR. Planning grant of $800,000 for lid development and management studies of lidding Interstate 5 in the Rose Quarter. This freeway is below-grade and already has street overpasses at every block in the study area, so the community is already physically well-connected.

Another unique aspect of the Seattle I-5 study area is that it has 9 on-ramps and off-ramps that further reduce connectivity for people outside of cars. As noted above, freeway-related surface street traffic is a major impediment to mobility in the area. Seattle has more ramps in its lid study area than most or all of the other recently awarded lid projects. Freeway ramps are focal points for high-speed driving, increased risk of collisions, clogged intersections during peak periods, and overall degraded pedestrian connectivity.

Figure 9 - Google Earth image of Vine Street Expressway in Philadelphia showing five street overpasses and one on-ramps or off-ramps in a distance of less than a ½ mile where a freeway lid is planned.

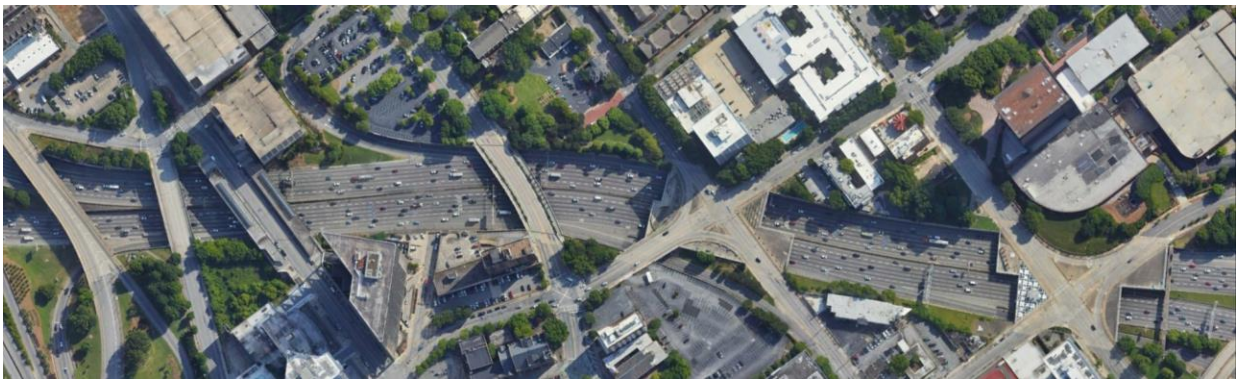


Figure 10 - Google Earth image of Interstate 75/85 in Atlanta showing eight street overpasses, existing public space elements over the freeway, and four on-ramps or off-ramps within a distance of a ½ mile where a freeway lid is planned

Figure 11 - Google Earth image of Interstate 5 in Portland showing five street overpasses and two freeway on-ramps and off-ramps within a distance of a ¼ mile where a freeway lid is planned.

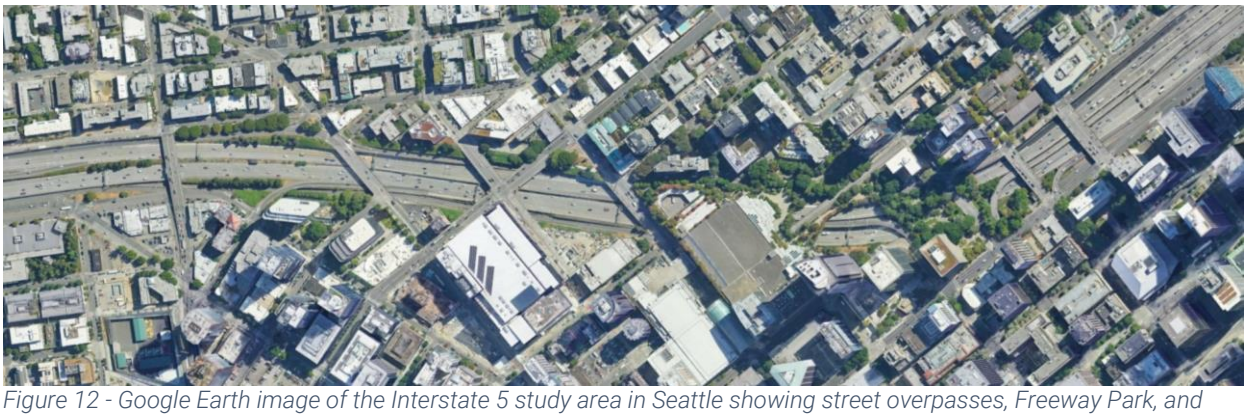


Figure 12 - Google Earth image of the Interstate 5 study area in Seattle showing street overpasses, Freeway Park, and nine freeway on-ramps and off-ramps where a freeway lid is planned.

5 - Other Equity Considerations and City Policy Support

Seattle has one of the highest concentrations of freeway lids in the country, but most existing lids in the city and nearby have mostly been built and planned in affluent, low-density neighborhoods that have little or no multifamily housing and ample parks and tree canopy.

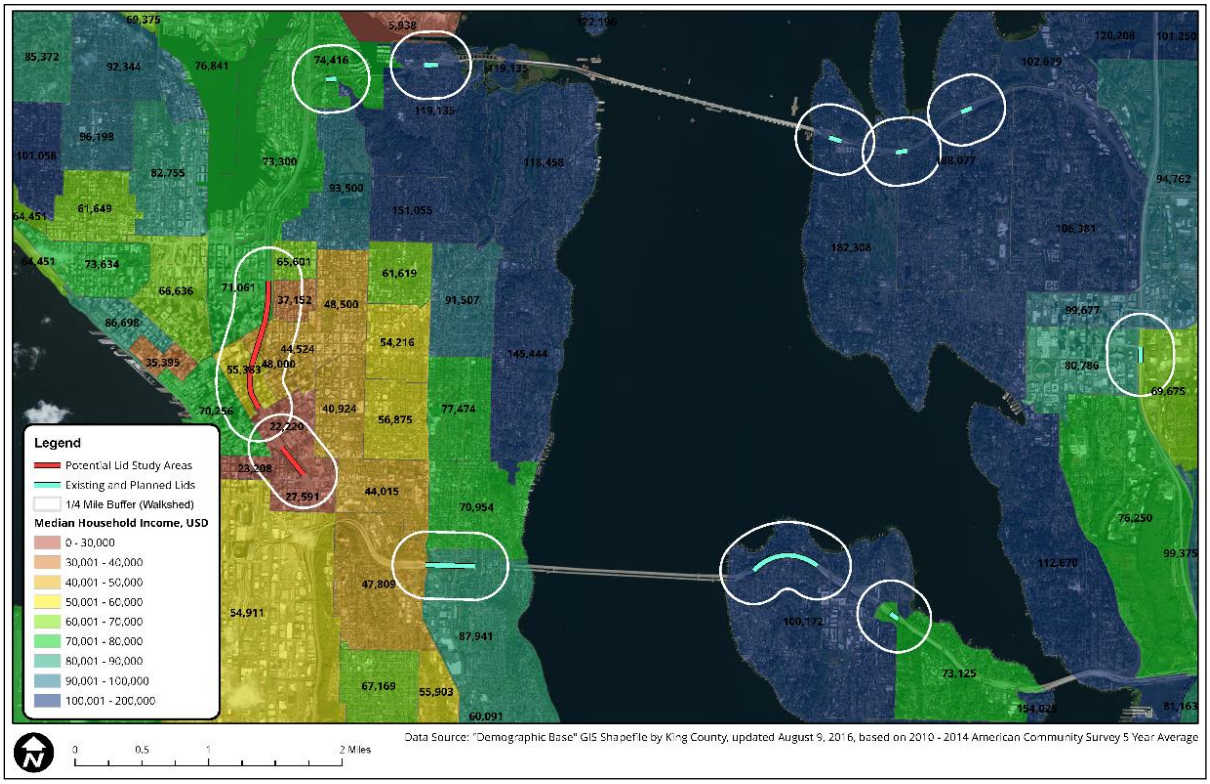


Figure 13 - Median household incomes near existing and planned lids in King County

Academic research provides further evidence of disparities. A 2018 study by Douglas Houston and Michelle E. Zuñiga at the University of California, Irvine, titled "Put a park on it: How freeway caps are reconnecting and greening divided cities", analyzed the environmental justice aspects of many freeway lid parks across the country. Considering poverty rates and rates of people of color living near the lids, the study found the current freeway lids in Seattle's central neighborhoods are most equitably located among lids in the region.

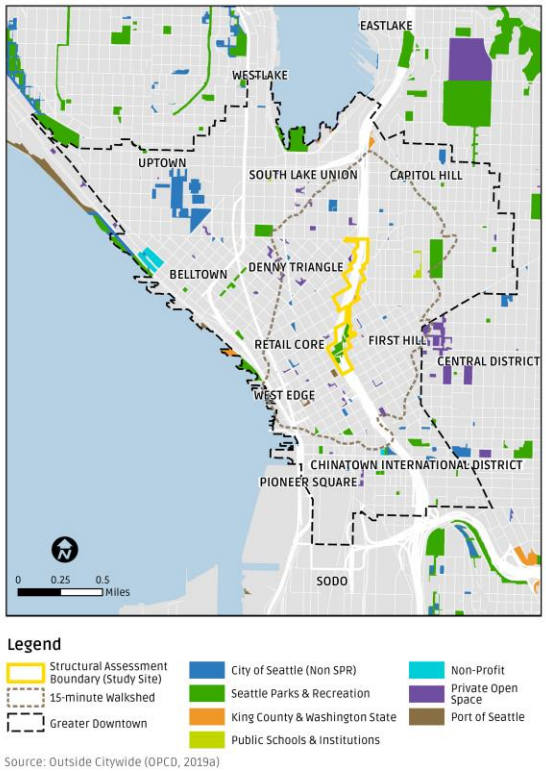
Project	Area (acres)	Within ½ Mile		Within 1 Mile	
		Poverty	People of Color	Poverty	People of Color
Freeway Park	5.2	1.6	0.9	2	1.1
Sam Smith Park	10.3	1.5	1.6	1.5	1.6
Mercer Island Lids	15.0	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.7
SR-520 Eastside Lids	6.1	0.4	0.7	0.2	0.7

Figure 14 - Freeway lid equity parity index for the Seattle metro area

In the table above, a score less than 1.0 (red) indicates the rates of poverty and minority identities are lower than the metro region, and a score more than 1.0 (green) indicates the rates are higher. In other words, the larger the value, the more equitably the lid park is located. **Freeway Park, in the central Seattle I-5 lid study area, scores very high, demonstrating that additional lids in this area will be equitably located.**

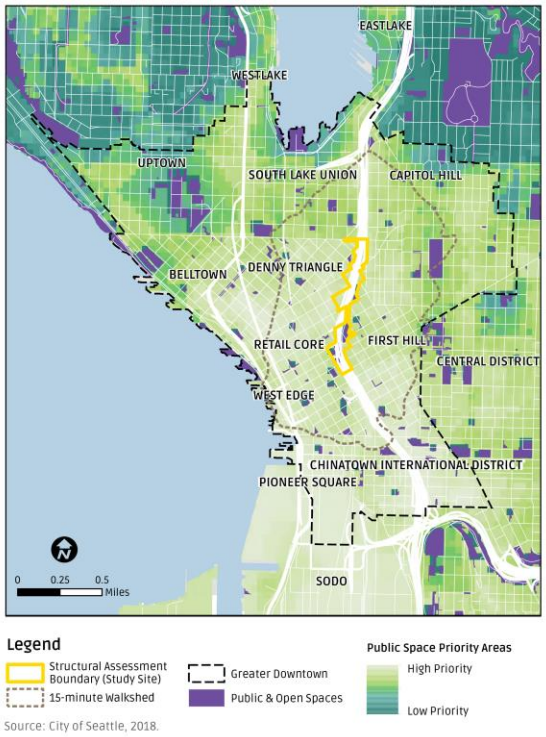
The residential and mixed-use areas around I-5 in central Seattle have the greatest inequities and highest priorities for investment in parks and public space, according to the 2020 I-5 Lid Feasibility Study.

Figure 7-18. Parks and Public Space in Greater Downtown



Source: Outside Citywide (OPCD, 2019a)

Figure 7-19. Public Space Equity Map for Greater Downtown



Source: City of Seattle, 2018.

Inequities will persist into the future with who is allowed to live near Seattle's lid parks. In Montlake, the new lid over SR-520 will provide a new park space and transit access but is surrounded by exclusive single-family zoning and expensive homes (median home price: $1.37 million). When the only neighborhood grocery store (which was also a de facto social hangout) was demolished in 2020 for the highway reconstruction, there were no options for that business to rebuild elsewhere in the neighborhood or on the lid itself.

Comparatively, the zoning around the central Seattle I-5 lid study area is intensively mixed and allows for continued dense, inclusive, and evolving development with a variety of housing.

Figure 15 – Left: Zoning in Montlake at SR-520. Right: Zoning in the central Seattle neighborhoods near I-5

6 - Next Steps and Outline of Scope of Work

The Seattle Council is advancing Resolution 32100, which includes this direction to OPCD:

> *C.* ***Seek federal grants, including a federal Reconnecting Communities grant,*** *to continue technical work and engagement, including work to develop specific proposals for lids in the context of necessary seismic work for Interstate 5 and other lidding opportunities that may arise…*

Numerous other adopted City of Seattle policies support the Lid I-5 project:

- **Seattle 2023 State Legislative Agenda**
  We are committed to expanding the use of freeway lids across the city, including on Interstate 5 and State Route 520, to reconnect neighborhoods and provide public land with amenities such as affordable housing, open space, and pedestrian and bike connections to transit stations.
- **Seattle Comprehensive Plan, Growth Strategy policy 3.13 (2022)**
  Preserve, strengthen, and, as opportunities permit, reconnect Seattle's street grid as a means to knit together neighborhoods and to connect areas of the city. Support efforts to use lids and other connections over highways that separate neighborhoods, especially when such lids provide opportunities to reconnect neighborhoods and provide amenities such as affordable housing, open space, or pedestrian and bike connections to transit stations.
- **Seattle Comprehensive Plan, Transportation policy 3.12 (2016)**
  Look for opportunities to reestablish or improve connections across State and Federal Highways by creating new crossings, enhancing streets where Highways cross overhead, or constructing lids, especially where these can also enhance opportunities for development or open space, affordable housing, and neighborhood cohesion.
- **Seattle Comprehensive Plan, Parks policy 1.17 (2016)**
  Create innovative opportunities to use existing public land, especially in the right of way, for open space and recreation, including street plazas, pavement to parks, parklets, lidding of reservoirs and highways, and community gardens.
- **Imagine Greater Downtown, big idea "Stitch the I-5 Divide" (2019)**
  In 2035, neighborhoods divided by I-5 are reunited with new and enhanced connections, vital public spaces, and community destinations.

The 2020 I-5 Lid Feasibility Study recommends numerous next steps to be funded, most of which will be addressed by the grant scope of work (as currently drafted).

2020 I-5 Lid Feasibility Study Next Steps	Lid I-5 Response in Draft Application Materials
Considerations of the future of the I-5 system	The proposed RCN grant scope of work includes collaborating with WSDOT on their I-5 master plan, I-5 Seattle seismic study, and I-5 ramp reconfiguration study.
Considerations of planning and policy for Downtown Seattle	The proposed RCN grant scope of work includes integration of a public lands demand analysis and a land use/urban design master plan.
Considerations of reframing the project limits	The proposed RCN grant scope of work expands a block north to Thomas Street and seven blocks south to Yesler Way with additional feasibility analysis for those areas.

2020 I-5 Lid Feasibility Study Next Steps	Lid I-5 Response in Draft Application Materials
Considerations of the risk appetite of the real estate development industry	The proposed RCN grant scope of work includes explorations of partnerships for lid development.
Agency alignment	This is ongoing at the leadership levels of the City of Seattle and WSDOT.
Community engagement	The proposed RCN grant scope of work includes a limited amount of community engagement targeted to under-represented constituents, with more robust engagement to occur in parallel with updates to the Urban Center plans (Downtown, South Lake Union, Capitol Hill/First Hill).
Downtown Seattle transportation and traffic impact study	Lid I-5 secured $300,000 in state funding for WSDOT to conduct an I-5 Ramp Reconfiguration Study by the end of 2024. The proposed RCN grant scope of work includes coordination with WSDOT's I-5 ramp study, traffic modeling, and multimodal transportation analysis.
Geotechnical explorations and assessment of site conditions	The proposed RCN grant scope of work does not include this, because the City will likely be able to use the results of WSDOT's ongoing I-5 seismic study to at least partially support this need.
Development of a Preferred Alternative and Master Plan	The proposed RCN grant scope of work includes a land use/urban design master plan that is used an interim step to defining a preferred alternative as part of future environmental SEPA/NEPA analysis.

Figure 16 - Next steps

The RCN grant is currently the best prospect for the once-in-a-generation opportunity to advance the lidding of I-5 in central Seattle, a vision that has been held by Seattle citizens for 70 years. We are open to continued communication at any time. We look forward to working with OPCD submit an application by the September 28 deadline.

Sincerely,

Lid I-5 Steering Committee

Scott Bonjukian, co-chair
John Feit, co-chair
Natalie Bicknell
Jim Castanes
Michael Connolly
Liz Dunn
Bruno Lambert
Yinan Liu
Tina Morehead
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Katy Ricchiuto

Lid I-5 Coalition Partner Organizations

Seattle Parks Foundation
Allied Arts
American Institute of Architects – Seattle Chapter
Capitol Hill Ecodistrict
Central Seattle Greenways
Community Roots Housing
Downtown Seattle Association
First Hill Improvement Association
Futurewise
Freeway Park Association
Melrose Promenade
Meridian Condominium Homeowners Association
Northwest Progressive Institute
Parents for a Better Downtown Seattle
Pike/Pine Urban Neighborhood Council
The Urbanist

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