EDMONDS CROSSING

Connecting ferries, bus & rail

Chapter 1 Purpose of and Need for the Action

The Edmonds Crossing project is located in the City of Edmonds in southwestern Snohomish County, Washington. The project vicinity is shown in Figure 1-1.

The project proposes to relocate the existing state ferry terminal from Main Street to another site farther from the downtown core. In the process, a multimodal center would be established that would integrate the ferry, rail, and transit services into a single complex. The new complex would provide an upgraded ferry terminal designed to meet the operational requirements for accommodating forecast ferry ridership demand; a new rail station designed to meet intercity (Amtrak) passenger service and commuter rail loading requirements; a transit center that would meet local bus system and regional transit system loading requirements; facilities for accommodating both vehicular commuters and walk-on passengers of the available transportation modes (parking, drop-off areas, retail and concessionaire space, and waiting areas); and a system linking these facilities to allow for the safe movement of users.

1.1 Purpose of the Action

The project is intended to provide a long-term solution to current operations and safety conflicts between ferry, rail, automobile, bus, and pedestrian traffic in downtown Edmonds.

1.2 Project History

The City of Edmonds incorporated in 1890. Beginning on April 16, 1923, the Joyce Brothers used the city wharf to provide cross-sound ferry service to Kingston. In 1928, Puget Sound Navigation purchased the ferry operation, and in 1929 Blackball Steamship Company took over the three Edmonds ferry routes to Kingston, Port Ludlow, and Victoria. The Blackball ferry system was transferred to Washington State Ferries (WSF) in 1951, and WSF has primarily provided service between Edmonds and Kingston since that time.

WSF has implemented a number of improvements to the ferry service in response to increased travel demands on the system. Major improvements have been made to the access highway, holding area, and toll facilities, but the ferry dock itself has remained relatively unchanged for 40 years.

Recent history indicates continued increases in the use of diverse transportation modes in Edmonds. The current ferry route from Edmonds to Kingston is one leg of State Route (SR) 104, which is classified as a portion of the National Highway System because it plays a critical role as a transportation link between the urban Seattle area and the Olympic and Kitsap Peninsulas. In 1988, transportation needs for all WSF routes were evaluated in the *Cross Sound Analysis* (State of Washington Legislative Transportation Committee, 1988), prepared for the Legislative Transportation Committee. This study considered the service

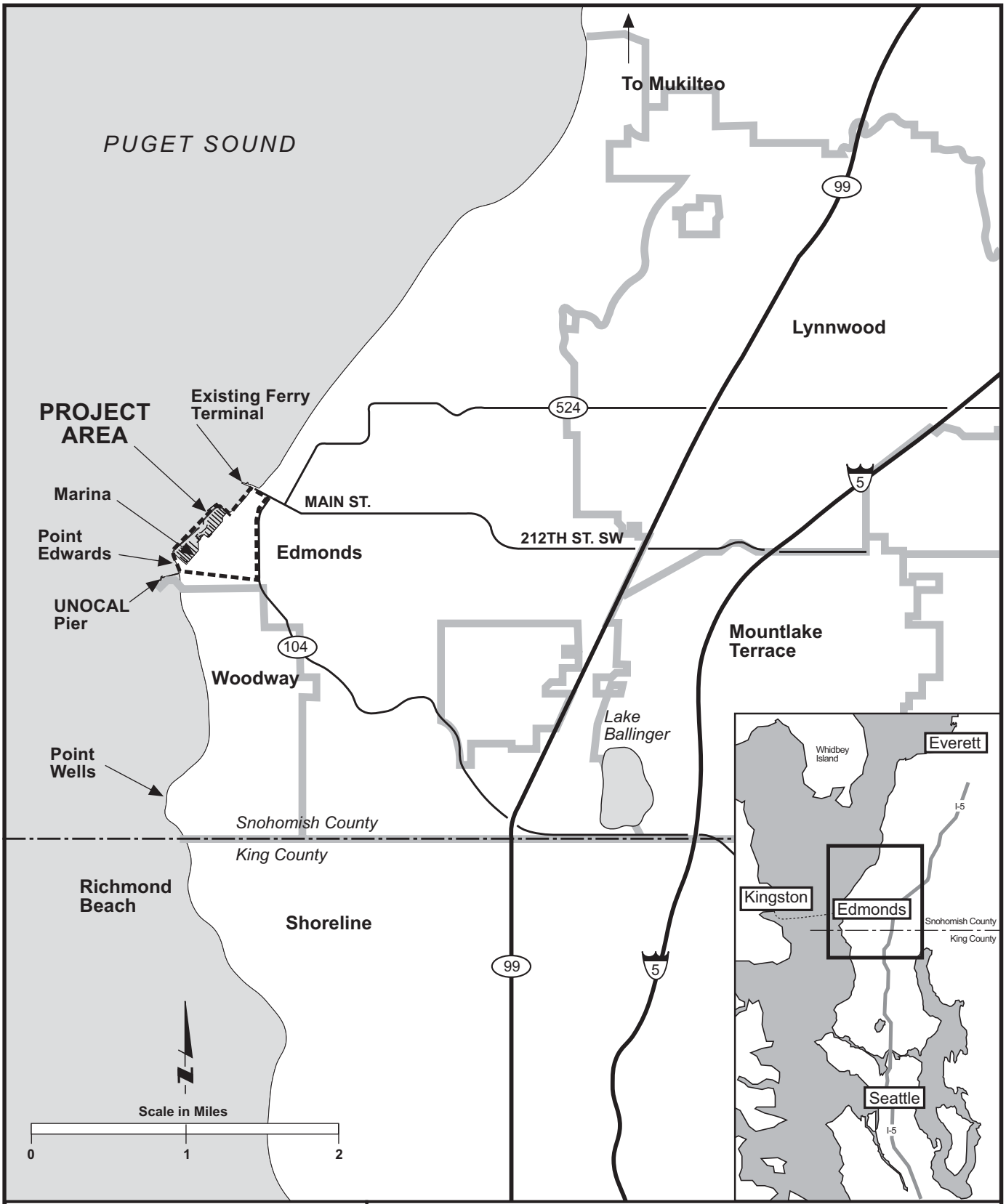

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Figure 1-1

Project Vicinity Map

154090.G1.07.A1_T092004007SEA • 1-1 Vicinity Map • 9/24/04 • dk/gm

requirements, operating costs, and vessel assignments for each route. For the Edmonds-Kingston route, the addition of a third vessel was recommended. Prior to 1988, a third vessel supplementing service was common during peak recreational travel periods. Two 160-car super class ferries were assigned to the route in the early 1990s. These smaller vessels were replaced with two 200-plus car Jumbo class vessels in 1998. Full implementation of a third vessel on this route will occur when more vessels are available. In order to accommodate more vessels and reduced headways, WSF requires additional capacity for docking, vehicle queuing, and related operational and public facilities. Traffic volumes and ferry queues now create a major impediment to the City's future downtown and waterfront redevelopment and the public's access to the shoreline.

In 1962, the first small-boat harbor was opened on the Edmonds waterfront. It was expanded twice and now has several hundred slips with extensive pleasure boat and fishing craft activity. Several stretches of beach south of the current ferry dock have also been developed as public parks, increasing pedestrian traffic in the area.

With the resumption of Amtrak passenger train service to Vancouver, British Columbia, increased train traffic disrupts ferry schedules and escalates safety concerns to an even greater degree than in the past. Community Transit's plans to improve the local bus transportation network and to provide connecting links to the regional transit system will increase multimodal needs of this area even more.

The history of these conflicting needs culminated in the City of Edmonds, WSF, and Community Transit signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in November 1993. The MOU called for the cooperative development of solutions to the conflicts between the City's growth plans and ferry traffic. In response to that agreement, preliminary engineering and environmental analysis of alternatives began in late 1993.

In recent years, a number of studies and public involvement projects have been undertaken to determine how to meet the variety of transportation needs that converge at Edmonds. A 1992 study concluded that relocating the ferry terminal was feasible. In 1994, alternative locations for a multimodal transportation facility were analyzed. Since 1994, further environmental review and facility definition resulted in a recommendation that an alternative site be developed as a multimodal facility serving ferry, rail, bus, pedestrian, and bicycle travel needs.

1.3 Need for the Action

The existing facilities are inadequate due to inefficient system linkages, inadequate capacity, travel and transportation demand, modal interrelationships, social and economic factors, operational and safety conflicts, and congestion. Each reason contributing to the need for the proposed action is discussed below in detail.

1.3.1 System Linkage

Central Edmonds is currently served by multiple modes of transportation, each with separate terminal facilities. The lack of an integrated terminal serving all modes of travel makes transfers between modes cumbersome and time-consuming,

particularly for pedestrians. The terminals for ferry, rail, and transit modes are not sited appropriately, nor are the connecting linkages efficient from the user's perspective. Without improvement, inconvenience and delay to travelers could be expected to increase in the future.

The project is a component of the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) developed for the Puget Sound area, and it supports regional objectives by facilitating intermodal transfers and contributing to reductions in commuter travel by single-occupancy vehicles (SOVs). PSRC has developed a congestion management system that includes objectives of increased usage of transit, pedestrian, and bicycle modes. Without this project, incentives for commuting by bus, rail, bicycle, or on foot would be diminished.

Inadequate facilities, conflicts in operations, and inappropriate locations of terminals currently hamper the transfer and connection functions among modes. These factors result in inefficiencies and hazards in the movement of persons and goods. Specifically, the following conditions are encountered on a recurring basis:

- Routine loading and unloading of ferry vessels results in the disruption of the normal flow of vehicles and pedestrians between downtown Edmonds and the waterfront, reducing capacity and creating potential hazards. These conflicts will occur more frequently after a third vessel is assigned to the route and ferry headways are reduced from 40 to 45 minutes to 25 to 30 minutes.

- Ferry loading and unloading are interrupted frequently by trains moving along the mainline railroad tracks. This at-grade rail crossing slows the movement of people and goods and creates a safety hazard. On at least one occasion, heavy train traffic prevented an emergency vehicle carrying a critical patient to the hospital from getting off the arriving ferry. These conflicts will occur more frequently with the addition of commuter rail service (volumes are expected to increase from the current 35 trains per day to as many as 70 trains per day in 2020 and 104 in 2030).

- When buses access the stop near the ferry terminal, they must maneuver through difficult intersections, crossing the railroad tracks twice. Frequently, they conflict with loading or unloading ferry traffic.

- The rail station is located away from the ferry terminal and across the tracks from the nearest bus stop, discouraging the use of transit and rail modes for ferry access.

- Bicyclists must wait in the auto holding area and load before or after vehicle loading, impeding the overall loading process and creating safety concerns.

In a future without the proposed project, conditions for intermodal travelers would further deteriorate. As demand grows, the inefficiencies resulting from these conflicts would increase, and accident hazards would worsen. Without improvements, the movement of people and goods would be increasingly interrupted by the bottleneck at the Edmonds ferry terminal.

1.3.2 Capacity

The existing ferry terminal provides only a single ferry mooring slip, which is inadequate to serve current peak travel demands. The single slip limits flexibility and creates difficulty in adhering to ferry schedules. These limitations will be aggravated when ferry headways are reduced from 40 to 45 minutes to 25 to 30 minutes, as planned with the addition of a third vessel on the Edmonds-Kingston route.

Capacity for loading and unloading the ferries is constrained by the many conflicts discussed above. The capacity of the vehicle holding areas is insufficient to accommodate the efficient loading of vehicles onto the ferry. Even though the existing holding areas provide a theoretical capacity of 510 vehicles, only 180 of these vehicles are between the tollbooth and the ferry. The remaining spaces are along SR 104, creating congestion and safety concerns. The capacity is difficult to manage in an efficient manner because traffic moves forward sporadically, leaving gaps and causing drivers to keep engines running, which increases pollution. Consolidating the ticketing functions and providing additional holding capacity are required to serve future demand effectively.

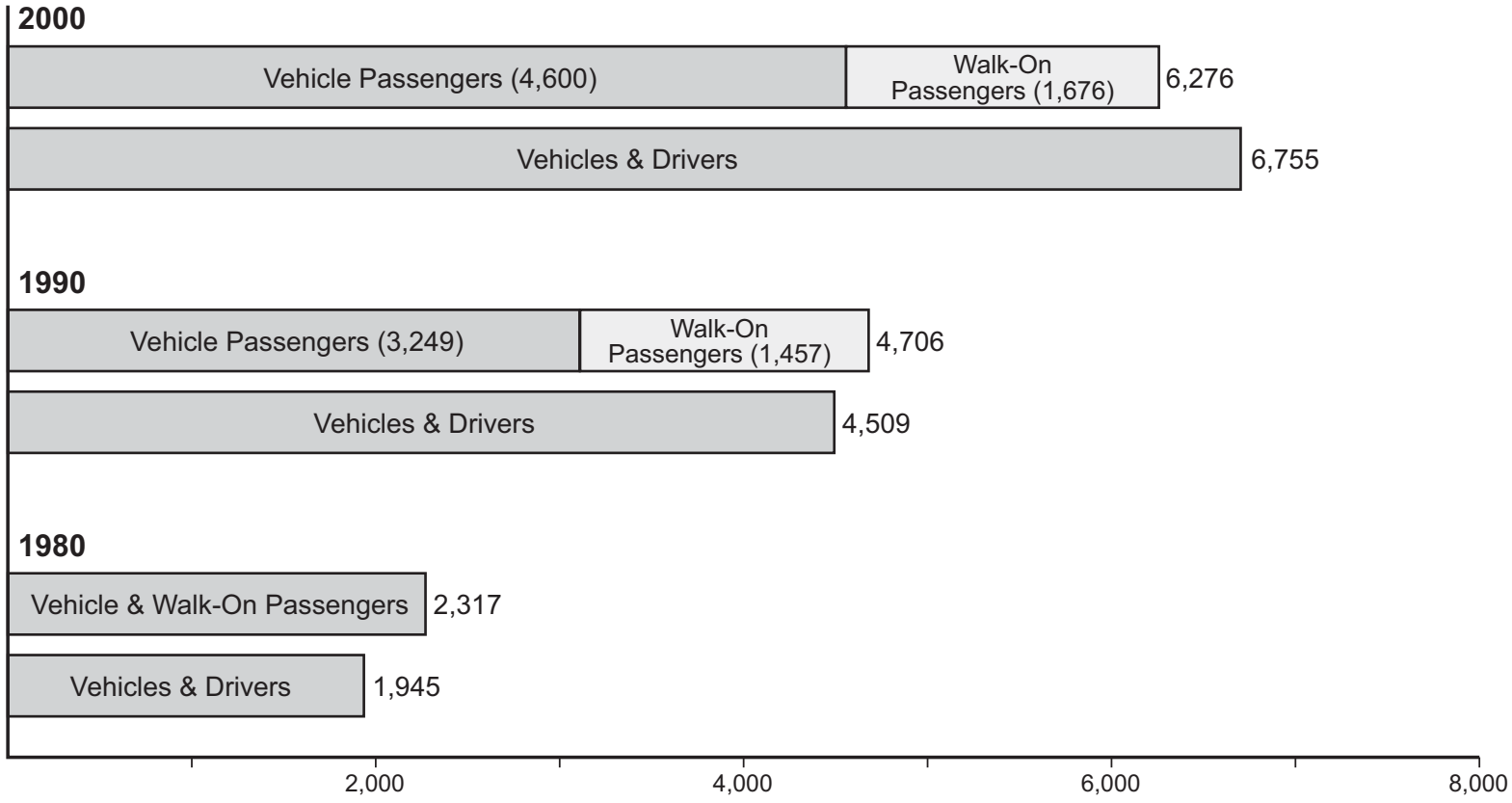
Finally, using SR 104 to hold ferry traffic diminishes its capacity to serve other existing and potential land uses in and around downtown Edmonds. Capacity along SR 104 is needed to serve potential development of parcels in the downtown area.

1.3.3 Transportation Demand

The Edmonds-Kingston ferry route is the fastest-growing route in the state's ferry system. Figure 1-2 shows historical growth in passenger and vehicle demand from 1980 to 2000. Ridership more than doubled during the 1980s, increasing from nearly 1,950 vehicles and more than 4,250 persons daily in 1980 to over 4,500 vehicles and 9,200 persons daily in 1990. Ridership also increased appreciably in the 1990s, growing by more than 40 percent to over 6,750 vehicles and 13,000 persons daily during 2000.

The 1992 *Cross Sound Transportation Study* (Booz-Allen and Hamilton Study Team, 1992) concluded that there was no reasonable alternative to the ferry service to meet the projected increases in travel demand.

The PSRC based its Transportation Element of Vision 2020 on the Edmonds-Kingston ferry service growing to support the allocation of population within the region. PSRC Destination 2030 identifies the Edmonds Crossing project as a ferry project on the Metropolitan Transportation System and thus a crucial element to the mobility needs and economic vitality of the region.



Source: Washington State Department of Revenue;
Washington State Office of Financial Management, Forecast Division.

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Figure 1-2
Historical Edmonds Daily Ferry Ridership

Demand for transit and rail services is expected to increase in the future. Community Transit is involved in ongoing programs to improve transit services in response to patron needs. Resuming intercity rail service between Seattle and Vancouver, British Columbia, has resulted in additional railroad activity. Voters approved development of a regional transit system in November 1996, which will implement commuter rail service between Tacoma and Everett. In the absence of terminal improvements, conflicts among the various modes would be further aggravated.

Increased demand also is anticipated for walk-on passengers, reinforcing the need for separate auto/passenger loading capability and a more efficient means of transfer among modes. In 1999, WSF conducted a survey of system users. Following are some of the key findings from this survey that support the increasing demands for coordinated services to attract more nonvehicular users:

- Overall, work, school, and business travel accounted for 67 percent of P.M. peak period trip purposes in 1999, up from just under 60 percent in 1993.
- The percentage of walk-on riders using bus or shuttle modes to access and egress the ferry terminals has more than quadrupled since the 1993. Specifically, approximately 3 percent of the walk-on P.M. peak period passengers accessed the ferry terminal using the bus in 1993, compared to approximately 13 percent in 1999.
- In 1993 approximately 3 percent of the passengers used a bus or shuttle to depart from the ferry terminal, and in 1999 approximately 8 percent of the passengers utilized a bus or shuttle.
- Approximately 32 percent of riders may have had a car on both sides of the water, with 17.5 percent paying for parking on each side.

1.3.4 Modal Interrelationships

Interface between the various modes of transportation is currently disjointed and practically nonexistent in Edmonds. Users must find ways to shift modes of transportation with practically no assistance under the current operations. Buses serve the area adjacent to the ferry terminal but do not arrive in a coordinated manner and have very little space to stop for passenger service. Train service is provided by Amtrak at a rail station approximately 1/3 mile from the ferry terminal. Sound Transit provides Sounder commuter rail service at a platform adjacent to the Amtrak rail station. Very few opportunities exist for parking to allow people to leave their vehicles and use other modes of transportation. Bicycles are provided limited space for queuing, and storage is provided remotely in a parking area across the railroad tracks from the terminal. In total, the existing Main Street facility is wholly inadequate to serve modal shifts.

The proposed Edmonds Crossing Multimodal Center would correct the above situation and would provide for new opportunities for leaving the SOVs behind. A fully functional rail terminal would coordinate with ample bus facilities that would allow better scheduling. Both short- and long-term parking would be provided to

allow vehicles to be left behind while using alternative modes. Ample space would be available to fully serve all travelers needs and to encourage commuters to use modes other than their SOV. Parking access and fare schedules would encourage users to leave behind their vehicles.

1.3.5 Social and Economic Factors

During ferry loading and unloading, nonferry traffic and access to local businesses are interrupted. Pedestrian movement between the recreational opportunities on the Puget Sound waterfront and downtown is disrupted. Downtown Edmonds has become increasingly cut off from the waterfront by the heavy volume of ferry traffic.

The *Edmonds Downtown/Waterfront Plan* (City of Edmonds, 1994) is intended to better integrate the downtown core with the waterfront, improve shoreline pedestrian access and traffic circulation, and encourage mixed-use development. Current conditions as described in this section limit the city's ability to achieve these plan goals by making it difficult to move between the two areas, minimizing the value of the shoreline as a public resource and amenity, and adversely affecting the potential for redevelopment.

1.3.6 Safety

The multiple conflicts occurring at the Edmonds ferry terminal give rise to a number of traffic hazards. The SR 104 and Dayton Street intersection is one of Edmonds' high-accident locations, and the existing ferry landing and toll booth also experience high rates of accidents. The at-grade railroad crossing also causes safety concerns. The volume of ferry traffic will rise after the addition of a third vessel and, in the absence of improvements, increased accidents are likely.

1.3.7 Congestion

SR 104 connects the Edmonds ferry terminal to Interstate 5 (I-5), SR 99, and SR 522, serving more than 80 percent of ferry traffic. Currently, ferry traffic backups extend along SR 104 approximately 3/4 mile south of Pine Street and many times in excess of 1 mile. These queues create conflicts at the intersection and interrupt the flow of through-traffic on the highway. In the future without the proposed project, queues could extend 1.5 miles beyond the Pine Street intersection. Queues of this length would severely impact traffic circulation in the central Edmonds area and along SR 104 nearly to the Westgate area.

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