

Senator Maria Cantwell

West Seattle Bridge Reopening Event

September 16th, 2022

Cantwell Remarks

[\[VIDEO\]](#) [\[AUDIO\]](#)

Cantwell: Well thank you Mayor and you can see he's wearing purple ahead of the big game tomorrow, and he already told me his prediction of the game but you can get that out of him yourself for the press. Well mayor thank you so much for your leadership and thank you so much for everything you are doing to continue to push Seattle in the right direction.

I want to offer a special thanks to everyone who has been involved with this including my colleague Senator Murray, Congresswoman Jayapal, Commissioner Mohamed, and obviously the team that was mentioned as part of the task force, former Greg Nickels and Pauline Lopez for their contribution on this. Obviously Sam Zimbabwe who is here, but Mayor Durkan who literally had to lead one of the most challenging aspects of this project in making the decisions and moving us forward. I want to special thanks to both of you for your leadership, and to Heather Marx who has been a warrior ever since. Okay she's hiding back over there, but I'm telling you she probably didn't sleep in the past two years. And all of the Seattle department of transportation for their great work and for all of the labor organizations for all the work in the project that became a little more complex than we were originally thinking. So I know we have iron workers building trades, laborers, concrete masons, electricians, operators, teamsters so thank you to all of them

West Seattle is definitely a unique and historic part of our city. It is a connector also to a global economy. And overnight the bridge shut down caused an extra six miles of detours through the congested first avenue south bridge, added 30 minutes to normal- what would be a 15 minute commute to downtown. And more than 84,000 drivers, and 25,000 bus riders had to find a new way to work. So come this Sunday the nightmare of this congestion is coming to an end.

I heard from a registered nurse and a lifelong Seattle resident, she was worried about whether her and her neighbors would be able to get to the emergency room if they were needed. I heard from a partner of a Delridge resident who said he struggled to get his daughter to preschool before getting to their own job as a middle school teachers. The sudden bridge closure added so much commute time for them that they were concerned about whether they could keep their jobs in that capacity.

We heard from people on Vashon Island and Southworth Ferry about how hard it was to get to their jobs and get to their medical appointments. So without the bridge drivers lost their direct route and they had to really jam through the freight traffic of East Marginal Way. So not only did that slow down commuters but it also slowed down our freight and freight capacity. West Seattle felt the worst of the pain with its residents, but it also slowed down a supply chain that was critical to moving goods in the northwest.

So we wanted to do one thing and that is to make sure that the US Department of Transportation knew how important the West Seattle Bridge was to our residents and to our economy. Not only did we ask Secretary Pete Buttigieg for help, but we convened meetings with the Deputy Secretary Polly Trottenberg to tour the bridge and the corridor that we mentioned earlier, East Marginal Way. Some people are also recounting how we all crawled through the bridge at one point time. But through all of that we held meetings with Mayor Durkan and her team and Washington DOT to make sure that the federal government saw how critical this project was to the West Seattle residents and to that national supply chain. And working directly with their leadership and Secretary Buttigieg we looked for funds that were critical.

Senator Murray, Representative Jayapal, Representative Smith and I authored a letter saying that we wanted some of the INFRA grant dollars. These are freight funds that were specifically for corridors that had to move a lot of freight. So we got \$11 million dollars from that. Not only did that help us on the upper bridge, it helped us on the lower bridge which also had problems, people may not realize that but those dollars were also used to help improve that corridor.

That allowed the city to string 46 miles and 92 tons of steel and cable to compress and reinforce the bridge structure which was so important. And obviously the news has done a great job of covering the epoxy crack injections and the carbon fiber wrapping and everything that is there to stabilize the bridge for the future.

The project also received money from the Local Bridge grant program \$12 million, a Highway Infrastructure Grant program of \$7.5 million and a Surface Transportation contributed \$6.9 million. So all in total a big chunk, \$37 million from the Federal Government, to say yes, we understand how important West Seattle is to the city of Seattle and to the economy of Washington State.

Overall, this corridor carries goods to international markets from 13 states supporting 20,000 jobs and generating \$8.7 billion in business output. So a fully functioning West Seattle Bridge is really important to our nation's economy. So again, I want to thank all our federal partners, and thank the city of Seattle, and to thank everybody involved in the Department of Transportation's locally and nationally. Sunday is going to be a day that hundreds of Puget Sound residents have been waiting for. I'm so glad we're going to be giving it to them.

I've noted that five West Seattle breweries also collaborated on a special IPA to mark this occasion that will be served at a beer garden just across the waterway there. The brewers are calling it Reunited IPA. They picked a perfect name.

When the bridge shut down two years ago, it turned West Seattle into an accidental island. It cut us off from a key part of our city, a key part of our history, and a key part of our tradition. And finally, that will be reunited. So thanks everyone for the hard work, and so appreciate the fact that this project is seeing the completion. Thank you.

Now I would like to introduce Congresswoman Jayapal someone who never stops working, and been a key player on a lot of our important policy issues including climate. Thank you, Congresswoman Jayapal.