Talking Points
Tunnel Construction Issues

- This morning's story in the *Seattle Times* about a sinkhole above the Brightwater conveyance tunnel and last week's news of the collapse of a concrete building near a vertical shaft adjacent to a light rail tunnel in Cologne, Germany raises questions about construction of bored tunnels.
- Safety is the top priority for WSDOT during any construction project and the agency has an excellent safety record. Nationally and internationally there are examples of construction problems – form work collapses during bridge and building construction and tower crane collapses during bridge construction.
- This is why WSDOT maintains a strong oversight role before, during and after construction to review and monitor safety designs and construction methods.
- We are still receiving information from each of the projects to understand what went wrong and will work with the civil engineering community to ensure it doesn't happen here.
- The overall record for safety during tunnel construction continues to be excellent – the I-90 Mount Baker bored tunnel and the recently completed Sound Transit Beacon Hill light rail tunnel.
- These incidents are examples of why WSDOT is taking steps to plan for construction of the SR 99 bored tunnel in the dense urban environment of downtown Seattle.
    - Safety begins with design. Last year's decision to proceed with a single bore tunnel rather than a twin bore tunnel reduces some of the potential risks during construction.
    - We are meeting this week with national and international tunnel experts to evaluate the current bored tunnel plan and seek input on how best to construct the tunnel under downtown Seattle.
    - We will continue to engage these and other experts to ensure construction plans incorporate lessons learned from tunnel projects around the world.
    - We will develop detailed understanding of the soil conditions under downtown Seattle. Site evaluation, beginning next week, will help us pinpoint potential trouble locations and design construction approaches that will address them.
    - These investigations and intensive monitoring during construction, similar to what was done during construction of the downtown bus tunnel, will provide for real-time changes to tunnel boring and grouting as conditions evolve.