

Where Should We Build It?

Coming up with the idea for a canal is the easy part. Can you decide which of the many suggested routes has the most merit?

Duwamish Route

- This route uses the natural outlet of Lake Washington. But the river falls 30 feet in only a few miles. Any canal along this route will require constant dredging.

Mercer Farm Route

- This route is more direct, but more expensive because of high hills, high land prices, and the need for two sets of locks.

Tramway Route

- This route is also more direct, but it is also more expensive because of high hills, high land prices, and the need for two sets of locks.

Smith Cove Route

- Security from naval attacks and a good linkup with Seattle's harbors make this the Corps' first choice. But the Great Northern Railroad has to be moved, and its owner, James J. Hill, is threatening to move the tracks all the way to Tacoma.

Salmon Bay Route

- Smith Cove and Salmon Bay are the only routes the Corps of Engineers consider to be feasible. After rejecting Smith Cove due to problems with the railroad, Salmon Bay is the top choice because it requires the least excavation and is straight enough to allow easy navigation of large log rafts.

Semple's Canal

- Due to lack of support from outside Seattle, the 1892 Rivers and Harbors Bill did not include the canal project. This opened the door for Eugene Semple, a private entrepreneur and former governor of Washington Territory, to take on the task.

Semple proposed a southern route involving excavation of two waterways and building a canal through Beacon Hill. Work began on the waterways in 1895 and on the canal in 1901. It continued despite huge boulders in the hill, problems with the 300-foot-deep cut, and increasing difficulty transporting the excavated material from the site. In 1904, the engineering, legal, and financial problems caused the project to fail. Harbor Island was created in part by excavation spoils from this project.