

DRAFT

A Comparison of the Big Dig and the Alaskan Way Viaduct Project

Many people have heard about Boston’s Central Artery/Tunnel Project, commonly referred to as “The Big Dig.” The Big Dig project faced cost overruns, scope growth, and a prolonged construction schedule, among other issues.

While replacing the Alaskan Way Viaduct will be a major project, it is important to note that the Big Dig project was on a much larger scale. Boston’s project was an eight-mile stretch with multiple tunnels and bridges. The bored tunnel is less than a quarter (1.7 miles) of what was affected in Boston.

Key Differences:

	Bored Tunnel and South End Project	Big Dig
Total length	2.5 miles	8 miles
Number of tunnels	1	3
Length of tunnels	1.7 miles	5 miles
Number of elevated structures	2	2
Number of on- and off-ramps	2	14
Total number of lane miles	12.8 miles	161 miles

Why did the Big Dig have cost overruns?

The two major reasons for cost overruns on the Big Dig were inflation and schedule delays. The original cost estimate for the Big Dig was developed according to federal regulations at the time, which formulated costs based on the construction index of the day without accounting for inflation. The project also faced significant delays that drove up this inflation. One major costly delay involved redesigning the Zakim Bunker Hill Bridge. The redesign process took three years and it is now the longest cable-stayed bridge in the world.

What measures have been taken to ensure that the cost estimates for the Alaskan Way Viaduct are accurate?

One reason for the Big Dig’s massive cost overruns was the unrealistic cost estimate used. In 2002, WSDOT developed a rigorous method for estimating and validating total project costs and duration called the Cost Estimate Validation Process (CEVP). This process not only evaluates the anticipated costs of construction, but also anticipates and evaluates the risks associated with the project that could drive up costs or delay the schedule. Since adopting CEVP, WSDOT has had an excellent record of delivering projects on time and at or below budget, and the process is being adopted as a standard by other state and federal agencies.