



## City of Seattle Seattle Planning Commission

Gregory J. Nickels, Mayor  
Barbara Wilson, Executive Director

November 9, 2006

Richard Conlin, Chair  
Council Committee of the Whole - 520 Bridge Replacement and HOV Project  
Seattle City Council  
600 4<sup>th</sup> Ave., 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Seattle, WA 98104

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Steve Sheehy

Barbara Wilson,  
Executive Director  
Casey Mills,  
Planning Analyst

### **RE: Seattle Planning Commission comments on the SR 520 Bridge and HOV Project**

Dear Councilmember Conlin:

The Seattle Planning Commission appreciates the opportunity to comment on the SR 520 Bridge and HOV Project alternatives. The Commission is an independent volunteer advisory body that provides advice and recommendations on major planning efforts. The Commission has completed a review of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) which we forwarded to you last week. We would like to offer some general comments for your consideration. We recognize that this is a challenging project that will be costly and have many impacts. We offer our thoughts on how to best measure the choice before the city:

- Any preferred alternative must meet the safety and transportation needs of Seattle residents.
- The decision on a preferred alternative must balance the potential impacts against their potential benefits for Seattle residents.
- The preferred alternative should help to achieve regional transportation and growth management goals and should be consistent with the direction of Puget Sound Regional Council's Destination 2030 plan.
- Every effort should be made to ensure the preferred alternative produces the highest level of transit integration into the region's system.
- The preferred alternative should be consistent with City planning goals and policies including Seattle's Comprehensive Plan, the Transportation Strategic Plan and Neighborhood Plans. Specifically the City should consider how each alternative will help Seattle achieve its goals of increasing transportation choices, achieve its mode choice goals, and its commitment to connecting to the region.

### **General Observations:**

Based on the above, the Planning Commission offers the following observations for your consideration in selecting a preferred alternative that will best benefit Seattle residents.

- The three alternatives and their options present a range of potential solutions. We concur with WSDOT analysis that finds the no build alternative would not meet the safety and transportation needs of Seattle residents.
- Based on our review we find that both the Six-Lane and Four-Lane alternatives outlined in the DEIS appear to be consistent with the transportation goals of the Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan prioritizes solutions that increase mobility such as transit, bike and pedestrian connections over single occupancy vehicle trips, and both alternatives are consistent with these goals.
- The Six-Lane Alternative most adequately provides for future transit needs and better addresses the region's overall goal of increasing transit mobility and transportation connectivity. We recommend that the city work with WSDOT and Sound Transit to ensure the project will accommodate light rail across the bridge and will provide the opportunity for connections at the Sound Transit Stadium station.
- All of the alternatives presented in the DEIS pose additional impacts and obviously the Six-Lane Alternative has greater impacts than the Four-Lane. We are particularly concerned about noise impacts, the health of the arboretum, the potential visual blight of the proposed sound walls, the increased impacts to fish and wildlife habitat, and the impacts to Seattle neighborhoods. We encourage the city to work with WSDOT to look at ways to minimize the footprint of this project.
- It will require a tremendous effort on the part of WSDOT to alleviate the significant effect of this project. The City of Seattle should work to ensure the inclusion of lids and other mitigation measures that benefit the surrounding neighborhoods and are included in any financing plan. Should WSDOT move forward with the Six-Lane Alternative, the City should work to ensure that an extensive effort to mitigate this option's negative impacts is undertaken. While the impacts of the Six-Lane alternative concern us a great deal, we believe the benefits of increased opportunity for both bus and high capacity transit provide a significant benefit and must be appropriately factored into your decision of a preferred alternative.
- We have concerns about the visual quality and design of the project. The bridge design, particularly the height and appearance of the sound walls, causes us much apprehension. In many locations, the benefit of noise reduction could be outweighed by the visual blight such walls would cause. Impacts might be better addressed by lowering the height of bridges and either lowering the height of or eliminating altogether the sound walls. Alternative noise mitigations such as lowering speed limits and building rubberized roadways should be explored. Because of the magnitude of this project, quality design must be further developed and not sacrificed. The current bridge design is drab and clunky. Creative ways to make the structure look more elegant should be explored, while retaining the same engineering characteristics. The new bridge will be 30 feet higher than it currently is, and will seriously detract from views and cause visual blight for surrounding communities.
- As for the choice between the Pacific Street Interchange option and Montlake Bridge option, the Commission notes that both options have advantages and disadvantages that must be carefully weighed. The Pacific Street Interchange would cause significant visual blight and environmental impacts whereas the new Montlake Bridge option would further increase congestion. The

question for the City of Seattle should be whether the impacts (visual blight, environmental impacts, etc.) outweigh the benefits (transit connections). The Pacific interchange option serves the bus transit connection better than the other options, though its impacts to the community and the environment are a major concern.

Again, we appreciate the opportunity to provide our observations on this project, recognizing the magnitude of its importance to the community and region. We remain willing to assist you as you further explore this project.

Sincerely,



Jerry Finrow, Chair  
Seattle Planning Commission

cc:  
Secretary Doug McDonald, WSDOT  
Mayor Greg Nickels  
Tim Ccis, Deputy Mayor  
Emelie East, Nathan Torgelson, Michael Mann, Mayors Office  
Michael Fong, Casey Hanewall, Council Central Staff  
Phyllis Shulman, Council Staff  
Grace Crunican, Bob Powers, Dave Allen, SDOT  
Diane Sugimura, John Rahaim, DPD  
Ken Bounds, BJ Brooks, Kevin Stoops, David Graves, Seattle Parks Department  
Karen Kiest, Guillermo Romano, Layne Cubell, Seattle Design Commission

**\* SPC RECORD OF RECUSALS AND DISCLOSURE**

*Commissioner Steve Sheehy **disclosed** that he works for Sound Transit, who is a co-lead on the project. Commissioner Sheehy **recused** himself from all Planning Commission activities and discussion on this matter.*

*Commissioner Kirsten Pennington **disclosed** that her firm CH2M Hill had a large part in writing the draft. Commissioner Pennington **recused** herself from all Planning Commission activities and discussion on this matter.*

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*Chair Finrow **disclosed** that he is employed by the University of Washington which has interest in this project but that he has no financial conflict of interest thus is not required to recuse. In addition, Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission (SEEC) Director has provided Mr. Finrow with a Advisory Opinion that determined that he has no financial interest so must disclose on the record and to SEEC office but can participate in all Commission discussion and activities on this matter.*

*Commissioner Amalia Leighton **disclosed** that her sister (who does not reside with her) is employed by EnviroIssues which contracts with WSDOT to assist in the 520 Public Involvement process. Commissioner Leighton has no financial conflict of interest and thus is not required to recuse.*

*Commissioner Kevin McDonald **disclosed** that he is employed by the City of Bellevue it has adopted an interest statement expressing support for the 6-lane alternative for the SR 520 bridge replacement. Commissioner McDonald has no direct or indirect financial conflict of interest thus is not required to recuse.*

*Commissioner Hilda Blanco **disclosed** that she is employed by the University of Washington which has a great interest in this project but that she has no financial conflict of interest thus is not required to recuse.*