



# Seattle City Council

September 27, 2010

Julie Meredith  
SR 520 Program Director  
Washington State Department of Transportation  
600 Stewart Street, Suite 520  
Seattle, WA 98101

Dear Ms. Meredith:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the ESSB 6392 Design Refinements and Transit Connections Workgroup's (ESSB 6392 Workgroup) Draft Recommendations Report. The multiagency process has been positive and productive, and has helped to improve working relationships among many of the key stakeholders in the SR 520, I-5 to Medina: Bridge Replacement and HOV Project (SR 520 Project).

The City Council's key goals for the SR 520 Project remain as follows:

- **Improve Transit.** Maximize transit usage and connectivity, and prioritize transit along the SR 520 corridor and in adjacent Seattle neighborhoods by improving the speed, reliability, and expandability of local and regional transit service.
- **Improve the Pedestrian Environment.** Increase pedestrian access, mobility, comfort and security, and provide efficient and logical connections to transit and neighborhood destinations.
- **Improve the Bicycling Environment.** Increase bicycle access, mobility, comfort and security, and provide efficient and logical connections through adjacent Seattle neighborhoods.
- **Improve the Neighborhood Environment.** Improve the physical environment of adjacent neighborhoods for the health and benefit of residents. Minimize any new impacts that the SR 520 Project may have on these same communities.
- **Improve Montlake Traffic Operations.** Facilitate acceptable peak and off-peak local traffic operations for all users.
- **Improve the Arboretum.** Minimize impacts to the Arboretum in terms of vehicle volumes and speeds, improve access for visitors, and enhance the overall environment of the park.

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We remain committed to working collaboratively with WSDOT, Governor Gregoire and the State Legislature to ensure that these collective goals for the SR 520 Project are met. With these objectives in mind, we have carefully reviewed the ESSB 6392 Workgroup's recommendations and, through this letter, offer some specific comments regarding the various project elements that were evaluated.

We understand that the charge of the ESSB 6392 Workgroup was to refine the design and improve the transit connections for the Seattle portion of the SR 520 Bridge, using the April 2010 Preferred Alternative as a baseline. We also understand that once the Workgroup's final recommendations report is issued later this year, WSDOT staff will work to incorporate those recommendations into a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the SR 520 Project. However, what is not obvious to us and remains unaddressed is how the process for making final design decisions for the SR 520 Project will continue to move forward after the FEIS is published in the spring of 2011 and how the City will be involved. In addition, we want to ensure that the cooperative relationship between the City and State is maintained as this project moves forward. We would appreciate a response from you that articulates how and when this body of work will be completed.

It is clear that the efforts of the ESSB 6392 Workgroup have enhanced the Preferred Alternative and the Seattle City Council agrees with the majority of recommendations that are detailed in the Workgroup's draft report. However, some areas of concern remain:

1. ***Second Bascule Bridge Across the Montlake Cut.*** We appreciate the workgroup's willingness to consider the City's request to examine transportation demand management (TDM) options for delaying or even potentially eliminating the need to construct a second bascule bridge across the Cut. We understand that a second crossing is included in the Preferred Alternative and recognize the need for the environmental process to fully evaluate the impacts of a potentially new bridge. We also appreciate that the additional bridge could well be a component of the SR 520 Project that is necessary to meet our collective goals for the corridor. However, we remain committed to working with WSDOT on developing an agreement on the process for deciding whether the second bridge is needed and if so, when. As part of this process we support exploring TDM alternatives and concur with the Workgroup's recommendation to establish specific triggers for future evaluation of the needs for the second crossing.

Identifying the three trigger factors to be measured (SR 520 mainline operations, transit travel times, and bike and pedestrian accommodation) represents an appropriate first step. Next, we believe that developing a clear process for monitoring and evaluating the timing and need for a second bascule bridge will be critical to ensure that a framework for decision-making is in place for future policymakers. We propose the following draft framework that could be used to formalize an agreed upon approach to addressing the question of the second bascule bridge:

- Commitment to a corridor management agreement between the City of Seattle and WSDOT that would include an outline of the analytical and decision-making process for the second bascule bridge.
- Development of a baseline report that uses the latest traffic modeling from the FEIS and current “ground” values. This report would be updated annually, based on refinements to traffic models, progress on TDM strategies and construction, and modeled and ground values centered on the triggers that have been identified.
- A three year work plan and schedule to be developed by SDOT and WSDOT to implement TDM measures.
- A technical work group to be identified in the corridor management agreement that includes representatives from the WSDOT, SDOT, KC Metro, Sound Transit and the City Council and would meet at least twice per year.
- The technical work group would review the annual report on triggers, receive updates on TDM measures and make ongoing recommendations to WSDOT and the City as necessary.
- The technical work group would be responsible for making a final recommendation on proceeding to construction of the second bascule bridge to WSDOT and the City. WSDOT would agree to not proceed to construction for the second bascule bridge without Council approval.

We look forward to discussing and developing this process and agreement in greater detail with WSDOT and the Governor’s office.

Beyond the triggers and decision process for the second crossing, we feel strongly that more work is needed by SDOT and WSDOT to develop a specific traffic management plan for the interim period between completion of the Montlake Interchange and possible construction of a second bascule bridge. We believe this interim traffic management plan must be aggressively and creatively geared toward forestalling construction of a second bascule bridge by accommodating, to the extent possible, transit, bicycle and pedestrian traffic across the Cut. In addition, we urge that the FEIS include an analysis of alternatives that seek to improve pedestrian and bicycle level of service across the Cut if transit queuing and traffic operations on SR 520 are managed through other means. This may include analyzing a narrower pedestrian and bicycle only second crossing.

2. **Arboretum.** We are satisfied with the progress made to-date on the Arboretum Mitigation Planning process. However, that effort is scheduled to run until the end of the year and additional analysis related to traffic management options is still needed. Funding responsibility for the improvements ultimately implemented also needs to be assigned.

Given the ongoing nature of this work, the Council wishes to reserve comment until after the Arboretum Mitigation Planning process concludes in December. Ultimately, we are seeking a balanced approach to traffic management in the Montlake area and the Arboretum. Prior to submitting its comments, the Council would also like to receive a briefing from WSDOT and SDOT on the Arboretum Mitigation Planning effort with specific attention to the following:

- The proposed left turn from 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue to East Lake Washington Boulevard and its specific impacts on the I-5 interchange, the Montlake Interchange and adjacent neighborhoods.
  - WSDOT's commitment to mitigation funding early in the project for Arboretum traffic calming and management in 2011 and beyond.
  - SDOT's near-term plans for traffic calming that could be implemented as early as 2011.
  - SDOT's plans for ongoing traffic monitoring and management in the vicinity of the Arboretum, and process for determining how and when additional traffic calming or management tools should be implemented.
3. **Corridor Transportation Demand Management Plan.** The State Legislature's mandate related to corridor management in ESSB 6392 represents a good baseline from which to manage traffic operations on SR 520. We applaud the legislature for being explicit about the minimum occupancy level of three-plus for the HOV lanes and to require notification when the average speeds in the HOV lanes fall below 45 MPH at least ten percent of the time during peak hours. The Council urges WSDOT and the legislature to consider going even further by integrating the use of dynamic tolling with other traffic management tools to more efficiently and effectively manage traffic operations on SR 520. We believe that a single, integrated corridor transportation demand management plan overseen by WSDOT is the way to ensure the best possible results. We urge the legislature to adopt legislation that establishes clear triggers for conversion to full dynamic tolling on SR 520 and for changes to the minimum HOV occupancy levels to facilitate traffic flow, particularly for transit, on the corridor.
4. **Neighborhood Traffic Management Plans.** Traffic management in adjacent neighborhoods, especially those impacted by possible traffic reduction strategies proposed for the Arboretum, remains a key concern of the Council. Although we recognize that some of the potential neighborhood traffic impacts are still unknown, we strongly encourage WSDOT to create a mitigation funding source that will allow WSDOT and SDOT to address the specific issues as they arise.

Traffic management in the vicinity of Roanoke Park is one issue of particular concern to the Council. As the design specifics for the portion of the SR 520 Project that extends through this neighborhood continue to evolve, we would like WSDOT and SDOT to continue working together to resolve emerging neighborhood issues related to vehicle, bicycle and pedestrian circulation in the vicinity of the lid at 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Delmar Drive.

5. **Corridor Management Agreement.** With regard to the Arboretum, the second bascule bridge, and neighborhood traffic management, we feel strongly that SDOT and WSDOT would benefit from a formal corridor management agreement between the City and the State. Commitments and a clear delineation of responsibilities would be useful as SDOT and WSDOT continue to proceed with planning and implementation of a variety of elements related to these key corridor management areas. The Council requests that a commitment to developing such an agreement be incorporated within the FEIS as a means to jointly manage the ongoing impacts of the project.
6. **Bicycle and Pedestrian Accommodation.** We are very pleased with the Workgroup's efforts to identify important non-motorized connections, conflict points and safety issues in the vicinity of SR 520, and to employ appropriate solutions. It is imperative that this work continue throughout the design and construction of the SR 520 Project in order to ensure that bicyclists and pedestrians are protected from conflicts with vehicles and that connections flow smoothly. The Council supports the continued involvement of SDOT and the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee in design review, and construction management and mitigation efforts as the SR 520 Project moves forward.
7. **Portage Bay Bridge.** The Council remains skeptical that the Portage Bay Bridge design included in the Preferred Alternative is as narrow as it could be. Even though WSDOT has stated its intent to operate the facility at 45 MPH, the Preferred Alternative proposes a new Portage Bay Bridge that is more than 40 feet wider than the current bridge. Further narrowing the shoulder and lane widths proposed for this facility will cause the bridge to appear more like a boulevard and help to induce lower vehicle operating speeds. The Council is supportive of creating a boulevard design with elements such as a planted median that enhance the character and assist with traffic speed control. Ensuring that the cross-section of the new bridge provides transit priority opportunities, such as HOV or transit-only lanes, also remains a priority for the Council. In addition, we also encourage WSDOT to keep working with the Seattle Design Commission and SDOT as the design for the Portage Bay Bridge continues to be refined.
8. **West Approach/Foster Island.** We want to applaud the work of WSDOT and the SR 6392 Workgroup for continuing to identify options and alternatives to narrow the SR 520 corridor. As you know, the Council has consistently supported efforts to minimize the

footprint of the SR 520 Project. We want to encourage WSDOT to continue to explore options to narrow structures on the corridor and have a specific suggestion to offer for consideration: WSDOT should examine the impacts of moving the transition of vehicular speeds on the mainline to the west high-rise and manage the corridor from that point west at 45 MPH, with roadway design consistent with the lower speed. This design speed could possibly be designated for only the non-HOV lanes. Doing so could allow for further narrowing of the structure and also aid in the transition to the Montlake Interchange and reduce noise in the Arboretum and Madison Park. We urge WSDOT to evaluate this approach as part of the FEIS.

9. ***Parks and Public Lands.*** Although this issue was not specifically addressed in ESSB 6392, we would like to use this opportunity to express two specific concerns:

- Existing public land in McCurdy Park that is removed from public use should be replaced with comparable lands within the immediate vicinity of McCurdy Park and be easily accessible to nearby residents, without requiring pedestrians to cross major off-ramps or streets. Safe and attractive bicycle and pedestrian connections between the Arboretum and the new SR 520 lid in Montlake should also be provided.
- Disruptions to other public lands in the vicinity of the SR 520 corridor should be minimized. The Roanoke neighborhood, in particular, is home to several pockets of public land that have been enhanced by local residents. While not officially “parks” that are managed by the City of Seattle, these open spaces are considered parks by the residents that live near and use them. At a minimum, the Council would like WSDOT to create an inventory of all such public lands and assess whether any of these properties will be affected by the construction of the SR 520 Project. We also encourage WSDOT to work with neighborhoods and consider mitigating any potential disturbance of these properties by relocating any such open spaces that are determined to be in the final footprint of the construction area for the new SR 520 Bridge.

10. ***Transit Service and Funding.*** The ESSB Transit Planning and Finance Workgroup will begin meeting this fall and is scheduled to release its final recommendations report by the end of this year. As transit functionality will be key to both construction period traffic management and the long-term operation of the SR 520 corridor, the Council will be closely tracking and reviewing the outcomes of this workgroup process. The Council requests a full report on the findings and recommendations of the ESSB Transit Planning and Finance Workgroup as the group’s deliberations are coming to a close. We would also like to take this opportunity to reiterate our support for the use of project mitigation funds and toll revenues to finance transit operations along the corridor and mitigate mobility issues resulting from construction.

11. **Bus Stop Locations / Re-locations and the Montlake Triangle.** The Council applauds the collaborative work carried out by the UW, WSDOT, King County Metro and Sound Transit to find a solution to moving forward with redevelopment of the Montlake Triangle and enhancements for transit, pedestrian and bicycle mobility. We also recognize that the ESSB 6392 Workgroup has recommended several potential changes to bus stop locations along Pacific Place and Montlake Boulevard. In particular, we would like to acknowledge that the proposal to create a northbound Montlake bus stop on the newly created lid appears a promising means of enhancing transit connectivity. We support the Workgroup's recommendations and look forward to seeing transit riders and neighborhood residents engaged in this effort before any decisions are finalized.
12. **Commitment to High Capacity Transit and Light Rail Accommodation.** We are very pleased with the progress WSDOT and the Workgroup have made in this area and recognize that substantial effort has been made to determine the specific design refinements required to accommodate light rail on the SR 520 Bridge in the future. For the purposes of the FEIS the Council believes sufficient progress has been made. However, we support continued efforts to ensure every possible consideration is accounted for without substantially increasing the cost or environmental scope of the current project.
13. **Commitment to Mitigation.** The Council is seeking formalized commitments from WSDOT regarding funding for project mitigation. The Council believes these commitments should be firmly established and specific funding amounts assigned to each element of the City's mitigation plan.


Other issues that are outside the scope of the ESSB 6392 Workgroup's Draft Recommendations Report will also remain important to the Council as the SR 520 Project continues to move forward. Those issues include the following:


1. **Project Process.** It is unclear how the SR 520 Project will proceed once the FEIS is published. At what time or under what threshold will the City receive assurance that the critical Seattle portions of the project will be fully funded along with the rest of the project? We request that WSDOT and the City develop clear expectations, agreements, and commitments on the final project design and construction process. We request that any understanding between the City and State on this topic take the form of a formal corridor management agreement. The Council will work in partnership with the State to develop these agreements.
2. **Funding.** The funding gap for the SR 520 Project is currently estimated at close to \$2 billion. To help close this gap, the Council favors full dynamic tolling for the general purpose lanes on I-90 (as opposed to HOT lanes only). This approach would also help to ensure balanced traffic flow on the two floating bridges that cross Lake Washington.


It is a priority for the Council that the entire SR 520 replacement project, from SR 202 to I-5, be fully funded, and we would be pleased to join WSDOT in seeking funding for the project from the legislature. We want to be clear that the Council's endorsement of the Workgroup's project design refinements to the preferred alternative and the project as a whole is dependent upon full funding for **all** project elements on the Westside and the accompanying mitigation.


Thank you again for considering our comments. We appreciate the efforts of all the members of the ESSB Design Refinements and Technical Connections Workgroup and believe this process has produced important and needed results. We look forward to working in continued partnership with you as the SR 520 Project moves forward.

Sincerely,

  
Council President Richard Conlin

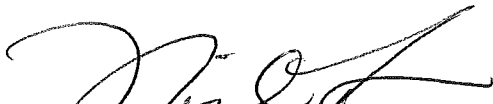
  
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