

I-0605-001

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Comment Category: Comments on Alternatives

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Comment:

First, I'd like to congratulate the SR-520 project team on the completion of the Draft EIS, a very important milestone in a project crucial to the future needs of the Seattle area. It is comprehensive, well-written, and provides in-depth discussion of the relevant issues facing the SR-520 corridor and its reconstruction.

However, the refusal to continue evaluating the 8-lane bridge option is extraordinarily short-sighted. Even if the traffic projection for 2030 is accurate and approximately 130,000 vehicles use the replacement bridge on an average day in 2030, this will place the replacement bridge nearly at capacity (if traffic is always split evenly between lanes: HOV lanes usually carry fewer vehicles). Historically, traffic volume projections have underestimated the number of vehicles by significant margins. Pushing the 6-lane option leaves very little room for error if the SR-520 projections to be too low.

Much is made of the assertion that the 8-lane option would increase volumes on I-5 and I-405. However, the presence of additional bottlenecks in the system is not a valid excuse for completing a project that will become a bottleneck itself in time. Again, even if the 2030 projections are exactly correct, this bridge is being designed to serve us much longer than 2030. The original bridge will have provided us with 50 years of service by the time the new span is completed, and it is a reasonable assumption that the new bridge will provide us with the same length of service, barring disaster.

As such, pushing a solution for 2030 will not be helpful to us in 2040, 2050 or beyond. One only has to look at the sorry state of I-405 in Renton, which will soon be carrying 200,000 vehicles per day on a six-lane freeway. I-405 is a problem much easier to fix: if the bridge becomes congested in a similar way it will be very difficult to do anything about it. We would be faced with the option of either restriping the shoulders away and making the road as unsafe and unreliable as it is today, or taking up another 120 feet of right of way to build a second span across the lake.

Additionally, the extra 2 lanes of the 8-lane span were intended for auxiliary lanes. These will dump no cars onto I-5 or I-405, merely facilitate much-needed room to hold traffic destined for congested interchanges at Montlake or Pacific, and 92nd Avenue NE. We need them. In the worst case, we may even need them for general flow.

Forgoing the 8-lane alternative for the 6-lane alternative will be amongst the most short-sighted decisions ever made about our freeways. It will be something which our children will curse us for as they sit idling on a 520 even more congested than it is today.

For once, let's do it right. The SR-520 team has done good engineering. Let's have some good long-range planning too, not just planning for today.

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Comment Summary:

8-Lane Alternative

Response:

See Section 1.1 of the 2006 Draft EIS Comment Response Report.