

Online Comment by User: maxmorris

Submitted on: 10/31/2006 5:16:00 PM

Comment Category: General Comments

Comment Location: Chapter-1, Page-1

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Comment:

(I drafted comments for over 2 hours, but your system timed me out, so they are lost. You should design better software for your comments system or advise commenters about their session time remaining. I will try to summarize my earlier comments here.)

I am a 12 year resident of the Montlake/Arboretum area and I commute to Microsoft daily.

The EIS report and the plans available do not give full information about many of the options, especially the Pacific Interchange Option. This is irresponsible. In particular, no written or mapped information adequately depicts the actual route cars will take to get to or from the new south-side ramps on Union Bay Bridge. Are there planned improvements to Lake Washington Boulevard to connect to 23rd/Montlake Boulevard? Will there be a lot more traffic on Lake Washington Boulevard connecting to Madison Avenue? It seems like there will not be.

I object to the tone of the EIS, particularly in how it frames the Pacific Interchange Option. For example, in chapter 4 in summarizing the visual impact, the monstrous new structure of the Union Bay Bridge is simply and briefly described as a prominent new bridge. The flawed framing continues in chapter 5 where more detail is provided but the bland, neutral tone is maintained, as though the Pacific Interchange Option were just yet-another-option among equals. It is NOT such a thing! In truth, the Pacific Interchange Option -- with its monstrous new Union Bay Bridge, the essential relocation of the major Montlake Boulevard thoroughfare, and the reconfiguration of 30 acres of property from the UW and the Arboretum -- amounts to a massive reengineering of a huge (over five neighborhoods are directly affected) and historical area of Seattle. This kind of back-door public policy is poor government. Decisions on this scale rightly belong within a direct and transparent political process, not under the rubric of building a new bridge.

I support replacing the 520 bridge with a six lane bridge. I think the Six Lane Alternative is great work! It may need some minor changes to align it better within the neighborhoods, for example, the second Montlake bridge. But otherwise, it represents balanced, constrained, and targeted design. I am not a fan of many of its impacts. But overall it seems like some good tradeoffs were made to have it fit as well as it can within the existing footprint, with minimal reengineering of the way people live, while still bringing all the transportation benefits.

The Pacific Interchange Option is an entirely different matter. It is not just a new bridge; it amounts to a change in how people will live their lives in the huge affected area of Seattle. First, because it is doing so much more, it costs quite a lot more and will have a big construction impact. Second, I believe it would be a disaster on commuting overall, on the historically-emergent configuration of the Montlake neighborhood, on the Arboretum itself, on the wetlands environment to the north of the Arboretum, on the University of

I-0726-001

Comment Summary:

Format and Content

Response:

See Section 23.1 of the 2006 Draft EIS Comment Response Report.

I-0726-002

Comment Summary:

6-Lane Alternative

Response:

See Section 1.2 of the 2006 Draft EIS Comment Response Report.

I-0726-003

Comment Summary:

Pacific Street Interchange Option

Response:

See Section 1.2 of the 2006 Draft EIS Comment Response Report.

I-0726-001

I-0726-002

I-0726-003

I-0726-003

Washington (its endowed lands and its activities), and on the overall aesthetics of a monumental 100-year-old waterway.

The benefit of significantly lowering average wait times for drivers north of the ship cut is important, though the Pacific Interchange Option was not originally pursued for that reason. Rather, it was proposed and devised by some residents of Montlake/Arboretum to selfishly insulate the neighborhood by reengineering everything away from it. But Montlake's configuration as a transit area was settled 40 years ago when the original freeway was put in, and even before that back to before recorded history. Not everyone in the Montlake/Arboretum area agrees with the Better Bridge Coalition or the Montlake Community Club! Montlake/Arboretum is great in many ways because of its historical charm and its centrality of access. With the stability of the last 40 years, basic patterns of value in Montlake/Arboretum have been settled -- from the profound (per house land values throughout the area relative to street traffic) to the mundane (timing morning and afternoon and weekend plans, laundry drop-off / pick-up). Reconnecting a 100 year old neighborhood is an absurd abstraction -- more like resurrecting the dead, or really, pulling the wool over your eyes regarding the real agenda. Indeed, now that the impact of the Pacific Interchange Option, on commuting and the Arboretum in particular, is becoming clear, residents of Capitol Hill and Madison Park/Valley are clamoring in alarm. Some Montlake/Arboretum residents have been clamoring all along.

I-0726-004

I believe that northside wait times can be improved in other ways that do not drastically reengineer our entire area. The UW -- both the institution and its community of 60,000 -- suffers much of the traffic. But even the UW objects -- if coyly -- to the Pacific Interchange Option. That's no surprise -- a loss of 1000 parking spots and 15 acres, plus major disruption to its master plan, will not go over well. Yet even your own analysis shows that there are other options to impact northside wait times that have less cost and much less impact. For example, the second Montlake bridge is just one example that would improve flow as much as 50 percent of what the Pacific Interchange Option is expected to achieve. The second Montlake bridge has the added benefit of tying in well with the originally-proposed Six Lane Alternative because it wouldn't require major reengineering or people's lives or significantly expand the constrained footprint of the Six Lane Option. Indeed, with minor modifications to improve merging (reducing interarrival times, e.g. smoothing and reducing the gaps between cars), traffic should flow very well relative to shunting queueing cars over to ramps on the Union Bay Bridge. I'm disappointed there was no analysis of this; I think this represents incomplete planning around the second Montlake bridge option. Also, the second bridge can be built to aesthetically and architecturally complement the existing and historical bascule bridge.

I-0726-005

Finally, I will address the Arboretum. The impact on the Arboretum is the most under-discussed item in the EIS, I believe. It is easy to compare wait times, abstract notions of neighborhood reconnection, and properly configuring public transit options. I wish there were more data on some of these things, i.e. expected impact of the Pacific Interchange Option on traffic flow throughout the Madison/23rd/Montlake/Lake Washington Boulevard area. People understand and can transact cost/benefit analysis in their mind when they have data. It is much harder to analyze ineffable value. What's so important about a park and its quietude? How do you place value on the aesthetics of a view from

I-0726-004

Comment Summary:

6-Lane Alternative

Response:

See Section 1.2 of the 2006 Draft EIS Comment Response Report.

I-0726-005

Comment Summary:

Arboretum (Concerns)

Response:

See Section 9.3 of the 2006 Draft EIS Comment Response Report.

I-0726-005

Foster Island or Marsh Island on Opening Day, or in the storming rain? How can you transact in the impact on one of the remaining wetlands when, following proper procedures, the impact on the aquatic environment can actually be fairly mitigated? I am disappointed that there was so little effort put into prominently framing and trying to answer these important questions. I am confident, though, that you will learn about the value of the Arboretum and the negative impact on it the Pacific Interchange Option will have. You will learn a lot about the value of the Arboretum from people's emotional connection to it via comments like mine. I expect you will truly learn the value of the Arboretum when that emotional connection gets translated into a swelling and focused nexus within the political process that opposes the Pacific Interchange Option and its social engineering.

In the meantime, I hope you will invest in investigating other, more effective, less impactful, and less costly adjustments that can make the Six Lane Alternative succeed.

-Max Morris

Comment Category: Second Montlake Bridge

Comment Location: Chapter-6, Page-10

I-0726-006

Comment:

More capacity for flow through Montlake from the 2nd bridge and less congestion on the larger freeway should tend to substantially mitigate queueing and reduce wait times. Further optimizing this by placing the queue on expensive ramps suspended over a park, historic waterway, and wetlands shouldn't be your only goal here.

Also, it's not clear what the real benefit of Montlake Boulevard acting as more of an arterial is when most of the traffic on it is bridge related anyway.

Comment Category: Pacific Street Interchange

Comment Location: Chapter-6, Page-26

Comment:

I-0726-007

You minimize the visual impact the Pacific Interchange Option. Currently, the Montlake Ship Cut is a beautiful, historical waterway enjoyed by many people from many angles -- car, kayak, canoe, walkers on the many trails. SR520 is not at all visible. The Pacific Interchange Option destroys the entire view by imposing a huge, aesthetically disconnected structure into the middle of it all. It is not just a "prominent bridge" and calling that does not properly frame the discussion.

Comment Category: Pacific Street Interchange

Comment Location: Chapter-6, Page-30

Comment:

You claim that you'll be acquiring lots of new parkland with the Pacific Interchange Option. What you don't note is that you'll be building a huge new structure on top of a scenic waterway and destroying the aesthetic and environmental of existing parkland including and around Marsh Island.

Comment Category: Pacific Street Interchange

Comment Location: Chapter-6, Page-31

Comment:

The Pacific Interchange Option permanently removes 15 acres from the UW endowed lands. The UW should be getting more land, not less.

Comment Category: Second Montlake Bridge

I-0726-006

Comment Summary:

Local Street Network

Response:

See Section 5.3 of the 2006 Draft EIS Comment Response Report.

I-0726-007

Comment Summary:

Pacific Street Interchange Option

Response:

See Section 1.2 of the 2006 Draft EIS Comment Response Report.

I-0726-007

Comment Location: Chapter-6, Page-6

Comment:

You say that with the 2nd Montlake Bridge Option, the amount of traffic between I-5 and Montlake would be very similar to the 6 lane alternative, vs the great benefit of the Pacific Interchange option. This doesn't make sense, or perhaps it represents an incomplete option. The 2nd Montlake Bridge Option would support plenty of traffic between SR520 and the Pacific Street area. You could redo the Pacific Street interchange to connect to this new capacity, without building a whole bridge above Marsh Island or taking land from the UW.

Comment Category: Second Montlake Bridge

Comment Location: Chapter-6, Page-7

Comment:

Again, you are saying that throughput will be better in the Pacific Interchange option vs. the 2nd Montlake Bridge option. But that's because of the combination of surface street work around Pacific Street connecting to better throughput on the Pacific Interchange Bridge. But the Pacific Street work could also be done in conjunction with the 2nd Montlake Bridge, though that's not what you're considering here. With those two elements combined together - - appropriately (it must still be designed it seems) -- equivalent flow capacity should be achieved compared to the Pacific Interchange option, at less cost and at much less impact on the UW, Arboretum, and the waterway.

Comment Category: Pacific Street Interchange

Comment Location: Chapter-7, Page-10

Comment:

The worst overall effect of the Pacific Interchange Option is that it will create a massive amount of traffic at the north end of the Arboretum, where the Union Bay Bridge would terminate. How is traffic supposed to get there from where it is now, namely on the Montlake Blvd / 23rd artery??? Go over the Montlake Bridge, then double back on the Pacific Street Ramps? That seems crazy and it won't improve traffic flow. The alternative is to jam through the Arboretum, either on Boyer or on Lk WA Blvd. Your engineers tell me this loading won't change, but I don't agree with that -- people won't want to drive up to the UW to get onto 520. And you will have 3 lanes and an HOV lane connect there, so why go up to the UW? So the Arboretum will become a parking lot. That is bad! At a minimum, much more detailed study and discussion of impact on flow through the area south of the new bridge in Seattle is desperately called for!