

University District Community Council
c/o 4534 University Way N.E.
Seattle WA 98105

October 24, 2006

Paul Krueger
Environmental Manager
SR 520 Project Office
414 Olive Way, Suite 400
Seattle, WA 98124-4025

RE: SR 520, Comment on draft environmental impact statement

Dear Mr. Krueger:

The University District Community Council ("UDCC") is a voluntary association of residents, businesses, and those who work in that part of Seattle that lies north of the Lake Washington Ship Canal, east of Interstate 5 south of Ravenna Boulevard, and west of 22nd Ave N.E. (but including both sides of it). It overlaps areas with University Park and the Roosevelt Neighbors Alliance. It is open to students at the University of Washington, faculty and staff and many attend its meetings. Both membership and Board meetings are open to the public and held regularly. The subject of SR 520 and its replacement has come up for discussion many times over the years and our membership has reached a consensus. It is set out in the first two sections of this letter.

Preferred Design

C-022-001

The UDCC has long supported repair and/or reconstruction of State Route 520 as necessary for safety purposes. If a new bridge is to be built, new capacity should be limited to "transit only" and bike lanes. Construction should occur within its existing corridor preferably within its existing right-of-way, and environmental impacts on the surrounding neighborhoods (north and south), the Arboretum, and the University of Washington should be mitigated to the maximum extent.

Unfortunately, the draft environmental impact statement ("DEIS") ignores our preferred alternative. The 4-Lane Alternative has no provision for "transit only" lanes, DEIS p. 3-8 thru 3-15, and the 6-Lane Alternative has two HOV lanes, but no transit only lanes, DEIS, pp. 3-15 thru 3-22. Transit only lanes differ from HOV lanes. Transit only lanes can be converted to rail usage; the transit authority can adjust transit only lanes (including directional flow) at rush hours and after major events to serve its convenience. HOV lanes are open to vehicles with two or more persons; legislation proposes to make HOV lanes open to anyone willing to pay a fee; Port districts and others have long campaigned to open HOV lanes for all trucks. Neither now or in the future will HOV lanes offer the flexibility or utility to rapid transit that transit only lanes do. The DEIS should have considered the "transit only" option.

C-022-002

The UDCC strongly opposes the Pacific Street Interchange Option. The DEIS ignores the University Community Urban Center Plan adopted by the City of Seattle after a lengthy neighborhood planning process. Appendix K, Land Use, p. 21 acknowledges that it violates this plan. It truly does. The neighborhood plan goals call for "... improved mobility and access by public transportation to service, jobs, businesses, residences, educational opportunities, and other destinations, both within and outside of the UCUC [University District and campus planning area], including local shuttle." (emphasis added). The community and City government recognize that the University District is saturated with the traffic of privately-owned vehicles: the flow is

C-022-001

Comment Summary:

Regional Land Use and Transportation Planning

Response:

See Section 2.1 of the 2006 Draft EIS Comment Response Report.

C-022-002

Comment Summary:

Pacific Street Interchange Option

Response:

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

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almost constant during daylight hours on N.E. 45th St. Traffic is also heavy during extended peak hours on Roosevelt Way N.E. (southbound), and 12th Avenue N.E. (northbound), 15th Avenue N.E., N.E. 50th St., and Campus Parkway N.E.

Sound Transit anticipates building its RTA station in the vicinity of Brooklyn St. N.E. and N.E. 45th St. and establishing a "feeder" system with Metro. Under the "feeder system," until the 65th St. station is built, buses from the north, east, and west would go to the RTA station, rather than to downtown, except for a few express buses during rush hour. This will bring a large number of buses to the University District. Metro planners have said that the UDCC can expect to see the curb lanes of Brooklyn Ave. N.E. from N.E. 42nd St. to N.E. 47th St. reserved for transit use only, and that during peak hours, the curb lanes of N.E. 45th St. will have many more bus routes, buses, and so much added transit use that motorists will be effectively limited to the inside lanes. This will greatly diminish the street capacity for single occupancy vehicles.

The University Community Urban Center Plan set three major goals for the improving local streets: (a) complete the 'Ave' project to widen sidewalks and greenery, making the 'Ave a place to stroll and shop; (b) bring the University and the University District closer together by reducing the bulkhead along the east side of 15th Ave. N.E., upgrading the streetscape along 15th Ave. N.E., improving the east-west pedestrian connection at N.E. 43rd, 42nd, and 41 St. St., etc.; and (c) reconnecting the University District with the waterfront along the Lake Washington Ship Canal by developing parks, orienting the streetscape to a campus like atmosphere and generally making it easier to cross N.E. Pacific Street on foot. Bicyclists also sought to alleviate the hazard at Campus Parkway on the north side of University Bridge, where cars make right turns directly in front of cyclists at the outside edge.

The Urban Center Plan envisions "mobility" as helping people go where they to within the University/University District by walking or cycling and to destinations outside the University District by public transportation. Heavy vehicular flows on streets impede pedestrian, e.g. at N.E. 45th St. and 15th Ave. N.E., during the hours before morning classes, twenty people may be stopped, standing on the corners waiting for the light to change, while three or four cars are making a left turn; intersections on Roosevelt Way N.E. and 12th Avenue N.E. south of N.E. 45th St. have push buttons designed to make pedestrians wait for a clearance. The Planning Committee recognized that students, other singles, and seniors have cars and use them for dating, hauling goods, getting to late night jobs where bus service is deficient, for recreation, and on the job (e.g. pizza delivery). However, their studies and experience showed that the street system can handle the anticipated traffic volumes off peak hours.

Pacific Street Interchange

C-022-003

The Pacific Street Interchange clashes with this planning and the long standing efforts to promote public transportation and reduce use of private vehicles. It extols the Pacific Street Interchange as improving the local street network and in its appendices as "improving access to and from the University District." and "reliability." It will add a new connection to the I-5 express lanes and thereby to the exit at N.E. 42nd St. and 7th Ave. N.E. and increase traffic at N.E. 4th St. It will add so much additional traffic to N.E. Pacific Street that its intersection at 15th Ave. N.E. that the DEIS classifies it as "congested." (Level of Service E), DEIS p. 5-23. That traffic has two main outlets/intakes: westward on N.E. Pacific Street south of the dormitories and thereby impede pedestrian crossings toward the canal front; and north-south on 15th Ave. N.E., setting up a divide between the U of W campus and the University District. Both are contrary to the goals of the Urban Center Plan and the best interests of the University District.

The Pacific Street Interchange will likely increase traffic on N.E. 45th St. and N.E. 50th St. When I-5 is congested at the Ship Canal Bridge --- which happens very frequently --- traffic going to the East side of Lake Washington will get off at N.E. 50th St. or N.E. 45th St. and head for Montlake Boulevard by way of the N.E. 45th viaduct, rather than use the left side off ramp to SR 520. Car and truck radios and routing devices built into late model cars will advise them to do just that to save time. Traffic that now goes over Portage Bay will instead use local streets through the University District and alongside University Hospital --- a poor trade-off. The Pacific

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Street Interchange makes the Husky Stadium station a poor place to catch surface buses. The depressed roadway prevents bus pull-outs, and passengers have to walk up to a quarter-mile to the nearest station. As a result, passengers under the other alternatives might make connections at Montlake will instead go to the N.E. 45th St. Station. N.E. to catch surface buses. The transfer points are closer, and the University District Station will have a far better ambiance than waiting near a freeway like ramp. That will increase the bus traffic to the RTA station, and passenger pick-ups by family and friends.

The Pacific Street Interchange does irreparable damage to the University of Washington campus and to the Arboretum. It trisects the campus with Aurora-like arterials, it superimposes a freeway-style interchange with its concrete ramps and bridge over the water sports area on the South East Campus; and it takes almost 15 acres now devoted for educational purposes from the campus. It puts a major interchange in the Arboretum at Marsh Island, converts Lake Washington Boulevard (an Olmsted Boulevard laid out as a park drive) into a freeway access roadway, the only southern access to the Evergreen-Montlake Bridge in Seattle besides I-5; it takes many acres, overshadows more, and dominates the views looking northward as well as spewing noise and air pollution throughout. The University District grew up around the University Campus. It is the largest open space for District residents; it provides jobs for many others; and it is the center of learning for several thousand University students who live here and a beacon of education for many thousand more who attend lectures, concerts, and plays; and, of course, it draws droves of sports fans. Damaging the University campus damages the University District. The Arboretum exhibits the widest range of arboreal species anywhere in the Northwest in a very beautiful and educational manner. Our residents visit for recreation and prize its. The injury that the Pacific Street Interchange does to the Arboretum is a total disgrace. Many district residents and most of the UDCC board members would use much stronger terms.

DEIS -inadequate

Ambiance

A committee reviewed the DEIS have many questions that the DEIS and its appendices should answer, but have not done so yet::

C-022-004

Traffic ---

How will the state resolve the traffic congestion the Pacific Street Interchange would create at 15th Avenue N.E. and 15th Avenue N.E.? by more paving? if so, where?

How much additional traffic will occur on N.E. 45th St. and N.E. 50th St. through the University District? What will be its impact? What changes in the street configuration can be expected at Montlake Boulevard N.E. and N.E. 45th St. to accommodate traffic using the viaduct?

Will the Pacific Street Interchange prompt more traffic through the University of Washington Campus on weekends and after hours when there currently no parking attendants on duty? If so, how much?

How much traffic will come off or go on the N.E. 42nd St. ramps to the express lanes? What streets will the traffic use?

Explain in detail the effect of the Pacific Street Interchange on emergency vehicles go to University Hospital both from the Southeast and from the North and West especially in light of the level of service E at N.E. Pacific Street and 15th Avenue N.E.

The DEIS uses figures assuming that tolls continue at the suggested rate forever and makes its environmental analysis accordingly. What would be the range of volumes if tolls come off by 2030, or, if inflation over the next decades, allows users to pay lower value tolls to pay the fixed costs?

How will the increased buses to the RTA station be handled? Where will the lay over zones be? Will there be bus only lanes? Will parking be restricted?

During the University Community Urban Center planning process, a traffic engineer from the City of Seattle opined that if traffic flows increased N.E. 45th St. and N.E. 50th would be made a couplet of one-way streets from I-5 to 15th Avenue N.E.? Would the Pacific Street Interchange make that unwanted circulation pattern more likely?

Will the added traffic on I-5 express lanes increase the noise levels on 7th Avenue N.E.

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Response:

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

C-022-004 south of N.E. 45th St. If so, how much?
The DEIS has no studies on the increased noise on University hospital? What impact will it have? please consider the cumulative noise levels adding in the noise from N.E. Pacific Street, which would be brought closer to the medical center.

C-022-005 Pedestrian mobility ---
How much added time will pedestrians have to spend waiting for the added traffic to clear up to that they can walk across?

What will be done to prevent right-turning traffic from bullying pedestrians when they finally get a crosswalk light? and to stop left-turning traffic from continuing to turn in front of pedestrians with a "walk" signal? Enforcement against motorists has been non-existent so far. How many added collisions will occur?

What plans are in the works with the Pacific Street Interchange for these two already hazardous situations that it aggravates: (a) the pedestrian crossing of N.E. 45th St. between the bus stop on the south side and the Husky parking and the north side at the traffic signal near the base of the viaduct; and (b) passage between the bus stop on the north side of N.E. 45th St. and the QFC at the entrance/exit of University Village near the base of the viaduct? Motorists look east for on coming traffic ignoring pedestrians approaching from the west. Eliminating the bus stops is not an acceptable response. Too many University students use those stops.

Will the State retrofit the pedestrian overpass over 15th Avenue N.E. by Schmitz Hall and the Henry Gallery near Campus Parkway to make it accessible by wheelchair?

When the assistant City's engineer proposed the one-way street couplets during the University Community Urban Center planning process, a retired architect responded that it would be better to build pedestrian underpasses in all directions at the intersection of N.E. 45th St. and 15th Avenue N.E. Will that be considered if the couplet concept surfaces again?

C-022-006 Parking ---
Where will the cars prompted by the "connectivity" that the Pacific Street Interchange envisions be stashed?

What replacement will be made for the parking places displaced from the Husky Stadium lot? What impact does the loss of parking have on the University Hospital, which now relies on them? on friends and family of patients in the hospital?

C-022-007 Displacement ----
Where will the University acquire the almost 15 acres that the Pacific Street Interchange takes from the campus? It would be very wrong to take the replacement from the west or north, when the major displacement occurs in the southeast. Surely, WSDOT can not expect that the University, to squeeze the expanded enrollment and staff into its existing campus.

Does it serve the public interest for the University to locate more of its research facilities in South Lake Union, a possible replacement site? The University has often insisted that its research be linked to and proximate with its teaching and libraries.

Can property be taken from the parking lots of University Village, the Safeway, and other ownerships north of N.E. 45th St.? Parklands and wildlife refuges should be protected, yet the Pacific Street Interchange makes its entire take on the south. In our opinion, the greenery south of N.E. 45th St. has more value to the public than the parking areas abutting N.E. 45th St. on the north.

If the state builds drainage retention vaults in Montlake Boulevard N.E. and N.E. 45th St., what provision will be made for keeping a continuous flow of Ravenna Creek to University Slough and its wetlands?

What can be expected in the way of detouring traffic through the University District during construction of the Pacific Street Interchange? Please describe in full.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. We would appreciate receiving a response to

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Response:

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

C-022-006

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Response:

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

C-022-007

Comment Summary:

Pacific Street Interchange Option

Response:

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

the questions posed.

Yours truly,

Matt Fox
President