

I-0649-001

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Comment Category: Comments on Environmental Effects

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Address: , , 98195

**Comment:**

As chair of the University of Washington Faculty Council on University Relations, I am submitting this Class C resolution which was passed by the Faculty Senate last week.

Class C Resolution  
SR 520 Bridge Replacement Project

**PREAMBLE**

The Washington Department of Transportation has recently released a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) which outlines several proposals for the future of the Evergreen Point Bridge on SR 520. Public comment on the document concludes on 31 October 2006.

The DEIS outlines three basic proposals: do nothing, rebuild the bridge as an expanded four-lane structure; or rebuild the bridge as an expanded six-lane structure. There are two permutations of the six-lane option. One would result in a radical change in the Pacific-Montlake intersection at Husky Stadium and University Medical Center by putting a major highway and interchange on University property. The interchange includes a bridge -- 110-feet above the water -- over the Waterfront Activities Center that connects SR 520 to Pacific Street; in addition, the plan calls for expanding Montlake Avenue to six lanes up to NE 45th.

Departing radically from standard environmental statements, this DEIS contains limited details on mitigation requirements and costs for all of the possible bridge construction projects. Thus, any cost estimate associated with these proposals underestimates total project costs. Therefore, decision makers cannot rationally choose between alternatives.

Any alteration of the bridge has ramifications far beyond the communities on either side of Lake Washington that are home to the physical structure. The Washington Department of Transportation held eight public meetings but held them only in the communities housing the physical structure: Bellevue and Seattle-Montlake. Although any revision of the bridge has direct impacts on the Arboretum, there has been no meeting with the Arboretum Foundation since November 2005. The Washington Department of Transportation held only two public hearings on the DEIS, one in Bellevue and one in Montlake. No public meetings were held at the University of Washington, the entity potentially affected the most by the proposed Pacific Interchange alternative. Therefore, there has been insufficient effort to engage all citizens affected by the proposals.

Whereas, the University of Washington operates with a set of core principles relative to the proposed project:

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**Comment Summary:**

Pacific Street Interchange Option

**Response:**

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

- To promote a vibrant, healthy and livable academic, business and residential community at the University of Washington and in surrounding neighborhoods;
- To promote carpool, bus, rail, bicycle and pedestrian transportation solutions that improve access to the University and that limit the impact of single occupancy vehicles on campus and surrounding neighborhoods;
- To meet the health care needs of the region and to make an impact on global health, all through the contributions of the professional schools in Health Sciences Center and the affiliated hospitals;
- To preserve and enhance the recreational, conservational and educational habitat of the UW Botanic Gardens, in particular the Washington Park Arboretum;
- To allow for the efficient and effective management of construction projects included in the University's Capital Improvement Program for the Seattle campus; and
- To preserve the ability of the University to meet current and future development needs.

Whereas, the Pacific Street Interchange as proposed in the Washington Department of Transportation Draft Environmental Impact Statement for SR520 violates core University principles in the following ways:

- It does not specifically consider impacts on the Burke-Gilman trail or on neighborhoods north of Montlake, such as Ravenna or Laurelhurst, or those south of the Arboretum, such as Madison Park;
- It promotes the use of single occupancy vehicles due to a) an increase in carrying capacity on the new bridge, b) expanded intersections at Montlake and Pacific and c) two new lanes of traffic heading north along Montlake from Pacific to 45th;
- The promotion of single occupancy vehicles increases the region's carbon footprint, in direct opposition to Seattle's Kyoto Challenge and King County's leadership in the Chicago Climate Exchange.
- It further divides the Medical Center from other parts of campus and has both short-term and long-term impacts on patient accessibility to health care services;
- It will reduce pedestrian safety on campus as the result of increased traffic, and attendant vehicle emissions will degrade air quality at the University Medical Center and athletic fields;
- It adversely impacts the Arboretum, through increased shading and degradation of educational habitat. Compared with other bridge alternatives, it will permanently remove the most acres of habitat (DEIS 5-28):
  - o The 6-lane Pacific Interchange takes 2.34 acres,
  - o The 6-lane base plan takes 0.7 acres,
  - o The 4-lane plan adds 0.04 acres;
- It adversely impacts the Arboretum through increased traffic;
- It creates adverse impacts and costs - which cannot be estimated because mitigation plans are not included in the DEIS - on the University's Capital Improvement Projects, defined by the 2003 Master Plan for the Seattle Campus, the City of Seattle-University of Washington Agreement, and the 2001 Arboretum Master plan; and
- It permanently removes about 18 acres of campus property from any future facilities expansion.

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Whereas, the Pacific Street Interchange as proposed in the Washington Department of Transportation Draft Environmental Impact Statement for SR520 will adversely impact the University in the following ways:

- It adversely affects the health and vitality of the University by increasing traffic volume 30 percent on the streets in Southeast campus;
  - o Specifically, this plan would increase afternoon peak traffic on Montlake between Pacific and NE 45th by approximately 1,000 cars per hour relative to the base six-lane plan and increase it by 1,200 cars per hour relative to the four-lane plan.
  - o Specifically, this plan would increase afternoon peak traffic on NE 45th at Montlake by 1,200 cars per hour relative to the base six-lane plan or 1,000 cars per hour relative to the “do nothing” plan.
  - o One of the most significant threats of the plan and the resulting increase in traffic is the timely and efficient ability of emergency vehicles to access the UW Medical Center as well as the Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center.
- Approximately half of the 31.6 acres of new right-of-way required for this option comes from the University of Washington (DEIS, 4-31). Most of this would be in parking areas south of Husky Stadium (E11/12) and along both sides of Montlake Boulevard;
- This taking results in the permanent loss of 500-760 parking spaces in E11 and E12 parking lots as well as a larger taking during construction;

Whereas, the plan provides a minimal benefit for University of Washington faculty, staff and students: approximately 10 percent of the UW population commutes from the Eastside and approximately half of those commute by HOV;

Therefore, be it resolved that the Faculty Senate supports a replacement of the SR 520 bridge that promotes the use of high-occupancy vehicles and transit that enhances transportation modes in our region;

Be it resolved that the Faculty Senate opposes any alteration of SR 520 that fundamentally alters the character of campus and interferes with the ability of the University to carry out its mission;

Be it further resolved that the Faculty Senate has grave concerns about the adoption of the Pacific Street Interchange as Washington Department of Transportation's preferred option because of its adverse effects on the University and surrounding areas relative to the benefits offered.

Respectfully submitted,

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Passed, 26 October 2006