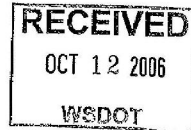




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October 9, 2006

WSDOT – SR 520 Project
Paul Krueger, Environmental Manager
414 Olive Way, Suite 400
Seattle, WA 98101

RE: SR 520 Bridge Replacement and HOV Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement

Dear Mr. Krueger,

The Bellevue City Council supports the reconstruction of the SR 520 corridor between I-405 and I-5 as a six lane facility (two general purpose lanes and one HOV lane in each direction). It is clear from the DEIS that a tolled six lane corridor will carry far more people than the four lane alternative. The new HOV lanes would provide the main transportation benefit. Because of this, it will be critical for WSDOT to design a system that provides the maximum benefit to transit, vanpools, and carpools, while not undermining general purpose traffic capacity.

The Bellevue City Council has reviewed the SR 520 Bridge Replacement and HOV Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), has selected a preliminary preferred alternative, and has identified several concerns we wish to share. We seek solutions that reasonably address travel demands while protecting established neighborhoods and the natural environment. The SR 520 DEIS reflects the magnitude and extent of study that WSDOT has undertaken over the past nine years in conjunction with the greater region to fully evaluate all reasonable solutions. Clearly, it is time to act to address the vulnerabilities and travel demands of the corridor.

Based on our review of the DEIS, we believe that the region should pursue:

- A six lane SR 520 corridor that allows for future expansion to accommodate high capacity transit;
- 108th Avenue Northeast direct access ramps for transit and HOV users;
- Transit flyer stops at 92nd Avenue Northeast and Evergreen Point;
- Pacific Interchange with direct access ramps for transit and HOV users; and
- Continuous pedestrian/bicycle facility on the north side of the corridor that connects without gaps to the SR 520 trail east of I-405.

Given the future importance of transit to the corridor, we view a direct access ramp at 108th Avenue NE/SR 520 as an essential component of the project. This option would better match the overall corridor design and functionality than the Bellevue Way HOV lane option. The Bellevue Way option would introduce a significant weave across congested general purpose lanes for buses using the new HOV facilities and the 92nd Ave NE transit flyer stop. This weave could undermine the functionality of the investment and would compromise its reliability, particularly during peak travel periods.

We support WSDOT's efforts to design the new floating bridge in such a way that future implementation of high capacity transit can be accommodated. We also support the inclusion of the Evergreen Point Freeway Transit Stop so that adequate right of way is preserved for future high capacity transit use. Without this added width, it appears that costly and disruptive reconstruction of the planned Evergreen Point lid would be necessary.

City of Bellevue offices are located at 450 110th Avenue N.E.

L-005-001

Comment Summary:

Pacific Street Interchange Option

Response:

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

L-005-001

L-005-001

The six lane alternative would improve overall mobility to corridor users, particularly with the Pacific Street Interchange. We support inclusion of this option because it would improve access between the Eastside and the University District/Northeast Seattle. The Pacific Street Interchange appears to be the best option for addressing existing and future demand for travel between the Eastside and the University District. The City of Bellevue recognizes that there may be impacts that require mitigation, particularly affecting the University of Washington and the environment. We encourage the Washington State Department of Transportation, City of Seattle, and the University of Washington to continue their discussions regarding the design and mitigation of the Pacific Street Interchange. We are optimistic that a solution can be found that satisfies regional and local transportation needs, the site-specific design issues in the University area, and provides a permanent long-term solution for the corridor.

L-005-002

Additionally, reconstruction of the corridor should include a continuous pedestrian/bicycle path that connects to the existing SR 520 trail east of I-405 in the vicinity of 120th Ave NE. We consider it unacceptable to truncate the path at Points Drive NE, as currently proposed. Again, these types of facilities should be viewed as interconnected systems, rather than isolated components.

L-005-003

How to address impacts has been an ongoing concern for neighborhoods and jurisdictions along the SR 520 corridor. We are impressed that the project team has found ways to alleviate nearly all existing and anticipated noise issues. However, we are concerned that solutions to high noise levels associated with proposed improvements East of I-405 have not been found. We anticipate that the WSDOT funded NE 8th St. to SR 520 "braid" project will build upon the SR 520 DEIS and seek to address noise issues in this area. It is disappointing that some Bellevue residences south of SR 520 near the Bellevue Way interchange would also continue to experience high noise levels. We are optimistic that solutions will be found as design progresses.

The City Council has communicated its desires for the State to pursue noise mitigation aggressively. City of Bellevue Resolution 7375 (adopted June, 2006) states: "The City Council of the City of Bellevue Washington hereby declares its desire for the Washington State Department of Transportation and other applicable agencies to aggressively pursue all noise abatement strategies, traditional and emerging, to mitigate noise generated by the use of major transportation facilities, to levels well below current state and federal guidelines." It will also be important for WSDOT to work closely with the affected neighborhoods to balance noise abatement strategies with potential view impacts.

L-005-004

Bellevue prides itself as "a city within a park." We value our parks, open spaces, natural areas, wetlands, and streams. The SR 520 project proposes to improve its relation with the environment by treating run-off and mitigating wetland impacts by creating new ones. The DEIS states that there are insufficient opportunities for mitigation within the affected basins. City staff have communicated numerous candidate mitigation opportunities that are within the affected basin that we believe could satisfy the need. This presents an opportunity to enhance Bellevue's assets and satisfy WSDOT mitigation needs. We look forward to working with you to realize our mutual goals.

L-005-005

Reconstruction of the SR 520 corridor would clearly have lengthy and significant impacts on the region. We understand the concepts described in the DEIS reflect a worst case scenario and that future work will better define the staging of improvements. It is encouraging to see that the corridor would remain open to traffic throughout the construction period. However, we are deeply concerned with the potential closure of the westbound HOV lane for up to two years for construction staging. While we realize that adequate staging areas are imperative to the project, we expect that transit and HOV demands will be high during construction and therefore continued operation of the HOV lane will be critical. Similarly, we anticipate significant impacts during the reconstruction of major interchanges such as Bellevue Way and 108th Ave NE. We encourage you to continue to refine your construction staging plans and to work closely with Sound Transit,

L-005-002

Comment Summary:

Eastside Concerns

Response:

See Section 24.0 of the 2006 Draft EIS Comment Response Report.

L-005-003

Comment Summary:

Eastside Concerns

Response:

See Section 24.0 of the 2006 Draft EIS Comment Response Report.

L-005-004

Comment Summary:

Wetland Mitigation

Response:

See Section 16.1 of the 2006 Draft EIS Comment Response Report.

L-005-005

Comment Summary:

Eastside Concerns

Response:

See Section 24.0 of the 2006 Draft EIS Comment Response Report.


L-005-005

King County Metro, and City staff to develop workable solutions that include realistic demand management strategies and special transit services, as appropriate.

L-005-006

Bellevue supports moving forward with the SR 520 Bridge Replacement and HOV Project as a six lane facility with a direct access ramp at 108th Ave NE and a continuous pedestrian/bicycle path that connects to the existing trail east of I-405. We look forward to a continued productive relationship with WSDOT to complete environmental review and design processes to develop a financing plan, and to reconstruct the corridor. We strongly encourage the State and region to pursue this project aggressively, while addressing neighborhood and environmental issues. We recognize that the SR 520 corridor represents a large capital investment for the State and region and that funding is a major issue. The cost of delay will only intensify this challenge. Therefore, we are committed to working with the State and region to construct this critical project as soon as possible.

Sincerely,



Grant Degginger, Mayor
City of Bellevue

Cc: Bellevue City Council
Steve Sarkozy, City Manager
Goran Sparrman, Transportation Director
Matt Terry, Planning and Community Development Director
Patrick Foran, Parks and Community Services Director
Denny Vidmar, Utilities Director

L-005-006

Comment Summary:

6-Lane Alternative

Response:

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