From: Clark Frazier [mailto:ClarkFrazier@comcast.net]
Sent: Thursday, January 28, 2010 11:58 PM
To: SR 520 Bridge SDEIS
Subject: Comments on the 520 I-5 Junction Options; The I-5 Interchange Design Options Are Unacceptable

I-006-001

Comments on the 520 I-5 Junction Options; The I-5 Interchange Design Options Are Unacceptable:

I have taken a quick look at your user unfriendly on-line PDF document describing a summary of the I-5 interchange options. Rebuilding the interchange in its present configuration is a complete waste of money because it would simply replicate a major traffic hazard, especially for drivers attempting to navigate to the Mercer Mess off ramp. Unfortunately, the extra southbound lane that picks up on the left tempts I-5 drivers to move left in the same area where drivers exiting 520 are attempting to move right. I have seen many near misses, especially when traffic is at levels B, C or D (congested but moving, often at widely varying speeds). A properly designed left hand entrance ramp (if such a thing is possible) would add a new lane to the right and force drivers to merge in one lane with a line configuration not permitting I-5 drivers to move left into that lane. To mitigate the problem, a direct connection or exit from I-5 to the Mercer mess exit is needed. Without such a fix, I don't believe that any work should be done on the interchange except to restripe the lanes into a slightly safer configuration.

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In general I am opposed to the entire project because it does not include light rail. I often don't go to events at the Seattle Center because of the extreme congestion on the 520 bridge and the painfully congested traffic around the Seattle Center. One thing the Metro planners don't seem to grasp is the need to add a second entry into Seattle for light rail. Attempting to connect a 520 light rail line with the transit tunnel or the line north to the University of Washington is not really possible in a southbound direction. Instead, the transit alignment should be routed along the 520 corridor with a new interchange station and possibly a connection to the north and then call at Seattle Center before proceeding downtown on either a First Street or Third Street for a more rational connection with the existing transit tunnel. Adding bus and HOV lanes will not create service to the Seattle Center or parts of downtown remote from the existing Light Rail tunnel. With HOV and bus lanes, the high operating costs associated with buses will preclude increasing evening service to a more acceptable level of at least every 15 minutes until after 11:00 PM. Since there are no real benefits to this project for transit riders or non-carpool users,

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this project should be scrapped and the existing pontoons should be used to replace the floating part of the bridge and the rest of structure should be shored up enough to prevent seismic collapse and call it a day. The money would be better used elsewhere until someone with real imagination can come up with a better design.

Clark Frazier
15821 NE 96th Way
Redmond, WA 98052

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Improvements on I-5 are not included as part of the SR 520, I-5 to Medina: Bridge Replacement and HOV project. However, to help improve the connection between SR 520 and I-5, the SR 520, I-5 to Medina project includes a new reversible HOV ramp that will connect to the existing I-5 reversible express lanes south of SR 520. The project will not preclude future modifications to the SR 520/I-5 interchange.

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Section 2.4 in the Final EIS explains why initial implementation of light rail transit on SR 520 is not planned. The decision to locate Sound Transit's initial east-west light rail transit corridor on I-90 rather than SR 520 has been made through extensive regional deliberation. Table 2-2 of the Final EIS illustrates the history of regional decision making on east-west mass transit routes, which began in 1967 when the Comprehensive Public Transportation Plan for the Seattle Metropolitan Area identified a rail corridor from Seattle to Bellevue and Redmond on I-90. Subsequent studies and agreements over the next 40 years have all continued to identify I-90 as the preferred rail transit corridor, with predicted ridership similar to or more than SR 520 and substantially lower costs and environmental effects. However, through coordination with Sound Transit, WSDOT has designed the Preferred Alternative to have enhanced compatibility with potential future light rail compared to the SDEIS design options. Chapter 2 of the Final EIS provides further discussion, including the options for potential future light rail to connect to Sound Transit's North Link light rail line. However, WSDOT is not the agency responsible for implementing light rail in the Puget Sound region. WSDOT will continue to work with Sound Transit as ST studies the potential for long-term implementation of rail in the SR 520 corridor.

Because Sound Transit is the regional agency responsible for implementing high-capacity transit in the Puget Sound region, it bears

the responsibility for environmental analysis of its project and non-project proposals.

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There will be some real benefits for transit riders. The SR 520, I-5 to Medina project would result in immediate benefits for transit speed and reliability in the corridor by providing high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes across the floating bridge and better HOV connections at the Montlake and I-5 interchanges (see Section 5.1 of both the SDEIS and Final EIS). The HOV lanes would allow for the near-term implementation of bus rapid transit, as called for in the SR 520 High-Capacity Transit Plan. Non-carpool users would also experience reduced congestion, as described in Section 5.1.

The comment suggests that the existing bridge should continue to be used after some additional work. Retrofitting the Evergreen Point Bridge and bridge approach structures was not determined to be a viable option under the No Build Alternative or separately. The bridge has had a number of safety and maintenance retrofits to date and further retrofits are not feasible due to structural and pontoon floatation limitations. Hollow columns support the west approach to the Evergreen Point Bridge, the Portage Bay Bridge, and on- and off-ramps in Montlake and the Arboretum. These columns are vulnerable to damage from earthquakes and could not be effectively retrofitted to accepted seismic protection levels. The No Build Alternative evaluated in the Draft EIS did assume that minor retrofits associated with maintenance and safety would continue, however, because a “retrofit alternative” is not structurally feasible, it was not determined to be a viable option.