Washington State Department of Transportation

**SR 520 Bridge Replacement and HOV Program**

I-5 to Medina: Bridge Replacement and HOV Project

**SR 520, I-5 to Medina: Supplemental Draft EIS Comment Form**

Please use this form to share your comments on the content provided in the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement document. WSDOT will consider all comments received between Jan. 22 and April 15, 2010 in making its final decision in the environmental review process. Thank you for your comments.

You can provide comments using one of the following methods:

-- Complete this form.
-- Mail your comments to Jenifer Young, SDEIS Environmental Manager, Washington State Department of Transportation, 600 Stewart Street, Suite 520, Seattle, WA 98101.
-- E-mail your comments to SR520Bridge_SDEIS@wsdot.wa.gov.
-- Speak to a court reporter at an environmental hearing scheduled for 5 – 7 p.m., Feb. 23, at Lake Union Park Naval Reserve Building, 860 Terry Ave. N., Seattle.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Name | Gregory Koehler | CommentDate: | 1/23/2010 19:07 |
| 2. E-mail | gregkoe@microsoft.co | Comment Source: | Online Comment |
| 3. Address: | 2629 11th Ave E | | |
| 4. City: | Seattle | | |
| 5. State: | WA | | |
| * 6. Zip Code: | 98102 | | |

**7. Do you have any comments on the SR 520, I-5 to Medina: Bridge Replacement and HOV Project Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement?**

**I-149-001**

While Option A+, with sound walls, may be the most reasonable of three proposals for balancing environmental impact with traffic capacity, it does not fundamentally solve the transportation problem of quickly and reliably moving masses of people across 520. I'm concerned that the SDEIS, as well as the video simulation of Option A, omits disclosing the merge mess at Portage Bay and I-5 that will ensue with this traffic configuration: The video shows, and the SDEIS describes, how transit will be able to flow via the inside 520 HOV lanes to/from the reversible I-5 express lanes. As the SDEIS explains, the HOV bypass is restricted to the mornings for Westbound 520 to South I-5 and to the afternoon/evening for North I-5 to Eastbound 520 (shown in the video simulation).

**I-149-002**

Unfortunately, the I-5 reversible lane schedule does not address some of the most problematic scenarios: During the morning Eastbound commute, transit from downtown will be stuck (as it is today) in the two general traffic lanes on I-5 that merge together under the 10th & Delmar lid. However, under Option A, and maybe the others options as well, traffic will slow and back up further as transit will need to merge left to reach the inside HOV lane.
In the afternoon/evening, the situation is much worse: Westbound transit in the inside HOV lane of 520 will need to merge with the two general lanes while cars also enter and merge from Montlake onramp via the auxiliary lane across Portage Bay. Any buses and carpools headed north will merge right across two or three lanes, depending on the configuration of the auxiliary lane, to reach north I-5. Since I-5 is also at capacity during this peak time, the back ups will be extensive. This is not mentioned in the Transportation Section 5.1, of the SDEIS.

**I-149-001**

As mentioned on page 2-1 of the SDEIS Transportation Discipline Report, "SR 520 often becomes congested when there are backups on I-5 through downtown Seattle and on I-405 at the ramps to and from SR 520. Congestion points include "weave" areas where entering and exiting traffic is changing lanes at the same time, places where a lane ends (for example, the end of the westbound HOV lane before the SR 520 bridge), and locations where a high volume of exiting vehicles causes traffic to back up onto the freeway mainline." Additionally, the report discusses how conditions will worsen by the year 2030.

Furthermore, the SDEIS Transportation Discipline Report contained analyses of traffic operations and several I-5 interchanges with the SDEIS design options and with the No Build Alternative. The report stated that several bottlenecks along the I-5 corridor limit the amount of traffic that can access SR 520 (page 5-1). It also stated that I-5 traffic demand would increase up to 20 percent with the No Build Alternative (page 5-9) and that none of the SDEIS options would be able to serve all of the forecasted traffic demand because of congestion on I-5 and I-405 (page 5-21).

For updated information regarding freeway operations and how they would improve under the Preferred Alternative, please see Chapter 5 of the Final Transportation Discipline Report (Attachment 7 to the Final EIS).

**I-149-002**

Analysis of the I-5 interchange area is fully described in Chapter 5 of the SDEIS Transportation Discipline Report. This chapter includes information about how SR 520 operates in conjunction with the new express lane connection and the Portage Bay Bridge lane configuration. Updated information for the Preferred Alternative is included in both Section 5.1 of the Final EIS and the Final Transportation Discipline

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**I-149-002**

At the same time, with the planned removal of the popular Montlake Freeway Transit Stations, mass transit riders (projected to increase by double digits with the introduction of 520 tolls) will suffer the loss of hundreds of daily transit connections. The concerns have been called out by Sound Transit in their studies and the agency will partially mitigate the loss by adding direct routes from the UW, notably the 542 line that will run every 15 minutes. Unfortunately, placing numerous additional buses on the road doesn't solve the fundamental problem that during peak times, they will all be stuck in the same general traffic backups resulting from the new Portage Bay Merge Mess.

If there are no better options and this is truly the best we can do, that is one thing. I don't believe this is the case.

**I-149-003**

We need to move more people, not necessarily more vehicles, across 520. Most frustrating is there is already an ideal, scalable, mass-transportation line under construction right next to the Montlake and I-5/520 interchange. It is called Link, it runs from Downtown Seattle and it will have a station at the Montlake Triangle that opens in 2016. It runs in its own dedicated lane and avoids any general traffic lane merge and gridlock issues. The current Sound Transit Plan is to run Link first over I-90 to the Eastside rather than 520. But I-90 is not light-rail ready. It must be retrofitted because the rail is too close to the pontoons, causing issues with electrical discharges. 520, on the other hand, is being designed specifically to carry light rail, with the road surface elevated above pontoons. So, I-90 will be retrofitted at great expense to carry light rail, while 520, which is designed and built to carry light rail, won't. This decision should be revisited. With continuous light rail serving mass transit needs, bus service across 520 can be greatly scaled back, reducing, or eliminating the need for dedicated HOV lanes. If HOV/HOT lanes are still deemed desirable for vehicle traffic optimization and revenue generation purposes, either of the two general purpose lanes could easily be used as HOV/HOT lanes, as necessary, with dynamic signs and transponder-toll technology.

Report.

Eastbound travel on the SR 520 corridor would be greatly improved by the update in design on the highway. This allows for buses originating from I-5 south of SR 520 to cross over to the center HOV lane. This condition was accounted for in the analyses referenced above. During the evening commute, there would be some congestion at the I-5 interchange; however, this congestion would be less than what would be experienced with the No Build Alternative.

**I-149-003**

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 (see Table 2-2 of the Final EIS).

The SR 520 High-Capacity Transit Plan, which was endorsed in 2008 by the state, King County Metro Transit, and Sound Transit, found that until at least 2030, demand for transit in the 520 corridor could be satisfied by bus rapid transit that runs in HOV/transit lanes, complementing Sound Transit's East Link on I-90. At the same time, the plan acknowledges that after 2030 significant increases in cross-lake travel may warrant dedicated HCT facilities in both I-90 and SR 520. Therefore, the new SR 520 bridge and associated interchanges will be built in a way that allows the structure to accommodate a two-way light rail line or busway at a future date.

While WSDOT believed that the design of the SR 520, I-5 to Medina project already accommodated potential future light rail, the agency worked with the City of Seattle and Sound Transit to identify changes that would enhance the corridor's rail compatibility. The Preferred Alternative reflects these design changes. Light rail could be

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**I-149-004**

To recap, in peak hours during the heaviy-used "reverse commute" direction, buses and carpools will need to run in and out of the general traffic lanes and will be blocked by the backups caused by the ensuing merge situations. Since buses and carpools will be running in the general lanes, we should study the possibility of eliminating the 520 HOV lanes and also the auxiliary Portage Bay lane, in favor of extending Link light rail... NOW. It is the best and only true mass-transit option, and already has billions in funding from the voter-approved Prop 1 in 2008.

We need to move more people, not necessarily more vehicles, across 520. Please connect Link Light Rail across 520 and end the madness!

These comments will become part of the public record for the SR 520, I-5 to Medina: Bridge Replacement and HOV Project Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Personal information is voluntary and will become part of the public record if provided. The Washington State Department of Transportation is a public agency and is subject to the State of Washington's Public Records Act (RCW 42.56). Therefore, comments may be made available to anyone requesting them for non-commercial purposes.

accommodated either by converting the HOV lanes for rail use or by adding light-rail only lanes. Both approaches would require the addition of supplemental floating bridge pontoons to support the additional weight of light rail, should the regional decision to add rail be made and funded. Such a decision would need to be planned and programmed by regional land use and transit agencies, funded by a public vote, and evaluated in its own environmental analysis.

Under the SR 520 High Capacity Transit Plan, Sound Transit would study the demand and necessity of light rail later in this decade. See Chapter 2 of the Final EIS for further information. Also see the SR 520 High Capacity Transit Plan at: http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Projects/SR520Bridge/Library/technical.htm. WSDOT undertook additional analysis after the SDEIS was published to help answer public questions about how rail in the SR 520 corridor might operate and the ridership it might generate. The analysis revisited the potential for implementing light rail transit on SR 520 *in place* of the HOV/transit lane between the Montlake interchange and the Eastside. The analysis concluded that light rail would not provide mobility benefits before 2030 because of service duplication with East Link (see Section 2.4 of the Final EIS for further discussion). The analysis assumed that bus service on SR 520 would be modified to work with light rail. Cross-lake bus routes would be reduced because light rail would duplicate that service. Eliminating the benefit of HOV lanes and adding light rail service would reduce the number of carpools, but it would not eliminate the demand for carpooling. (The analysis assumed no tolls for carpools with 3 or more occupants.) Further, a single general purpose lane in each direction would substantially restrict cross-lake mobility. With light rail service on SR 520 and I-90, the demand for general-purpose travel would still require two lanes in each direction on SR 520.

**I-149-004**

Please see the response to Comment I-149-003.