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To: SR 520 Bridge SDEIS
Subject: Comments on 520 EIS

EIS Environmental Hearing Comment Form.

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Comments:

I-237-001

My wife and I have lived next to I-5 on North Capital Hill (overlooking I-5 and 520, at E Miller) for 36 years and watched with interest the alternatives that WSDOT has submitted to the adjacent residents for their solutions to increased traffic on I-5 and 520. Now we are aware of a new plan to move traffic from the express lanes to 520 by building an elevated structure for transit and HOV lanes.

We attended the recent meeting at Lake Union and connected with individuals from WSDOT who offered to come to our home and take pictures and then send us a computerized picture of what the new structure would look like and how it would impact our beautiful view. Having received pictures of the 520 /I-5 ramp connections, I would like to express my concerns about the West end of the project.

It seems that WSDOT's solution is to provide an extremely high flying type overpass from 520 to I-5 heading south. We are quite concerned about the height and necessity of this project and want to voice our opposition to it. We have enjoyed our view across the freeway to the Eastlake neighborhood and Lake Union and already have felt unhappy about the sound walls on the West side of I-5 that really seems to further isolate both neighborhoods. This structure, which will be much higher than the present 520 Southbound road, will block our views and force us to look at buses speeding past and allow more noise and pollution in our house.

I-237-002

I would question whether, since this ramp is supposedly limited to buses and HOV traffic (3 or more people per car), the ramp would be fully utilized. We all know that soon after opening, political pressure will be applied to allow single occupancy vehicles to use this ramp, first during off hours and then all the time, thus creating more noise and pollution for the adjacent neighborhoods. This seems like a 1950's solution to a 2010 situation, out of date, not serving the Puget Sound population very well and creating more pollution and noise for the sake of serving a few more single occupant cars from the east side.

I-237-001

The SR 520 and I-5 interchange ramps would be reconstructed in generally the same configuration as the existing interchange. The only exceptions would be that a new reversible HOV ramp would connect to the existing I-5 reversible express lanes south of SR 520, and the alignment of the ramp from northbound I-5 to eastbound SR 520 would shift to the south.

The proposed HOV ramp over I-5 would be roughly 30 feet wide and at approximately the same height as the existing ramp on the east end. It would be approximately 15 feet higher than the existing ramp at the southern end. This new HOV ramp would be adjacent to the existing ramp and would be consistent with the visual quality of the existing interchange. The visual effect would not be a significant change from the existing viewshed of the historic properties and would not alter their integrity.

I-237-002

Direct access ramps are designed and constructed to provide transit and carpools with a bypass to congestion that can occur on general purpose lanes. They are also beneficial for providing a direct connection from the highway HOV lane to the local system without forcing transit and carpools to weave across general purpose traffic. The State does not have any intention of opening the direct access HOV ramps to general purpose traffic, which would reduce the benefits to transit and HOVs. ESHB 6392 specifies that the HOV lane will be available only for vehicles with 3 or more passengers. The State's HOV lane operations policy would be used to identify when the HOV lanes' operational thresholds were met and when an adjustment to the occupancy requirement would be recommended. Because ESSB 6392 specifies the HOV lane vehicle occupancy of 3 or more people, the State would need to request legislative approval to make any modifications.

I-237-002

Don't destroy the cities beautiful neighbors just to accommodate more vehicles, think of better solutions, as tunnels, mass transit, etc. It seems to me that rather than adding more traffic to I-5, which is at a crawl in both directions most of the time, a better solution would be to distribute traffic via short tunnels to major connection points. The price of gas will never decline, maybe in 10 years or so it could be \$5.00 to \$8.00/gal. plus the expense of shelling out money for tolls on this bridge of \$3.00 + for each trip. Spending \$4.5 billion (not including interest on the money, which would double the cost) is a waste of money. I know the governor and others want to move quickly, while the "bidding climate" is favorable thinking they are going to get more for their buck, but that is false economics. Wait until the change orders start to appear on the project, costs will rise quickly. I know that political pressure is strong from construction unions and contractors to provide jobs for their members, but to provide these jobs and a bridge solution that is poorly thought out is no solution at all. Don't go for the least expensive bid, we see to many government buildings where that is the driving solution - dull, dull, dull.

I-237-003

I have reviewed the Nelson\Nygaard report that the Mayor's office commissioned. The information in this report advocating light rail across the bridge to Montlake and a four-lane Portage Bay Viaduct seems like a very progressive idea. Don't widen the area between Montlake and I-5 simply to add a few more cars into the city.

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I-237-003

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). 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 (see Chapter 2 of the Final EIS). Please also see the responses to comments from the City of Seattle Mayor's Office, in Item L-007, regarding high capacity transit.

The SR 520, I-5 to Medina project would complete the HOV lane system in the corridor, improving reliability and efficiency for transit and carpools, but would not add general-purpose lanes. Thus, the project is aligned with improving the overall efficiency of the transportation system by creating incentives for people to choose an alternative to driving alone. The 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 (see Section 2.4 of the Final EIS for more information).

The Preferred Alternative evaluated in the Final EIS minimizes the footprint of project wherever possible while complying with safety and operational standards (see Chapter 2 of the Final EIS). A 4-lane Portage Bay Bridge would not allow for HOV lanes, which provide express lane connectivity, or for a managed shoulder in the westbound direction, which is needed to address congestion.