From: "Deborah.Ensor@dot.gov" <Deborah.Ensor@dot.gov>
To: "youngje@consultant.wsdot.wa.gov" <youngje@consultant.wsdot.wa.gov>
Subject: WSDOT SR520 Comments

Jenifer,

Please see the attached comment letter for the SR520 project. The hard copy will follow via mail. Please contact John Witmer at 206-220-7964 if you have any questions. We look forward to continued coordination on the SR520 project.

Thank you and have a great day.

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April 15, 2010

Jenifer Young, Environmental Manager
SR 520 Project Office
600 Stewart Street, Suite 520
Seattle, WA 98101

Re: Comments on Supplemental Draft EIS for the SR 520 Bridge Replacement and HOV Program, January 20, 2010

Dear Jenifer:

F-001-001

Thank you for the opportunity to review the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), January 20, 2010 for the SR 520, I-5 to Medina: Bridge Replacement and HOV Project. The Supplemental Draft EIS analyzes a 6-Lane Alternative with three design options for the Montlake interchange area. The 6-Lane Alternative would add continuous HOV lanes and include three landscaped lids over SR 520 to reconnect neighborhoods.

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) would like to offer the following comments on the Supplemental Draft EIS.

1. The document discusses the SR 520 High-Capacity Transit (HCT) Plan that outlines a strategy for incremental implementation of bus rapid transit service (BRT) on SR 520 and the development of a multimodal center at the University Link light rail station. However, the document does not clearly indicate how each of the design options would accommodate BRT or transit bus access to the light rail or multimodal station.

F-001-002

2. The multimodal station is referenced in several locations (for example, pages 1-17 and 5-28), but it does not appear to be included as part of this project. If the multimodal station is not part of this project, can it be included at a later date? This would seem to be a prime location and opportune time for an intermodal connection.

F-001-003

3. In order to be effective, the BRT service would require direct access to the light rail station. It is not clear how each of the design options vary in their ability to deliver BRT service to the light rail or multimodal station. FTA encourages that future bus or BRT transit intermodal connectivity be given strong consideration in the design for this project, including direct HOV access to a multimodal center.

F-001-001

The connection of bus rapid transit (BRT) and transit bus service to the light-rail station was evaluated through a collaborative effort involving WSDOT, the City of Seattle, King County Metro, and Sound Transit as part of the design refinements and transit connection workgroup required by Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill (ESSB) 6392. This workgroup refined the Preferred Alternative to include details on transit priority and HOV lanes, bus stop locations, and transit connections. The suggested design refinements are included in the ESSB 6392: Design Refinements and Transit Connections Workgroup Recommendations Report (Attachment 16 of the Final EIS). While the Montlake Multimodal Center is not a component of the SR 520, I-5 to Medina project, it is a part of the project's affected environment. The Montlake Multimodal Center refers to an area known today as the Montlake Triangle, which is bounded by Montlake Boulevard NE, NE Pacific Street, and NE Pacific Place. The multimodal center was collaboratively planned as part of the 2008 SR 520 High Capacity Transit Plan. Section 5.1 of the Final EIS and Chapter 8 of the Final Transportation Discipline Report describe transit operations and rider connections in the area of the multimodal center. For more information on the Montlake Multimodal Center, please see the SR 520 High Capacity Transit Plan at http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Projects/SR520Bridge/Library/technical.htm.

F-001-002

The Montlake Multimodal Center is not part of the SR 520, I-5 to Medina: Bridge Replacement and HOV Project, but it is a part of the project's affected environment. The Montlake Multimodal Center refers to an area known today as the Montlake Triangle, which is bounded by Montlake Boulevard NE, NE Pacific Street, and NE Pacific Place. The Montlake Triangle, considered one of the "gateways" to the University of Washington, is an integral piece of University's Rainier Vista. Bus, pedestrian, and bicycle facilities are integrated into the Montlake Triangle, with bus stops or layover areas on all three "faces" of the

F-001-004

4. The project would eliminate the Montlake Freeway transit stop. The document indicates that this is a highly used station and that it is overcapacity in terms of bicycle usage. A qualitative assessment on the effects of the removal of this station begins on page 5-22. Based on this assessment, it is our understanding that transit service would benefit from the improved traffic flow and by riders transferring to the light rail station. However, the analysis leaves room for doubt due to the lack of a quantitative assessment of changes in travel times, transit ridership, and mode of transit access.

F-001-005

5. FTA would support any design option that would strongly enhance the pedestrian environment in this highly congested location by providing safer and easier access to the Husky Stadium light rail (or multimodal) station, such as the proposal to include a lid over Montlake Boulevard at Husky Stadium.

F-001-006

6. Sound Transit and the University of Washington are currently developing a light rail station design option that includes a mid-block pedestrian crossing of Montlake Boulevard. To what extent do the three SR 520 options work with the mid-block crossing and Rainier Vista plan? If you were to extend the length of the lid a little further north, it could serve as a grade-separated pedestrian crossing to the light rail station.

F-001-007

7. FTA would support any design option that would encourage additional transit ridership though improving access to transit stations by the use of bike trail enhancements like those included in the pedestrian lid over SR 520 at Montlake Boulevard. Please also ensure that pedestrians and bicyclists can safely cross the Montlake Cut.

F-001-008

8. We did not find a discussion of the cumulative construction impacts with future light rail extensions and the University Vista projects. FTA previously commented on this issue in our DEIS comment letter, dated October 31, 2006. Since Sound Transit now has the funding to construct light rail north from Husky Stadium under their ST2 Program, the inclusion of this cumulative impacts analysis regarding future projects that have programmed funding has greater importance.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to comment. Please contact John Witmer at (206) 220-7964 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Reyes-Alicea
Director of Planning and Program Development

Triangle and pedestrian/bicycle pathways across the Triangle.

The future extension of light-rail service to the University of Washington station is expected to increase bus, pedestrian vehicle, and person volumes at the Montlake Triangle. Pedestrians will cross the Triangle to transfer between bus and rail service, traveling to the University of Washington central campus to the north and University of Washington Medical Center to the south. The introduction of light-rail service leads to the name change from the Montlake Triangle to the Montlake Multimodal Center. These changes are all identified in the SR 520, I-5 to Medina project No Build Alternative.

As part of the ESSB 6392 process, WSDOT coordinated with transit agencies, the City of Seattle, and the University of Washington during refinement of the Preferred Alternative. This coordination ensures that the SR 520, I-5 to Medina project will not adversely affect transit, pedestrian, and non-motorized facilities and operations at the future Montlake Multimodal Center, nor will it preclude future transit facility and service improvements. Development of the Montlake Multimodal Center will be an action undertaken by Sound Transit and not by WSDOT.

F-001-003

The Preferred Alternative in the Final EIS includes an HOV direct-access ramp to and from the east on SR 520, which would connect to the Montlake interchange area. Between the Montlake interchange area and the Montlake Multimodal Center, where the light-rail station would be located, SR 520 buses would have transit signal priority and access to HOV lanes on Montlake Boulevard NE. These HOV lanes would be provided as part of the SR 520, I-5 to Medina project. These facilities, along with the travel time and reliability improvements provided by completing the SR 520 HOV lane system, would meet BRT standards and would support transit agencies in their delivery of future BRT service in the SR 520 corridor. The SR 520, I-5 to Medina project does not

preclude future modifications to the King County Metro and Sound Transit bus routing, planning, and implementation. The project does provide the infrastructure that could be used by the transit agencies in various ways to optimize their transit service including the addition of their BRT service levels.

F-001-004

Since the SDEIS was published, WSDOT and FHWA have identified a Preferred Alternative, which includes modifications to the Montlake Boulevard interchange and lid that would better accommodate transit. With implementation of the Preferred Alternative, bus stops on the lid would accommodate both eastbound and westbound buses, replacing the current Montlake Freeway Transit Station stops for buses traveling between the University District and the Eastside. The Montlake lid stop would also function as a flyer stop during the off-peak periods so that passengers could access the SR 520 buses traveling between the eastside and downtown Seattle. University Link light-rail service, expected to be operational in 2016, will accommodate some of the trips that now use the bus stops. Please refer to the Final EIS for more information on the Preferred Alternative and Chapter 8 of the Final Transportation Discipline Report for an updated assessment of how the project would affect transit operations, transit ridership, and mode share. The chapter includes an evaluation, with quantitative data, of how removal of the Montlake Freeway Transit Station would affect rider travel times, transit connections, and access to the University District. The SR 520 I-5 to Medina project will also complete the SR 520 bicycle/pedestrian path between the eastside of Lake Washington and Seattle. This path completion will likely reduce the need for cyclists to transport their bikes on buses as they will be able to ride across the SR 520 bridge.

Additionally, as required by state legislation, the ESSB 6392 workgroup evaluated the transit connections at the Montlake interchange and lid

and made recommendations to facilitate an adequate level of service between the University of Washington/Montlake area and the Eastside, following closure of the Montlake Freeway Transit Station. Please refer to the ESSB 6392: Design Refinements and Transit Connections Workgroup Recommendations Report (Attachment 16 of the Final EIS).

F-001-005

Through the ESSB 6392 process, Sound Transit and the University of Washington, along with WSDOT, have recommended a grade-separated crossing (pedestrian/bicycle lid) over Montlake Boulevard NE that will ease the access between regional bus service and the rail service. The crossing is not part of the SR 520, I-5 to Medina project, and its design and implementation were analyzed through a separate NEPA Reevaluation of the Sound Transit North Link Light Rail Final Supplemental EIS and Record of Decision, dated April 2006 and June 2006 respectively. Sound Transit submitted its revaluation for the triangle project in December 2010 to FTA. All associated environmental clearances were complete in early 2011. A funding agreement for the crossing is under development and is expected to be signed around the time of publication of the SR 520, I-5 to Medina Final EIS.

F-001-006

As described in the response to comment F-001-005, Sound Transit and the University of Washington, along with WSDOT, have recommended a grade-separated crossing (pedestrian/bicycle lid) over Montlake Boulevard NE. This solution assumes that the University of Washington's Rainier Vista project, which would provide a grade-separated crossing over Pacific Place NE, will be completed. Please see Chapter 8 of the Final Transportation Discipline Report for discussion of the Montlake Multimodal Center, to be developed by others, under both the No Build Alternative and the Preferred Alternative.

F-001-007

The Preferred Alternative in the Final EIS includes a lid over SR 520 in the Montlake area; the lid was designed to support pedestrian movement and connection with transit. Non-motorized connections through the Montlake area and across the Montlake Cut were designed in coordination with the City of Seattle to address the needs of pedestrians and cyclists traveling through the area. With construction of the new bascule bridge, which is part of the Preferred Alternative, Montlake Boulevard would include a bike lane allowing riders to cross the cut in each direction.

F-001-008

Section 6.18 of the Final EIS provides a discussion of potential effects of concurrent construction activities, including effects associated with the SR 520, I-5 to Medina project and the Sound Transit North Link project. WSDOT reviewed the construction schedules for the SR 520, I-5 to Medina project, Sound Transit's University Link and North Link light rail projects, the University of Washington's Rainier Vista project and Husky Stadium Renovation project, the University of Washington Medical Center expansion, the Seattle Children's Hospital Cancer and Critical Care Expansion, and other ongoing or planned projects in the vicinity of SR 520 to identify the potential for concurrent construction effects relating to overlapping haul routes, noise, air quality, and other relevant aspects of the environment.