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From: Anita Bowers [mailto:anita_m_bowers@hotmail.com]
Sent: Thursday, April 15, 2010 10:25 PM
To: SR 520 Bridge SDEIS
Subject: Montlake and the SDEIS

Jennifer Young:
Environmental Manager
SR 520 Program Office
600 Stewart St., Suite 520
Seattle, WA 98101

Dear Ms. Young:

C-035-001 As you know, the Montlake Community Council has actively participated in the SR520 replacement process beginning before the Trans Lake Washington Study began. We have continued this involvement through the development of the Pacific Street Interchange plan that our neighborhood endorsed. We participated in the Seattle Local Impact Committee, the mediation process and now the SDEIS process that evaluates three alternatives Plan K with the M variations, Plan A and its sub option and Plan L.

Our community has sponsored numerous public meetings and forums to assess community views on the alternatives. We have attended dozens of technical working committee meetings sponsored by WSDOT. Volunteers have worked tirelessly to keep informed on project developments and to share their views with all of the members of our neighborhood through regular monthly meetings and through special meetings. Our active membership has contributed articles in both the paper and online version of our Montlake Flyer. We have worked in good faith with WSDOT to develop alternatives that support regional mobility goals for the 520 corridor and that respect the natural and human environment of the Montlake Neighborhood.

C-035-002 We have also actively supported and participated in the work of the Coalition for a Sustainable 520. Their comments to you have been thoroughly reviewed by our transportation committee. We support them all. The Coalition supported Plan K and more recently the modification to it called Plan M. Their recommendation to study a lower impact four-lane design with tolling is critical. We agree with their thoughtful recommendations.

C-035-003 We have been very concerned that the EIS process has been subverted by announcements of the unofficial selection of Plan A+. The Legislative Working Committee announced its preferred alternative recommendation before the SDEIS process was complete. The study of Plan M, a less costly alternative to Plan K with fewer wetlands impacts, was abruptly concluded before the thorough, objective analysis of its feasibility was made. Moreover, we have no information on the details of Plan A+ to make a thoughtful determination of the suitability of this plan for our neighborhood.

C-035-001

WSDOT received a number of comments in support of and in opposition to Options A, K, and L and the associated suboptions. These opinions are summarized in the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement Summary of Comments that was published in April 2010 and is available at <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Projects/SR520Bridge/SDEIS.htm>.

Since the SDEIS was published, FHWA and WSDOT have developed a Preferred Alternative that is similar to Option A, but incorporates design refinements that respond to community and stakeholder reaction to the alternatives analyzed in the SDEIS. WSDOT has performed additional studies to identify alternative construction methods and opportunities to reduce the project's construction and operational effects, as presented in Chapter 3 of the Final EIS.

C-035-002

The EIS process, as defined by NEPA and SEPA, is expressly intended to evaluate a reasonable range of alternatives that meet the project's purpose and need. This evaluation was accomplished in the Draft EIS and the SDEIS. The Draft EIS analysis provided sufficient basis to identify the 6-lane alternative for the corridor, which was identified by the Governor as the preferred lane configuration. Legislated work group processes during 2008 allowed greater community and agency input to the project design in the Montlake area. The SDEIS provided detailed analysis of the resulting Options A, K, and L and the construction and operation effects for the Montlake area. Based on the analysis documented in the SDEIS, FHWA and WSDOT developed a Preferred Alternative that was informed by feedback from agencies, Indian tribes, community organizations, and the public.

C-035-003

The Preferred Alternative has been designed to minimize effects on the

C-035-004 | There are some very real concerns about the divisive affect this alternative will have on reuniting our neighborhood because of the size of the interchange and the dehumanized lid environment that contains ramps, roads and vehicle trenches. We are not clear on the traffic estimates but even minor modifications will have enormous consequences for all or part of our neighborhood. Estimates in Plan A and A+ of the increase in traffic on East Lake Washington Blvd are but one example.

C-035-005 | A book, Montlake, An Urban Eden was written about our neighborhood. Montlake is surrounded by parks from Foster Island to North Capitol Hill. This string of parks is linked together to form a continuous green space enjoyed by our neighborhood. Yet Plan A and A+ threatens to degrade this network and to remove the opportunity to improve the connections between them. The integrity of the historic Montlake Bridge is a symbol of our neighborhood and is threatened in Plan A and A+ along with the bike and pedestrian corridor so popular with our residents. This bridge is both a gateway to our community and to the University of Washington and the experience of viewing it or crossing it must not be disturbed. The importance of protecting the view corridor of the Montlake Bridge equates to the University of Washington's protected status of the Rainier Vista in our opinion.

C-035-006 | Finally, we are concerned that the SDEIS does not evaluate a four-lane alternative financed and managed by tolls that would avoid most of these impacts. We are concerned that the study of Plan M was abruptly and arbitrarily halted. We are concerned that the EIS process has become irrelevant as the state has apparently made its decision.

We look forward to sharing with you our thoughts and will continue play an active role in whatever form this takes.

Respectfully yours,

Anita Bowers
President
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neighborhoods that are in the project area and to provide enhancements that include an expanded lid and improved pedestrian and transit facilities (see Chapter 2 of the Final EIS). WSDOT will continue to work with the community as design of the Montlake lid continues to be refined.

Chapter 2 of the Final EIS discusses the reasons that Option M, proposed during the legislative workgroup, was not considered a reasonable alternative. The primary reasons for its dismissal were environmental impact and cost. As stated in the findings of the legislative workgroup, "Because the Montlake Cut is an environmentally sensitive area, we believe the permitting of Option M's wetlands impacts will be very risky and very costly to mitigate and we believe there would be a high likelihood of a much longer delay (12 to 24 months) in order to negotiate the permitting issue with the US Army Corps of Engineers." Additionally, the Cost Review Panel was concerned that given the range of probable costs for Option M, it was unlikely to fit within the legislatively established budget for the project.

C-035-004

The Preferred Alternative has been designed to provide better continuity of the Montlake community assets, particularly for the lid structure. WSDOT will continue to provide opportunities for community input, as well as coordinate with the City of Seattle and the University of Washington throughout the design of the Montlake lid. Pedestrian and bike paths across the lid along with plantings will humanize the environment and blend the landscape with the adjacent neighborhood and park boulevards. The lid will once again physically unite the Montlake neighborhood in a manner similar to the site conditions prior to the original SR 520. Overall, the context sensitively designed landscaped lid would provide traffic calming effect as vehicles transition from SR 520 to arterials, park boulevards, and local streets. Please see the Recreation Discipline Report Addendum (Attachment 7 to the Final EIS)

for more information about parks and trails and the regional connectivity of those features.

C-035-005

The Preferred Alternative includes a new bascule bridge adjacent to the existing bridge. As stated in the Cultural Resources Discipline Report, the design of the new bascule bridge will be context sensitive to minimize its effects on the setting and feeling of the historic Carl F. Gould Montlake Bridge. Stipulations are included in the Programmatic Agreement (Attachment 9 to the Final EIS) to ensure mitigation of effects resulting from the new bascule bridge and its proximity to the existing Montlake Bridge that would diminish the integrity of historic properties. The Preferred Alternative retains the existing view corridor of the Montlake Bridge aligned with the Rainier Vista on the University of Washington campus.

C-035-006

The transportation analysis performed for the Draft EIS showed that while a 4-lane alternative would improve safety by replacing vulnerable structures and widening lanes and shoulders, it would not satisfy the project purpose of improving mobility in the SR 520 corridor. In 2010, responding to public comment regarding a transit-optimized 4-lane alternative or a 4-lane alternative with tolling for congestion management, WSDOT evaluated these alternatives using an updated traffic model. The results showed that the 4-lane alternatives would provide substantially fewer mobility benefits than the 6-Lane Alternative for both general-purpose traffic and transit. Therefore, the 4-lane concepts were eliminated from further study. Similar to Option K, Plan M would have greater adverse effect to the built and natural environment than either Option A, or the Preferred Alternative. See the response to Comment C-035-003 for more information regarding Option M.