



April 15, 2010

Paula Hammond
Secretary
Washington State Department of Transportation
SR 520 Bridge Replacement and HOV Program
Plaza 600 Building
600 Stewart Street, Suite 520
Seattle, WA 98101

Dear Secretary Hammond:

C-041-001

As the Voice of Business in Bellevue, the Bellevue Chamber of Commerce represents a diverse collection of business interests. Its membership ranges from sole proprietors to large corporations. The Chamber endeavors to promote economic growth through an integrated transportation network that can efficiently move people throughout the Puget Sound Region.

The State Route 520 corridor is vital to connecting people and jobs. However, the current capacity and safety of the bridge are no longer acceptable. It is critical for the entire region that this corridor be replaced as quickly as possible to allow for the continued economic growth and safety of the people who drive this route. This letter builds on the comments previously submitted by the Bellevue Chamber of Commerce to the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to highlight our priorities with this project.

The Chamber appreciates the work completed by the Legislature during the recent session to begin Eastside implementation of SR 520. By allowing work to start on the Eastside now, the project stands a greater chance of finishing on time and on budget. This will ultimately allow people and commerce to more quickly move along this route that currently accommodates more than 115,000 trips daily.

We continue to support a new six-lane replacement bridge built with the structural support to accommodate future lane additions and are encouraged by the progress made towards this. The Chamber urges WSDOT to continue to move forward with the current design option to accomplish this goal.

C-041-001


Since the SDEIS was published, FHWA and WSDOT have identified a Preferred Alternative that is similar to Option A, but incorporates design refinements that that respond to community and stakeholder reaction to the SDEIS. The Preferred Alternative would improve mobility and safety while reducing negative effects. Please see Chapter 2 of the Final EIS for a description of the Preferred Alternative design and Chapters 5 and 6 for discussion of its environmental effects.

C-041-002 | Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is an important component to congestion relief and we believe it is important to begin a BRT system as soon as possible after the project has been completed. A BRT system operating on HOV lanes on SR 520 would serve and connect the two biggest job centers in Washington State while providing commuters with a reliable transit option.

C-041-003 | The Chamber believes the new structure must contain a continuous bike and pedestrian path. The current gap at 108th Ave NE is a critical missing link for both commuting and recreational users. We urge WSDOT to look for the most efficient ways to address this situation now rather than waiting to address this in the future when costs are likely to be higher.

C-041-004 | Thank you for your consideration of these comments. We know what a long and contentious process this has been. However, we greatly appreciate the recent action to move forward. It is important to get this project right and the recent steps taken by the Legislature to begin early Eastside implementation as well as authorizing variable tolling are encouraging. We urge you to continue to advance on this project and complete it on the current timeline. Doing so will have significant benefits for our state's continued economic vitality.

Sincerely,



Betty Nokes
President & CEO



Greg Krape
Chairman

C-041-002

The vision for bus rapid transit in the SR 520 corridor is identified in the SR 520 High Capacity Transit Plan endorsed in 2008 by the state, King County Metro Transit, and Sound Transit. This plan finds that future demand for transit in the SR 520 corridor, until at least 2030, would be met with bus rapid transit that runs in HOV/transit lanes, complementing Sound Transit's East Link. At the same time, the plan acknowledges that after 2030, significant increases in cross-lake travel may warrant dedicated high-capacity transit facilities on both I-90 and SR 520. Therefore, the Evergreen Point Bridge and associated interchanges will be built in a way that would accommodate a two-way light-rail line or busway at a future date. Sound Transit will study the demand and need for light rail later in this decade. For more information, please refer to the SR 520 Final High Capacity Transit Plan and related documents at: <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Projects/SR520Bridge/Library/technical.htm>.

C-041-003

Construction of improvements between 108th Avenue NE and NE 24th Street are outside of the scope of the SR 520, I-5 to Medina: Bridge Replacement and HOV Project, as well as the SR 520, Medina to SR 202: Eastside Transit and HOV Project. The nonmotorized facilities proposed by the SR 520, Medina to SR 202 project have been designed to be consistent with known planning efforts for nonmotorized facilities and will provide regional and local access to existing and future trail systems within the construction limits of that project.

C-041-004

Comment noted.