

Questions and Answers

Next Phase of SR 520 construction in Seattle: Developed for the SR 520 website

Updated: 5/2/18

Introduction

Below are some of the most frequently asked questions received during SR 520 public outreach in 2016 and 2017, and answers to each of them. This document will be updated periodically to reflect the latest key questions we receive.

If you are interested in learning more about WSDOT's nighttime noise variance for the Montlake Phase, please see our [Major Public Project Construction Noise Variance Question and Answer document](#).

List of questions (click on link to jump to individual answers below):

Design Features for the Rest of the West

1. [What will the Montlake area and the new Montlake lid look like?](#)
2. [What are the features of the new land bridge over SR 520?](#)
3. [Will WSDOT go through a similar design process for the Portage Bay Bridge phase of construction? What is the focus for the north Capitol Hill and Roanoke area?](#)

Project Timeline

1. [How long is construction of the project going to take?](#)
2. [What are the three construction phases for the Rest of the West?](#)

Transit, Bicyclists and Pedestrians

1. [How are buses going to operate in the Montlake area when the project is complete?](#)
2. [Why is the Montlake flyer stop being moved to the Montlake lid?](#)
3. [Will the bicycle/pedestrian path across 24th Avenue East be open to bicycles and pedestrians when the West Approach Bridge North \(WABN\) project is complete? What about during the next phase of construction?](#)

Montlake Boulevard Market and 76 Station Property

1. [What is the status of the property where the Montlake Market and 76 gas station are located?](#)

Traffic

1. [When will the eastbound on-ramp to SR 520 in the Arboretum be removed?](#)
2. [Why are you removing the eastbound on-ramp?](#)
3. [How will you accommodate this traffic shifting to the busy Montlake interchange?](#)
4. [Will construction of the Montlake lid and West Approach Bridge South cause closures or disruptions of traffic?](#)
5. [What will be done to deter traffic from "cutting through" local neighborhood streets in the future?](#)
6. [Why are you adding a traffic signal to the intersection of 24th Avenue East and East Lake Washington Boulevard?](#)
7. [Will all SR 520 traffic be shifted on the new West Approach Bridge North structure when Montlake Phase construction begins?](#)

Construction Staging

1. [We thought the old Museum of History and Industry \(MOHAI\) site would no longer be used for construction staging after the WABN project is done. Why do you need to continue to use that space for a staging area?](#)

2. [So when will the old MOHAI area become a landscaped stormwater treatment site and park space for neighbors?](#)
3. [Why will there be a staging area in the Arboretum for 10 years?](#)
4. [Will traffic be impacted by the project's construction staging areas?](#)

Second Bascule Bridge

1. [What is the status of the second bascule bridge across the Montlake Cut?](#)
2. [Will the second bascule bridge include car and bus traffic, or just be for bicyclists and pedestrians?](#)

Natural Environment and Vegetation

1. [Will the project's design require the removal of trees along the corridor?](#)
2. [Why are you removing the R.H. Thomson Ramps to Nowhere?](#)

Montlake Phase construction

1. [What is the timeline for Montlake Phase construction?](#)
2. [What is WSDOT doing to minimize construction impacts to neighbors and others who travel through the Montlake area?](#)

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Design Features for the [Rest of the West](#)

1. **Question: What will the Montlake area and the new Montlake lid look like?**
Answer: The [Montlake lid](#) will be a hub for local and regional transportation connectivity, and will include multifunctional open spaces, urban trails, undercrossings, a [regional shared-use path](#) and transit connections.
2. **Question: What are the features of the new land bridge over SR 520?**
Answer: The land bridge will be a landscaped bicycle/pedestrian path over SR 520 that will serve as a lookout point and provide a north-south connection across the highway between the Arboretum and points north.
3. **Question: Will WSDOT go through a similar design process for the Portage Bay Bridge phase of construction? What is the focus for the north Capitol Hill and Roanoke area?**
Answer: Yes. Our recent outreach focuses on the next phase of construction: [Montlake Phase](#). WSDOT will provide similar design attention to the [remaining phases of construction](#), including the project elements in the Portage Bay and North Capitol Hill areas (such as a lidded overpass at 10th Avenue East and Delmar Drive East). We intend to continue our [coordination with the Seattle Design Commission](#) and other design professionals to inform the future design of these phases prior to moving into contracting and construction.

Project Timeline

1. **Question: How long is construction of the project going to take?**
Answer: The funding allocated by the Legislature via the [2015 Connecting Washington transportation package](#) extends through the 2027-2029 biennium. The \$1.64 billion allocated to complete SR 520 in Seattle is spread out over that time frame, which constrains spending during each biennium. Because of this, WSDOT is building the "Rest of the West" project in three major phases.
2. **Question: What are the three construction phases for the Rest of the West?**
Answer: The current construction schedule is as follows:
Phase 1 – Montlake Phase
 - Montlake lid, West Approach Bridge South, land bridge over SR 520
 - Estimated to begin in late 2018

- Estimated duration: 4-5 years

Phase 2 – Portage Bay Phase

- New Portage Bay Bridge with regional bike-pedestrian path, Roanoke lid, improved I-5 interchange, bike-pedestrian I-5 crossing
- Estimated to begin in approx. 2020-2022
- Estimated duration: 6 years

Phase 3 – Montlake Cut Crossing Phase

- Second bascule (drawbridge) over Montlake Cut
- Estimated to begin as early as 2024
- Estimated duration: 3 years

Transit, Bicyclists and Pedestrians

- 1. Question: How are buses going to operate in the Montlake area when the project is complete?**

Answer: The design of the Montlake lid allows the function of the current SR 520 mainline “flyer stops” to continue in the future on the lid. [Transit operations](#) on the lid and corridor will be determined by the regional transit agencies: Sound Transit and King County Metro.

- 2. Question: Why is the Montlake flyer stop being moved to the Montlake lid?**

Answer: WSDOT conducted an extensive public process and environmental review as the project design was developed. WSDOT heard concerns about the footprint and width of the highway. Keeping the flyer stop at highway level would have resulted in a wider overall project footprint. The solution identified was to put the regional bus stops on the new Montlake lid. The flyer-stop function can be served on the new lid. King County Metro and Sound Transit will determine future transit operations.

- 3. Question: Will the bicycle/pedestrian path across 24th Avenue East be open to bicycles and pedestrians when the West Approach Bridge North (WABN) project is complete? What about during the next phase of construction?**

Answer: Now that the West Approach Bridge North project is complete the bicycle and pedestrian path across 24th Avenue East is open. This bicycle access will be closed when the next construction phase starts in late 2018, but bicycle detour routes will be available. Ongoing communications about construction will be utilized so that travelers will be able to plan around construction. WSDOT will require the contractor for the next phase to ensure that these safe detours are available, and to notify the public in advance.

Montlake Boulevard Market and 76 Station Property

- 1. Question: What is the current status of the property where the Montlake Market and 76 gas station are located?**

Answer: On August 11 and 15, 2017 the King County Superior Court heard from WSDOT and their Assistant Attorneys General, as well as from the property owners and their legal team regarding WSDOT’s acquisition of the property where the Montlake Market and 76 gas station are located. After hearing from both sides, the King County Superior Court made a ruling on the case and found that the property is needed for public use and that WSDOT may proceed to acquire the property from the owners. This is an important step in WSDOT’s ability to move forward with construction of the corridor’s Montlake Phase improvements, beginning in 2018.

After the King County Superior Court issued their ruling, the property owners filed an appeal to the Washington State Court of Appeals. Oral arguments in the Court of Appeals were held on Feb. 22, 2018. We expect the court to issue a ruling on this case in the coming weeks.

Traffic

1. Question: When will the eastbound on-ramp to SR 520 in the Arboretum be removed?

Answer: The eastbound on-ramp will be closed and removed during construction of Phase 1 of the Rest of the West, known as the Montlake Phase. We currently expect to begin construction of these elements in late 2018.

2. Question: Why are you removing the eastbound on-ramp?

Answer: WSDOT conducted a comprehensive public involvement process during the planning and design phase of the [SR 520 Program](#). It involved a wide array of local and regional stakeholders in the decision-making process. This work and the public feedback it generated helped lead to a community-driven “Preferred Alternative” design for a reconstructed SR 520 corridor. This design – announced in April 2010, approved by the federal government in 2011, and fully funded by the Legislature in 2015 – removes all ramps in the Arboretum, including the eastbound on-ramp, which will help restore the Arboretum to a more natural state.

3. Question: How will you accommodate traffic shifting from the current eastbound on-ramp to the Montlake interchange?

Answer: In order to accommodate the traffic that currently uses the eastbound on-ramp in the Arboretum, WSDOT will implement several traffic improvements in the Montlake interchange area:

- Add a general-purpose lane to the existing eastbound “loop” on-ramp to SR 520 at Montlake Boulevard.
- Implement a second left-turn lane from northbound Montlake Boulevard onto the eastbound loop on-ramp to SR 520.
- Add capacity to the westbound lane of East Lake Washington Boulevard near the Montlake interchange, which will directly feed into the improved eastbound loop on-ramp at Montlake Boulevard.
- When Montlake Phase construction is complete, transit/HOV traffic on the eastbound loop on-ramp will be shifted to the new direct access ramp on the Montlake lid. The loop ramp will then have two general-purpose lanes for access to eastbound SR 520.

The new Montlake interchange should result in improved traffic flow and added capacity to handle the additional vehicles from the current Arboretum on-ramp during construction and after project completion.

4. Question: Will construction of the Montlake lid and West Approach Bridge South cause closures or disruptions of traffic?

Answer: During construction, there will be periodic short-term closures of the highway and local streets, and temporary traffic detours. Where possible, WSDOT will try to minimize short-term lane closures and limit necessary closures to non-peak time periods. Some nighttime work will be necessary. As a result, WSDOT applied for and received a nighttime noise variance. WSDOT will work with the contractor and the city of Seattle to minimize closures and keep traffic moving. WSDOT and the city of Seattle are also updating the Neighborhood Traffic Management Plan (NTMP) for the Montlake Phase. The [final Montlake Phase NTMP](#) (pdf 4.3 mb), published in 2017, includes a list of traffic management measures to help minimize traffic effects from construction.

5. Question: What will be done to deter traffic from “cutting through” local neighborhood streets in the future?

Answer: WSDOT and the city of Seattle are working together to develop an update to the corridor’s Neighborhood Traffic Management Plan (NTMP) to address a variety of concerns related to traffic on local streets. One of these concerns is local “cut-through” traffic. The plan will identify measures and solutions for this and other concerns. You can view the [final Montlake Phase NTMP](#) (pdf 4.3 mb) on our program website.

6. Question: Why are you adding a traffic signal to the intersection of 24th Avenue East and Lake Washington Boulevard?

Answer: The 2011 Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) identified the need for a signal at the intersection based on projected traffic conditions in 2030. Since the release of the FEIS, WSDOT and the city of Seattle have continued to work together to determine how and when to implement the signalization of this intersection.

Based on traffic count data and projections of anticipated volumes, with an all-way stop sign at the intersection of 24th Avenue East and East Lake Washington Boulevard, traffic queues are anticipated to consistently back up in both the westbound and eastbound direction. Analysis shows that the installation of a signal at this intersection would minimize the traffic backups by a substantial degree, as compared to an all-way stop sign at the intersection. This signal will be installed as part of the next phase of SR 520 construction, the Montlake Phase. The exact timing that the signal will be activated will be coordinated with WSDOT and the city of Seattle.

7. Question: Will eastbound traffic shift onto the new West Approach Bridge North structure when Montlake Phase construction begins?

Answer: Yes, the switch is necessary to keep SR 520 traffic flowing in both directions while we demolish the old west approach bridge and construct a new bridge for eastbound-only traffic. WSDOT anticipates that during Montlake Phase construction, all SR 520 traffic will travel between Montlake and the new floating bridge on the new West Approach Bridge North (WABN). We will stripe the WABN structure to temporarily carry two lanes of traffic in both directions – without HOV lanes. We will construct a new West Approach Bridge South (WABS) to replace the old west approach bridge (which currently carries all eastbound traffic from Montlake to the new floating bridge). The West Approach Bridge South will be built in a similar alignment to the old structure. Once the Montlake Phase is complete, the north (westbound) and south (eastbound) approach bridges both will have two general-purpose lanes and one HOV lane. This [graphic shows the phased traffic configurations](#) in the SR 520 corridor as construction continues west.

Construction Staging

1. Question: We thought the old Museum of History & Industry (MOHAI) site would no longer be used for construction staging after the WABN project is done. Why do you need to continue using that space for a staging area?

Answer: A new stormwater basin on the MOHAI site was originally scheduled to be completed as part of the WABN project. When WABN construction began, funding was not yet approved for the Rest of the West. There was no funding available at that time for the highway's remaining improvements in Seattle, and thus the future construction schedule was unknown.

After receiving full funding in 2015 for the Rest of the West, WSDOT determined that the stormwater facility at MOHAI should be deferred and constructed as part of the Montlake Phase, for maximum efficiency. The new facility will treat runoff from both of the west approach bridges (westbound and eastbound).

2. Question: When will the old MOHAI area become a landscaped stormwater site?

Answer: We will complete the larger stormwater site by the time we complete the West Approach Bridge South – in approximately 2022 or 2023. Until then, the old MOHAI site will be needed for staging and construction of that bridge and the Montlake lid.

3. Question: Why will there be a staging area in the Arboretum for years?

Answer: Construction of SR 520 improvements in Seattle is taking place in a very compact urban environment. Because the remaining project phases are very large and complex, WSDOT will need the peninsula space, as well as other locations, for staging materials, equipment, vehicles and personnel, and accessing the construction sites. The WSDOT-owned peninsula is planned to be restored and incorporated into the Arboretum once SR 520 construction is completed.

4. Question: Will traffic be impacted by the project's construction staging areas?

Answer: Moving construction vehicles and equipment in and out of project staging areas can affect nearby traffic. WSDOT's contractors will follow best management practices to limit the effects of their work on car, bus, bicycle, and pedestrian traffic during construction. The project will provide advance notice of planned road closures or major detours.

Second Bascule Bridge

1. Question: What is the status of the second bascule bridge across the Montlake Cut?

Answer: The project's Preferred Alternative design, as fully funded by the 2015 Legislature, includes a second bascule bridge across the Montlake Cut to the east of the existing bascule bridge. This bridge is currently planned to be built as the final phase of SR 520 construction.

2. Question: Will the second bascule bridge include car and bus traffic, or just be for bicyclists and pedestrians?

Answer: WSDOT and the city of Seattle continue their discussions about the bridge. The bridge currently included in the project design would carry cars, transit, bikes and pedestrians. Final design will be advanced in coordination with the city of Seattle and other stakeholders prior to construction of this phase.

Natural Environment and Vegetation

1. Question: Will the project's design require the removal of trees along the corridor?

Answer: We understand the importance of trees near the SR 520 corridor. WSDOT will develop a Tree and Vegetation Management and Protection Plan (TVMPP) that the contractor will be required to follow. The TVMPP describes the standards and project-specific best management practices that will be used as guidance to preserve and protect trees and vegetation within the limits of project construction. The TVMPP presents a variety of methods for minimizing effects on trees and vegetation during construction and establishes an implementation and tracking plan to ensure that the best practices are followed. To accomplish this, the plan identifies areas of mature tree removal, protection, and restoration, including areas temporarily dedicated to construction. The plan will be developed in coordination with the city of Seattle. This is a very tight, geographically constrained area, and project improvements may require tree removal due to space limitations and grade adjustments. However, final construction plans are in development. WSDOT will continue to analyze potential screening options during and after construction.

2. Question: Why are you removing the R.H. Thomson "Ramps to Nowhere"?

Answer: The removal of these unused ramps is for three primary reasons:

- The ramps do not serve a functional purpose for vehicles or non-motorized users, and as such do not provide a transportation benefit to the public.
- Removal of the ramps will allow for the restoration of park land and natural space in the Arboretum.
- This design decision reflects feedback WSDOT received from a wide variety of local and regional stakeholders, community organizations, and agencies during the planning, public involvement and permitting process.

Montlake Phase construction

1. What is the timeline for Montlake Phase construction?

Answer: The timeline and next steps for the Montlake Phase of construction include:

- **Fall 2018:** Select design-build contractor
- **Late 2018:** Host preconstruction open house with contractor and begin construction
- **2022-23:** Complete the Montlake Phase

2. **What is WSDOT doing to minimize construction impacts to neighbors and others who travel through the Montlake area?**

Answer: A variety of management plans will be finalized prior to the start of Montlake Phase construction. They include:

- **Community Construction Management Plan (CCMP)**
 - The Community Construction Management Plan (CCMP) outlines the ongoing process through which the public can provide input about construction management decisions to help avoid, minimize, and/or mitigate the effects of construction activities on historic and other properties. It also guides the actions of the design-build contractor, provides opportunities for WSDOT and its contractors to keep the public informed, and gathers input to improve and modify the construction practices addressed by the CCMP. The CCMP establishes general expectations for the Montlake Phase and will be made available to the public for review in advance of construction in late 2018.
- **Neighborhood Traffic Management Plan (NTMP)**
 - The Neighborhood Traffic Management Plan (NTMP) is a living document that outlines the city of Seattle and WSDOT's commitment to enhance safety, connectivity, and livability in the Montlake Boulevard corridor for all travelers. WSDOT and the city held a public meeting and comment period in spring 2017, in order to gather feedback on traffic concerns to identify traffic management measures to be implemented in the Montlake corridor. The final NTMP for the Montlake Phase was published in 2017.
- **Tree and Vegetation Management and Protection Plan (TVMPP)**
 - The Tree and Vegetation Management and Protection Plan (TVMPP) is an appendix of the Montlake Phase CCMP. The TVMPP describes the standards and project-specific best management practices that will be used as guidance to preserve and protect trees and vegetation within the limits of project construction. WSDOT will provide the TVMPP to the public for review prior to construction.