



Michael Patrick McGinn
Mayor of Seattle

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While comments made in the author's position statement focused on items that were specifically a part of the Preferred Alternative, there are broader issues with the current SR 520 project that need to be made clear, as I have serious concerns about them and their negative impact on Seattle.

Our vision for this project includes:

- An SR 520 project that is light rail-ready from the start and serves transit only from the beginning and demonstrates a strong commitment to high capacity transit
- An SR 520 project that protects and preserves our natural areas and open spaces
- An SR 520 that is smart about dealing with traffic
- An SR 520 that is realistic about funding--this is a \$4.65 billion dollar project with a \$2 billion dollar funding gap

Currently, there are many barriers to achieving this vision. A contract to construct a six-lane bridge span will be awarded in Spring of 2011, yet there is no funding for the Seattle portion of this project. Lids that connect neighborhoods and provide open space, re-engineering of on- and off-ramps, a solution for traffic increases in neighborhoods—these elements remain unfunded. The traffic of this six-lane bridge will meet up with the existing four-lane system from Foster Island to I-5, providing no additional space for the extra traffic to go. The extra traffic afforded by an extra lane will exist adjacent to the Arboretum and much of it will merge into Seattle neighborhoods. Seattle streets in the vicinity are nearing full capacity already.

The lack of funding for the Seattle portion of the project demands a re-thinking of priorities.

There is also no requirement for high capacity transit, and funding for needed expansions of transit lags far behind what is needed. The state, city, county, and transit agencies all have limited resources, and this plan chooses to devote them to adding highway lanes rather than investing in high capacity transit. At the same time, there are other WSDOT projects with hefty price tags that will continue to be a financial burden. Instead of costly highway projects, we need to be shifting to meeting the rising demand for transit. When big-ticket items like the SR 520 project do not promote transit as a first priority, we are not only going against the goals of state laws put in place, we are continuing to support the creation of more trips and more traffic.

Making these difficult decisions is the only way we will be able to meet our shared goals for reducing vehicle miles traveled and lowering greenhouse gas emissions. We ask that our regional and statewide agencies and elected officials join us in this endeavor.

Sincerely,

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TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM**Subject:** Light Rail Transit Accommodation in the SR 520 Preferred Alternative**Date:** September 14, 2010

Full build out of light rail transit (LRT) in the SR 520 corridor is not included in the project's Preferred Alternative (PA). There has been an effort made in technical design to ensure accommodation of future LRT by confirming that specific design features of the replacement bridge and approaches support conversion to light rail. Serious questions remain, however, and it is clear that new bridge construction and additional costs will be necessary to add LRT to SR 520 at some future date. The PA has reduced these costs and risks relative to the previous Option A+ design while remaining within the boundaries of the project scope, but it has not fully addressed light rail accommodation.

Remaining Issues in the "Preferred Alternative"

Significant issues, barriers, and practical matters remain within the existing PA, due in part to the lack of a current plan to build LRT in the SR 520 corridor. These challenges include the following:

- **Bridge Deck**—By reducing shoulder widths on the bridge deck and assuming LRT operation in a smaller design envelope, LRT can be accommodated within a 115 foot roadway section. Two significant assumptions have not yet been confirmed: 1) Sound Transit will accept the narrower operating envelope, and 2) FHWA will approve a design standard waiver necessary to narrow the shoulders on both sides of the roadway.
- **Pontoons**—Designers continue to assume that adding LRT to the currently designed 6-lane bridge requires construction and attachment of up to 30 new "flanker" pontoons, which would be both costly and environmentally complex.
- **West Approach**—The west approach has been designed to incorporate a "gap" between the eastbound and westbound lanes to accommodate a future point of departure for light rail. There are two unresolved issues that present challenges to adding LRT to the corridor:
 - 1.) The structure designed for the eastbound lanes would have to be widened approximately four feet from the west high rise toward Montlake. This will require the addition of longitudinal beams between each of the piling supported caps and a deck surface. This is a straightforward structural addition but will occur over environmentally sensitive waters.
 - 2.) While more work has been done refining the early concepts for the four different light rail alignments, there is significant work to be done in confirming the feasibility of accommodating these options against the design of the PA. Divergence points, environmental impacts, and accommodation of other technical needs must be further defined in order to determine the level of accommodation that the PA offers.

Summary

Progress toward accommodating a future light rail alignment within the SR 520 project has been made. However, there are a number of unknowns, such as which concept might be selected for an LRT crossing of the Montlake Cut. To truly accommodate future LRT within the SR 520 project, the considerations listed above should be incorporated into the design and construction of the new floating bridge and west approach at this stage of the project.

