Chapter 11: Public and Agency Comments

This chapter discusses the comments received during the public comment periods for the SR 520, I-5 to Medina: Bridge Replacement and HOV Project SDEIS (issued in January 2010) and the SR 520 Bridge Replacement and HOV Project Draft EIS (issued in August 2006). It also presents WSDOT's general approach to reviewing and providing responses to the comments received.

11.1 What was the review process for the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement?

The January 2010 SDEIS evaluated three design options—Options A, K, and L—for the 6-Lane Alternative. The greatest physical differences among the options were in the Montlake Cut crossing, the location of the interchange in the Montlake area, and the profile of the west approach structure.

The SDEIS was issued on January 22, 2010. WSDOT accepted formal comments on the SDEIS until April 15, 2010, a period of 84 days. Public notification for the comment period included the following:

- Community and jurisdictional briefings about the SDEIS
- Public notices announcing the comment period in local newspapers
- Project Web site announcement
- Notification posters distributed throughout the project area
- Press release to local media

The SDEIS was distributed to agencies, tribal nations, libraries, and members of the public who requested to be on the mailing list. The SDEIS was also available online at the project Web site for review and comment.

On February 23, 2010, WSDOT held a public hearing and open house at the Naval Reserve Building in Seattle, Washington, at which verbal

comments and written comments were accepted. Listed below are other ways the public could submit written comments:

- Online at the project's Web site: http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/SR520Bridge/
- Email
- Regular postal mail
- Comment forms distributed by mail and at the public hearing that could be returned via mailed during the comment period

All public comments received and WSDOT responses are reproduced in Attachment 11, Responses to SDEIS Comments. In all, WSDOT received 415 submittals during the public comment period, totaling over 4,000 individual comments.

What did WSDOT learn from the comments received during the public comment period?

Topics most frequently noted in public, agency, and tribal comments on the SDEIS are summarized below. For more information about public and agency comments received during the SDEIS comment period, including those received at the public hearing, please see the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement Summary of Comments – April 28, 2010 (WSDOT 2010b).

Public Comments on the SDEIS during the Comment Period

The SR 520, I-5 to Medina Project received 415 comment cards, letters, and e-mails during the SDEIS comment period (January 22, 2010, through April 15, 2010), of which 392 were from the public, including individuals, businesses, and community organizations. The categories that were most frequently mentioned by the public, along with examples of the topics addressed, included:

- **Transportation:** Transit and high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) use of SR 520, including timing of potential light rail; inclusion of Lake Washington Boulevard ramps and associated traffic effects in the Arboretum; assumptions and conclusions of traffic and transportation modeling; transit reliability and connectivity with removal of Montlake Freeway Transit Stop; bicycle and pedestrian mobility
- **Engineering design:** Bridge width, particularly with respect to Portage Bay Bridge; height of proposed floating bridge compared to existing bridge; design components specific to a geographic area; replacement for functions of Montlake Freeway Transit Stop; infrastructure needs for accommodation of light rail in the SR 520 corridor

- **Design Option A:** Opinions for and against the option; questions regarding need for design components, especially Lake Washington Boulevard ramps and new Montlake bridge; requests for additional information
- **Funding and cost:** Funding method (tolling, taxes, private funding); concerns regarding accuracy of project costs, particularly estimates of tunneling cost; concerns that mitigation and enhancement measures would be eliminated if project was not fully funded; magnitude of project planning and analysis costs; use of public dollars; project budget
- **Recreation:** Impacts of project on Washington Park Arboretum, including land acquisition, noise and visual effects, traffic, and wetland filling/shading; effects on other local parks; effects on recreational activities during construction and/or operation, such as recreational boating and Opening Day events
- **Section 106 effects:** Concerns that effects on historic properties had not been fully evaluated, particularly with regard to construction effects; requests for additional and/or improved coordination through Section 106 consulting party process
- **NEPA-related topics:** Assertions that I-5 to Medina project was improperly segmented from Eastside and/or pontoon projects; suggestions that additional alternatives, such as a transit-optimized 4-Lane Alternative and immediate implementation of light rail transit, were reasonable and should have been evaluated further; statements that Preferred Alternative selection was predetermined by WSDOT and legislature

Agency and Tribal Comments on the SDEIS during the Comment Period

Of the 415 comment cards, letters, and e-mails received during the SDEIS comment period, 23 were from government entities, including federal, state, and regional entities; local jurisdictions; and tribes. The categories that were most frequently mentioned by agencies, along with examples of the topics addressed, included:

- **Agency and tribal coordination:** Requests for continued coordination between WSDOT and regulatory agencies and tribes; requests to provide more information on impact calculation methods and engage agencies in developing more detailed proposals for mitigation in anticipation of permitting requirements
- **Traffic and transportation:** Requests for additional study of light rail transit and/or exclusive transit use of the HOV lanes; assertions that funding would be needed to replace the function of the Montlake Freeway Transit Station and meet additional service demands; requests for additional coordination with City of Seattle to better integrate

pedestrian/bicyclist and transit features in Montlake interchange vicinity

- **Engineering design:** Bridge height, including a general preference by resource agencies and tribes for higher bridges to reduce intensity of shading; desire for narrower width of the Portage Bay Bridge; questions as to whether design of the floating bridge and west approach was compatible with light rail transit; elements in specific geographic areas; effects of Option A on NOAA Northwest Fisheries Science Center campus; design considerations for components like lids, transit stops, and bridge segments
- **Natural resource effects:** Concerns regarding lack of agency and tribal participation in mitigation development; effects of wider floating bridge on lake circulation and temperature; effects of project construction and operation on salmon stocks; construction impacts and aquatic fill under Option K
- **Mitigation:** Need to avoid and minimize effects before mitigating; requests for additional information about natural resources, social, economic, transit-related, and air quality effects in order to assess appropriate mitigation requirements; temporary versus permanent effects
- **Recreation:** Concerns regarding impacts on the Washington Park Arboretum and other local parks; requests to provide specific mitigation under Sections 4(f) and 6(f); requests for continued engagement with agencies with jurisdiction over parks

How did WSDOT respond to the SDEIS comments?

WSDOT read and assessed all of the comments received from the public, agencies, and tribes. Each comment is responded to in Attachment 11 to this Final EIS. As needed, some factual corrections, additional analysis, and language clarifications have been included in the Final EIS and/or the discipline report discussions to address topics raised in the comments. Where changes in the documents have been made as a result of comments submitted, this is noted in the response.

11.2 What was the Draft EIS review process?

The August 2006 Draft EIS evaluated a 4-Lane Alternative and a 6-Lane Alternative with three Seattle design options:

- The Pacific Street Interchange option
- The Second Montlake Bridge option
- The No Montlake Freeway Transit Stop option

The Draft EIS comment period lasted from August 18 to October 31, 2006. Interested parties commented on the Draft EIS online, by mail, by e-mail, and at two public hearings held in the project area in the fall of

2006. In all, WSDOT received 1,734 submissions from organizations, tribes, and members of the public. The largest proportion of comments from the public expressed a preference for or against one or more of the 6-Lane Alternative design options. The Pacific Street Interchange option generated over 800 "for" and "against" comments, many more than any other design option. Other comments from the public focused on traffic, transportation systems, and transit; parks and recreation, particularly impacts related to the Arboretum; urban design and aesthetics; neighborhood impacts; and other topics such as tolling, noise, bicycle/pedestrian access, and wetlands. The majority of these comments (over 1,000) came from zip codes within the city of Seattle. The *SR 520 Draft Environmental Impact Statement Public Comment Report* (WSDOT 2006b) provides additional detail on the number and nature of comments received.

How did WSDOT respond to the Draft EIS comments?

In spring 2007, the Washington State Legislature passed Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill (ESSB) 6099. The bill directed the Office of Financial Management to hire a mediator and appropriate planning staff to develop a 6-lane corridor design for the Seattle portion of the project area. The mediation group identified three design options—Options A, K, and L—which FHWA and WSDOT advanced for further consideration in the SDEIS (see Chapter 2 for additional information). As a result, responses to comments on the Draft EIS were deferred until after publication of the SDEIS and identification of a preferred alternative.

All comments received on the Draft EIS are reproduced in Attachment 13, Draft EIS Comments. These comments have been addressed in a comment and response summary report also included in Attachment 13. The report documents the diverse opinions expressed regarding the configuration and effects of the 6-Lane Alternative and design options that were evaluated in the Draft EIS. It also provides summary responses that explain how the issues have been addressed by new analyses contained in the 2010 SDEIS and/or Final EIS and the responses to the 2010 SDEIS comments (Attachment 11).