Design Advisory Group Meeting Summary

February 23, 2006 5:00 – 8:00 pm
St. Demetrios Church, Seattle

Welcome and Introductions

Suanne Pelley welcomed everyone to the first Design Advisory Group (DAG). Suanne noted that she would be facilitating tonight's workshop, and gave a quick review of the agenda, which included a few short presentations from the project team as well as some interactive group exercises. Suanne introduced Julie Meredith.

Julie thanked everyone for participating in the Design Advisory Group and helping to launch this exciting piece of design work. She commented that this is a great opportunity to focus on aesthetic design, regardless of which alternative is selected, and noted that this group will not address the alternatives, but will instead work on design ideas that can be applied to any of the alternatives.

Julie asked attendees to introduce themselves and tell the group what perspective and skills they hoped to bring to the Design Advisory Group. DAG members in attendance included:

- Alana McIalwain, Madison Park
- Andrew Price, Madison Park
- Ann Preston, Portage Bay/Roanoke
- Dave Martin, Medina
- David Cooper, Yarrow Point
- George Martin, Clyde Hill
- Jack Kindred, Portage Bay/Roanoke
- Jean Amick, Laurelhurst
- Joe Herrin, Laurelhurst
- Joel Wessenberg, North Capitol Hill
- Kathy Feek, Kirkland
- Laurie Finnelly, Hunts Point
- Lyle Bicknell, Montlake
- Mary Jane Swindley, Wetheril Nature Preserve
- Paul Demitriades, Medina
- Richard Kress, Bellevue
- Vicky Cooper, Yarrow Point

Project team members in attendance included:

- Daniel Babuca, Project Engineer
- Darby Watson, Urban Planning & Design
- John Milton, Project Director
- Julie Meredith, Project Engineering Manager
- Lindsay Yamane, Project Engineer
- Mark Hinshaw, Urban Planning & Design
- Mark Maurer, Roadside & Site Development Manager
- Patrick Clarke, WSDOT Bridge Design
- Paul Kinderman, WSDOT Lead Architect
- Susan Wessman, Urban Planning & Design
- Alexa Miller, Communications Coordinator
- Bryan Jarr, Outreach Coordinator
- Chelsea Tennyson, Outreach Coordinator
- Suanne Pelley, Communications and Outreach Manager

One member of the press, representing the King County Journal, and one member of the public were also in attendance.

Project Overview

Julie Meredith briefly framed the project and described how the Corridor Aesthetics work fits into the larger schedule. She noted that the first page in the Resource section of the DAG binder is the overall project schedule broken into the Environmental Review, Design, and Community Outreach. The project team is on schedule to release the Draft EIS this spring, and then we expect to publish the Final EIS about a year later. Preliminary design work has been started and will pick up speed once a preferred alternative has been selected. Community outreach has been an important part of the project, and will continue throughout the life of the project.

The next schedule in the DAG binder describes the types of design work that has been done since the Trans-Lake Project was started in 1998. Community Design Workshops were held in 2000, 2001, and 2002. That work helped identify community desires for the project overall including: reducing noise, reconnecting neighborhoods, preserving open space, protecting sensitive areas, and reducing traffic. In 2003 the SR 520 Bridge Replacement and HOV Project was launched with the passage of the Nickel Gas Tax. In 2004 the project team held Community Roundtables to specifically address opportunities for the lids—looking at ways to effectively reconnect communities with large freeway overpasses. Now in 2006, the team is engaging the Design Advisory Group to help establish aesthetic principles to carry forward through project design. As shown on the schedule, we also expect there to be further community design opportunities through final design.

Julie commented that the project team sees this as an important step in establishing some aesthetic guidelines that will be used by the rest of the design team as the project moves forward. This will include the bridge designers, architects, landscape architects, lighting designers, and others who will be preparing the final design packages for the project. It is important that we provide the overall aesthetic direction for these specialists to consider and try to incorporate as they move into more refined design.

<u>Question/Answer</u>
Paul Demitriades asked how the DAG would be able to provide input on the Draft EIS if the DAG process does not end until June 2006.
The DAG work/recommendations will be wrapped into the Final EIS.

Paul also asked what the status of the handbook is and if it is required by WSDOT for all projects.
No, it is not a requirement. It is a tool meant to serve as a resource for future designers to use.

David Cooper asked if the handbook would be a document that all design teams will have to use and whether or not it would become part of the EIS.
It will be wrapped into the Record of Decision. The idea of the SR 520 Corridor Aesthetics Handbook is that it will be used in the same manor as I-90's design handbook. I-90 was built in phases. They used the same set of design standards for each phase so as to accomplish a unified look.

<u>DAG Purpose and Goals</u>
Julie introduced Daniel Babuca to provide more detail on the DAG. Daniel referred the group to the Guidelines for Participation located in the DAG resource binder. He quickly reviewed a few key elements of the Guidelines:

- The goal of this process is to establish aesthetic guidelines to incorporate into a Corridor Aesthetics Handbook.

- The DAG is not weighing in on which alternative should be selected for the corridor, but instead working to develop the design qualities and characteristics that could be used with any of the alternatives.
- The DAG will develop recommendations that will then be taken out to the broader community—at Open Houses and other key times when the Draft Handbook is available.
- We expect that DAG members will represent their communities and make an effort to share information with communities to gain feedback as this process moves forward. It will be important that DAG members let communities know when and where they can participate in public review of the recommendations.
- DAG members are asked to commit to a total of approximately 10 hours of meeting time, and do a bit of homework between meetings.

Daniel went on to review the flowchart located in the resource binder. He noted that this shows how the series of meetings will be conducted and at what level of the corridor we'll be working on during each session. Some meetings DAG members will be separated by Seattle and Eastside, and other meetings everyone will meet together. Toward the end of the workshop process, we will incorporate DAG ideas into the Draft Handbook for the DAG to review.

Daniel reviewed with the group three elements in the Resource section that help to frame the discussion of aesthetic guidelines. Following the Flowchart is a page that describes WSDOT's commitment to Context Sensitive Solutions—or CSS. CSS has evolved over time—from a general notion of working with communities on projects, to a more specific commitment from WSDOT to work with communities to develop projects that best fit within particular areas and neighborhoods. Examples include I-405, I-90, and Mill Creek. The aesthetic guidelines developed by the DAG will be a big part of early CSS work that can guide all future design work on this project.

The next page in the DAG resource notebook is titled "Design Elements" and is a summary list of some of the elements that can be discussed in corridor unity and in the thematic zone work. This list also includes those elements that cannot be addressed by the DAG, primarily those elements that are dictated by safety and other design standards. Finally, Daniel provided a glossary of terms and photo samples so that we can begin to use the same terminology throughout the workshops, and also provide additional inspiration for ideas that the DAG might like to entertain.

Breakout Session #1

Daniel Babuca introduced Mark Hinshaw, who led the first breakout session. Mark noted that this exercise was designed to help get everyone thinking about aesthetics and asked that everyone think about their own vision of a new SR 520 corridor.

For this first exercise, people began to work with the concept of Corridor Unity by thinking about themes for the corridor. The bottom half of the exercise sheet provided a list of potential words for each person to review and think about. DAG members were then asked to select 3 – 5 words that best describe the themes that make sense for the 520 corridor, or to write their own words. Then as a group they discussed the words each person had chosen and worked toward reaching consensus on the top 3- 5 words that the group would like to recommend. Lastly, each group selected a spokesperson to share their findings with the larger group.

Below is the list of words each group gravitated towards:

Blue Group:
- Natural – Green
- Graceful – Refined
- Quiet – Calm

Green Group:
- Natural – Harmonious
- Worthy

Red Group:
- Reflective
- Subtle – Harmonious
- Artful
- Contextual

Corridor Unity

Susan Wessman greeted the group and dove more deeply into the concepts of Corridor Unity. Susan noted that now that the group has had an opportunity to play with some of the possible themes related to corridor unity, the plan was to delve into this idea even more. Susan commented that, in essence, the group had already begun a visioning process for the corridor with this exercise by looking at the corridor through a designer's lens. One lens is corridor unity: How does a driver of the corridor, or a passenger on a bus, experience the entire corridor? What are the walls, vegetation, colors that give the corridor a certain feel?

Susan noted that the other lens that the group would be exploring later is looking from outside the highway: from the parks and trails, views and vistas, lids, and other local connections to the 520 facility. Working on corridor unity will allow the DAG to recommend some overarching themes to WSDOT and the design teams. Susan commented that the team also expects that the corridor themes developed by the DAG will apply to any of the alternatives. To further the group's thoughts, Susan reviewed a PowerPoint presentation that included images of some of the elements that could be included within a corridor theme. There are other elements, but these were intended to help the group see how thematic ideas would be carried out in specific elements. Susan displayed images and provided a brief description of the following elements:

- Appurtenances
- Bridges
- Gateways
- Landscapes
- Lids
- Trails, paths and bike/ped path
- Views
- Walls

Question/Answer

Paul Demitriades asked Susan to elaborate on context sensitive design.
Context Sensitive Design is exactly what we are doing now. We've done it since the Translake Project with our community design sessions and are continuing it now. It's the community-focused process we work through in order to develop a handbook and ultimately design a bridge that represents the character we hope to create.

Mark Hinshaw noted a prime example along Route 71 in Missouri. He noted three elements, including 30-foot obelisks, limestone walls, and handrails that play on agricultural themes, that help to unify the corridor and represent the history of that region.

Breakout Session #2

Susan went on to describe how the next breakout session would be formatted. She noted that each group will have a facilitator from the 520 team to help keep the discussion moving and a note-taker to help capture the details. She stated that the goal was for each group to work on the following two components:

1. Select 2-3 themes that are priorities for your group. You can use the words that your group selected earlier, you can switch to some of the words that other groups discussed, or you can develop new words based on information you've heard.
2. Based on these selected themes, we want you to further define and develop each theme:
    a. Are there colors that the group sees as part of this definition?
    b. Are there textures that would support the theme?
    c. What other approaches should be considered as part of each theme?
    d. Do you have examples in mind that show this theme?

Each group had approximately 20 minutes to discuss the above. After the 20 minutes, they were asked to report back to the whole group. The notes below summarize each group's conclusions:

Green Group:

1. Natural – Harmonious
    a. Structures could become wildlife habitat
        i. Vines growing
        ii. Bird sanctuary
        iii. Observation points overlooking marshland
2. Reconnection
    a. Human and wildlife
    b. Reconnect divided communities
3. Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Certification
    a. Sustainability
    b. Materials/run-off reviewed

Red Group:

1. Sweeping Vistas
    a. Vistas as gateways
    b. Paradigm of being on the structure verses looking at it
2. Natural Beauty
    a. Color Palette: light/warm/subtle
    b. Materials: natural/naturalistic, wood, stone, tile
    c. Reflective of the Pacific Northwest
    d. Landscaping should reflect surroundings
3. Three distinct zones
    a. Eastside – conifers
    b. Bridge – water/sky
    c. Westside – urban/deciduous trees

Blue Group:

1. Graceful – Sleek
    a. Color Palette: Complementary: silvery/water
    b. Low profile
    c. Reconnect neighborhoods
2. Sophisticated
    a. Not "hokey Northwest"
    b. No trees or salmon

3. No vertical canyons like I-90
4. Texture – can texture soften noise?
5. Vistas – can't impede traffic
6. Unobtrusive – soften with foliage

Next Steps

Suanne thanked everyone for their hard work and contributions. She noted that now that these themes have been identified, we'll continue this discussion at the next workshop. In the meantime, the team will take your themes and begin to develop drawings or other ways to express the themes that have been identified. In addition, the project team is asking each DAG member to do the same. Specific directions are listed below:

- Develop a list of ideas or things that are part of your community on a regular basis. For example:
    - Look at highway elements (lights, barriers, landscaping, walls, views....) and ponder why the elements are the way they are.
    - Photograph or sketch a place or landscape in your neighborhood (or someone else's) that you really like.
    - Why do you like it?
    - Photograph or sketch a place or landscape in your neighborhood (or someone else's) that you really DON'T like.
    - Why do you dislike it? (i.e. what works and doesn't work and why)
    - Take photos of things, landscapes, places that interest or intrigue you.

There are two goals to this exercise: to cultivate or encourage skills of observation and inquiry ("Wow, I never noticed or thought about that before. Why is it there? How does it work?") and to have a collection of images to use as part of developing/agreeing to the aesthetic concepts.

Suanne thanked the group again, and noted that the next meeting is on Thursday, March 16th from 5:30 – 8:00 p.m. at St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Bellevue. With no further comments or questions, the meeting was adjourned.