



Summary of SR 520 Legislative Workgroup Public Comment Period Nov. 20, 2009 through Dec. 4, 2009

A preliminary summary of public feedback was provided to the SR 520 Legislative Workgroup members on Thursday, Dec. 3, 2009 detailing efforts and comments received through Dec. 2, 2009. This report provides a final summary of public comments from Nov. 20 through Dec. 4, 2009. Public feedback incorporated into the final report largely mirrored that of the preliminary report.

BACKGROUND

On Nov. 17, 2009, the SR 520 Legislative Workgroup released draft design and financing recommendations for the SR 520 corridor. This release launched a public comment period that ran from Nov. 20 through Dec. 4. Participants were asked a total of three questions: 1) if they had comments on Option A+ as recommended by the Workgroup; 2) if they had comments on the finance methods recommended by the Workgroup; and 3) if they would like to provide any additional feedback.

The comment period was advertised through the following methods:

- E-mail notification to the SR 520 program listserv, Workgroup member's listservs, and the Workgroup's public listserv.
- Online notification on the SR 520 Legislative Workgroup and the SR 520 Bridge Replacement and HOV Program Web sites.
- Online ads on the Bellevue Reporter and Seattle Times Web sites.
- Verbally announced along with informational flyer at Workgroup meetings, Seattle City Council Committee of the Whole and other SR 520 program briefings during November.

Participants completed the online comment form, submitted handwritten comments, and/or provided verbal comment at the SR 520 Legislative Workgroup Town Hall and/or the Seattle City Council Committee of the Whole meetings, both of which took place on Nov. 24.

The SR 520 Legislative Workgroup received hundreds of public comments in response to the draft recommendations. This summary attempts to distill the large amount of public input into a concise and meaningful analysis of the common themes voiced by the public to help inform the Workgroup members in their final recommendations on Dec. 8, 2009.

COMMENT TOTALS

The following is a summary of public comments received via all methods provided through Friday, Dec. 4, 2009.

By the numbers:

- A total of **479 individuals** provided comments between Nov. 20 and Dec. 4.
 - 31 submitted handwritten or e-mailed comments.
 - 71 provided verbal comment at the Nov. 24 SR 520 Legislative Workgroup Town Hall and/or the Seattle City Council Committee of the Whole meeting.
 - 377 people provided online comments on one or more questions.
 - From these 479 individuals, a total of 910 comments have been received and categorized between Nov. 20 and Dec. 4, 2009.
- The most frequently provided zip code was 98112 (the Montlake area), with 217 comments received.

The survey and verbal comment opportunities offered the public a way to provide input on the SR 520 Legislative Workgroup's draft recommendations. People who chose to participate in the public comment period were self-selected. As such, while the larger public was targeted, this report is not representative of the public-at-large and results of the comment period should not be considered statistically significant.

COMMENT THEMES

Question 1: What do you think of Option A+, the Legislative Workgroup's draft recommended design option?

A total of **427 comments** were received related to the Workgroup's draft recommended design option. Three general responses are presented: opposition to Option A+, support for Option A+ and no preference identified. These are listed in order of the total number of comments received in each category.

Opposition to Option A+

291 comments opposed Option A+ for the following reasons:

- **Neighborhood impacts:** Impact on overall quality of life due to increased noise, proximity of a new bridge structure to private properties, visual impacts, and aesthetics. The following is a sampling of these comments:
 - *Our homes, our livelihood, our neighborhood livability must be of the utmost priority in the selection of your final plan.*
 - *I am a Lake Washington Boulevard resident, and own a home in Montlake. I have concerns with Option A+, or Option A with suboptions. I have concerns with moving ramps in front of my home, and the devaluation of my home property as a result. This will have a severe impact to historic homes. This represents the view of the Lake Washington Boulevard residents. We ask you to reconsider plan A+.*
- **Traffic impacts:** Mobility in surrounding neighborhoods is not significantly improved under Option A+. A number of people also expressed opposition to an additional bascule bridge.
 - *[Option A+] creates a massive interchange and more surface traffic in an already crowded corridor, it further splits the Montlake neighborhood, and fails to take advantage of the light rail/bus connection possibilities and the UW station...Adding a second bridge next to the existing Montlake Bridge will destroy housing and forever change the demeanor of a wonderful family neighborhood.*
 - *We are totally opposed to the A+ option. It makes a significantly worse mess of the Montlake local traffic by adding a second draw bridge, has a significant disconnect between transit and UW light rail, reduces values in the Montlake area due to noise and obstructions, and is opposed by many local groups including the Coalition for a Sustainable SR520.*
- **Interchange location:** Impacts of the on- and off-ramps on SR 520 on the neighborhood.
 - *Please avoid adding ramps to Lake Washington Boulevard and take out the existing ones. This Olmsted Boulevard is an important asset in our region. The existing traffic on the Boulevard needs to be reduced to return this historical park road back to its original intent. It should not be used to solve traffic problems in a future SR 520 design. Traffic should be put on Montlake Blvd. and 23 Avenue, a city street where it belongs. Noise calming features should be enthusiastically embraced to improve the visitors experience to the Washington Park Arboretum.*
- There were several comments that noted a specific preference for either Option A, K, L or M.
 - *Option K seems to be the best for the future. I like the tunnel.*
 - *To whom it may concern: Option L is my recommendation for flow of traffic wise, the commute will be smooth even during Husky games and UW events due to the west bound only lanes. This*

is a great option as well due to the simple design. This design is simple yet smooth especially for the amount of money it costs.

- *I'm a supporter of Plan M because it's a coherent collection of thoughtful design elements that function well together for vehicle, bicycle and pedestrian mobility as well as for the neighborhood that surrounds it.*

Support of Option A+

88 comments supported Option A+ for the following reasons:

- **Cost:** Most affordable option, within the overall project budget.
 - *I'm glad Option A+ or A is moving forward. I EMPHATICALLY oppose Options K or M. K or M would cost \$1.5 - 2 Billion more than A+ (plus inevitable cost-overruns). That is a huge additional cost and it is unaffordable to Washington taxpayers. I am a member of the Roanoke Park-Portage Bay Community Organization, yet I oppose their recommendation...Their position was adopted without considering cost.*
 - *Option A+ has best design, and gets the job done within reasonable cost.*
- **Transit/mobility:** Allows for improved transit connections.
 - *It's the most efficient one for moving buses, has the least negative environmental impact on wetlands and fish migration, and fits within the budget.*
 - *This option...coordinates well with the City of Seattle's objectives to encourage more people to use transit and HOV as a mode of travel.*
- **Environmental impacts:** Minimal impact to the environment, wildlife and waterways.
 - *I favor A as the design and I agree with the Arboretum Foundation. It seems to me that all the tunnel options are destructive of the Arboretum.*
 - *I appreciate that the A+ design gets away from the tunnels beneath the ship canal. In my opinion the tunnel concept was never appropriate, given the cost, the steepness of grade required, and the environmental impacts of construction.*
- A noticeable number of comments supported Option A+ while expressing opposition to a ramp connections to Lake Washington Boulevard in the area of the Arboretum. These comments emphasized the importance of preserving the cohesive nature of the Arboretum public space.
 - *I represent the Friends of Olmsted Parks. I want to talk about the environmental impacts and traffic in Arboretum. What we are calling A prime is A+ without the ramps. We support A prime, but not A+. A prime and A+ are different and we don't need the Lake Washington Boulevard ramps. There is too much impact even without the ramps. A prime shows a reduction in traffic in Arboretum by 2030 and A+ increases traffic. A+ lids are unacceptable.*
 - *Generally, I we agree with the A+ Option and reject categorically the exorbitant environmental and financial costs of the other options listed. Nonetheless we have reservations about the new Arboretum ramps to replace the Ramps to Nowhere. As supporters of the Seattle Friends of Olmsted Parks we...recommend that the ramps be included in the SEIS but that they be excluded from the state legislation to be addressed in January. In the event that subsequent data (more than the currently available information) justifies the absolute necessity of such ramps the legislation could be amended to include them.*

No preference identified

57 comments did not state specific support or opposition for Option A+. Comments included:

- **Consider an option with eight or more lanes:** Build a larger bridge to accommodate for future population growth.
 - *3 lanes is not enough. We need to do this right and not waste money on a bridge that will not help traffic congestion. Please reconsider and find a way to add more lanes.*

- *There should have been an 8 lane option instead of the 6 lane proposal. This will just get clogged again in a few years.*
- **Light rail:** Select an option that will accommodate future light rail.
 - *Please add light rail corridors to your plan.*
 - *Please continue to make sure you have a long term light rail option to put on the bridge at some point. 520 practically is a much better choice (from a people use perspective) than I-90 for light rail. Let's get moving!*
 - *Corridor light rail – transportation should move people and money should be spent to get people out of their cars.*
- **Montlake Freeway Transit Stop:** This transit stop is heavily used; some stated that it should remain a transit hub in a new SR 520 design.
 - *Generally I like this option as it has the least impact. HOWEVER - please retain the Montlake Flyer Transit Station. This facility has served us well for more than 30 years. It is used for connectivity to Capitol Hill, the Central District, Ravenna, Greenwood, Wedgwood, Fremont, Wallingford as well as the University District. It will never be financially feasible to operate enough buses just to the U-District, especially during off-peak hours, to replace the function of the Montlake Freeway station. On Football Saturday, literally thousands of Husky fans alight at the existing station. These stops serve a thousand riders every day...The freeway station is important for connections and providing an alternative for people who cannot afford to pay a toll.*
 - *The elimination of the Montlake Flyer freeway station makes me think this was all a bad joke. That station serves what I understand is several thousand people a day. For interchange and other purposes. Removing it simply reduces UW and Montlake commuting options as well as inconveniencing downtown transfers.*

Question 2: What would you like the SR 520 Legislative Workgroup to consider about the finance methods that are under consideration?

257 comments were received related to financing recommendations. 188 specifically provided feedback on the tolling component of the recommendation.

Consider additional tolling

143 comments supported using additional tolling options to finance the new SR 520 corridor. These respondents have different opinions about what to charge for a toll, when to enact tolling on additional roads and under what circumstances. However, they agree on the solution of additional tolling to decrease the funding gap. Comments included:

- **Improved mobility and increased transit use:**
 - *I think you should go forward with tolling of both routes fully and right away. Tolling should be based on time of day: during rush hour there is much more demand, so the price should be higher. At no point should there ever be traffic congestion along either route. By tolling appropriately, those who need to drive will be assured a fast trip and the money gained will fund increased transit options for those for who would use them if they were available.*
 - *I would strongly advocate using tolls on single occupancy vehicles as a behavior changing mechanism that would be a far better solution to the traffic and congestion problems.*
- **Fair method:** Funding to improve the roads should be paid by the users of the roads.
 - *The 520 bridge is important to the economy of the city and the entire state, and it is fair to draw funds from other locations.*
 - *The only way for the cross-lake transportation system to properly work is to toll both 520 and I-90.*

- **Realistic/reliable solution:** Most reasonable method to address the funding gap.
 - *Tolls on both bridges are unavoidable and I support them. Toll 520 and I-90! Those who use these roads should pay for 100% of the funding gap.*
 - *Tolling on 520 and I-90. Whatever closes the gap fastest so the work can be started. Is there any evidence that the HOT lanes on 167 are making a financial difference? This could have the added benefit of pushing more travelers onto busses crossing the lake, diminishing congestion?*

Do not consider additional tolling

45 comments opposed additional tolling measures as a way to finance the new SR 520 corridor.

- **Unfairness:** Many respondents opposed a toll on I-90 as a way to fund improvements to a different corridor.
 - *Tolling I-90 to pay for 520 is dubious in my mind. Tolling I-90 and then investing 100% of that money back into the I-90 corridor would make more sense.*
 - *Please do not toll I-90 to help pay for the 520 bridge...they are two separate bridges, and if people want to drive longer to avoid a toll, so be it.*
- **Taxes:** Construction of the new bridge should be paid for by increased taxes, not tolls.
 - *I would rather see a gas tax added. This would encourage people to use less fuel and move to mass transit (thus reducing the need to increase capacity).*
 - *Tolls? Are you serious? Then please tell me what you are doing with the highest gas tax in the nation?*

Additional comments:

- Support for pursuing maximum state and federal funding opportunities
- The vulnerable section of the bridge should be the only segment replaced until future funds become available to pay for the project.

Question 3: What other comments would you like to share to help the Legislative Workgroup refine recommendations as it deliberates and offers input to the Washington State Governor and Legislature?

226 comments were received for this question. Key themes of other items for consideration are summarized below.

Decision-making process

A total of 106 comments referenced the decision-making process. Respondents noted the time already invested in the SR 520 program and the need to move forward with the right solution. However, while respondents want a decision made to improve the safety and traffic conditions of the corridor, there were varying responses as to what that design decision should be.

- *Let's get this project going. Seattle has now been declared to have the worst traffic in the nation. What is this Legislative Workgroup going to do about it?*
- *I urge you to get this project moving along... We need mobility in this region... We need the project to continue moving forward.*
- *I know that this process has drag on for years and some people are anxious to move forward with a solution, apparently any solution. However, it would not be wise to jump into a project that does not meet the overall goals of the 520 replacement just because one option happens to come within 1-2 billion dollars of the budget.*

Additional themes include:

- **Support for selecting an option based upon improving local traffic and mobility.** People want the ability to drive through the Montlake Boulevard corridor without experiencing traffic delays created by people accessing SR 520 (61 comments).
 - *Please make people moving (as opposed to SOV moving) a priority in this highly congested metropolitan area.*
 - *Please consider better options to mitigate traffic around the exit and entrance ramps of 520 into neighborhoods! Option A+ is entirely unacceptable.*
- **Finalization of finance mechanisms.** Comments noted concern about project costs and state that it is fiscally irresponsible for Washington state to proceed with a design option until it has the means to fully cover the cost (26 comments).
 - *We are completely opposed to going ahead with any 520 construction until firm funding sources have been identified.*
 - *Why create additional costs when the state is already in a budget crisis?*
 - *Build only what you can afford to build with the money available.*

Of these comments about finance mechanisms, 6 supported retrofitting the existing bridge and replacement of only the most vulnerable sections of the existing bridge (it should also be noted that in the first two questions a total of 13 comments also referenced support for a retrofit solution, resulting in a total of 19 comments):

- *Replacement of 520 is predicated on safety first and foremost. Fund that with presently available money and retrofit the existing bridge.*
 - *The most important and I assume most vulnerable portion of the bridge are the floating sections. These need to be replaced and I encourage the Workgroup, State, local communities and all interested parties to put aside their 'NIMBY' issues and at a minimum make the pontoon replacement a high priority.*
- **Some respondents repeated comments listed in previous sections,** including: opposition to Option A+, the importance of accommodating light rail, restatement of neighborhood impacts and objection to the removal of the Montlake Freeway Transit Stop (91 comments repeated at least one of these concerns stated in earlier questions).
 - *Please consider the impact to the local community who have to live with your recommendations 24 / 7 rather than the commuters passing through.*
 - *Add light rail corridor on these bridges or you do not get my support.*
 - *I strongly DISLIKE this design. It is completely false to state that it has "the least impact to the surrounding environment" since Montlake, Portage Bay/Roanoke Park, and the Arboretum & Union Bay would suffer significant adverse impacts. It is also false to say that it has "broad based community support" since the Montlake and Roanoke Park neighborhoods are strongly opposed to this design. It is the absolute worst possible option for Westside neighborhoods and natural areas under and around 520 on the Seattle side.*

METHODOLOGY FOR COMMENT PROCESSING

All comments received from all sources during this comment period were logged in a comment database for archiving and categorization purposes. Comments were categorized to highlight prevalent themes or frequently referenced topics. Most comments covered multiple topics and each comment was categorized for all attributes. Verbatim excerpts were selected based on their clarity and brevity in order to reflect themes and the range of perspectives expressed.