

Questions and Answers SR 520 Montlake Project

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Below are answers to some of the most frequently asked questions WSDOT has received about the latest phase of SR 520 construction in Seattle – the [Montlake Project](#). We will periodically update this document to reflect recent project developments and the latest key questions we receive.

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Design Features for the Montlake Project

1. **Question: What will the Montlake area and the new Montlake lid look like?**
Answer: The [Montlake lid](#) (pdf 9 mb) will be a hub for local and regional transportation connectivity, and will include multifunctional open spaces, urban trails, undercrossings, an extension of the [SR 520 Trail](#), and transit connections. We'll also make changes to Lake Washington Boulevard and SR 520's Montlake Boulevard interchange to improve travel safety and enhance traffic capacity through the area.
2. **Question: What are the features of the new land bridge over SR 520?**
Answer: The land bridge will be a landscaped bicycle and pedestrian path over SR 520, east of the Montlake lid. The new crossing will provide a north-south connection over the highway between the Arboretum and East Montlake Park and the University District, with a connection to the SR 520 Trail.

Project Timeline

1. **Question: How long is construction of the Montlake Project going to take?**
Answer: Major construction of the project began in summer 2019, with completion expected in 2023. The SR 520/I-5 Express Lanes Connection Project, planned to begin construction in 2020, should be completed at about the same time. Construction of the Portage Bay Bridge and Roanoke Lid Project is expected to start in 2023 and last about six years. The fourth SR 520 project in Seattle is the Montlake Cut Second Bascule Bridge Project. In late 2019/early 2020, WSDOT plans to bring together project partners, stakeholders, and the public to review current transportation needs, identify potential options that will improve mobility in the Montlake Boulevard and SR 520 corridors, and discuss this latter project's scope.

Transit, Bicyclists and Pedestrians

1. **Question: How are buses going to operate in the Montlake area when the project is complete?**
Answer: A new, landscaped Montlake lid will include a multimodal transit center for local and regional bus service, replacing the function of the current, highway-level Montlake Freeway Station. [Transit operations](#) on the lid and corridor will be determined by the regional transit agencies: Sound Transit and King County Metro.
2. **Question: Why are the Montlake freeway stops being moved to the Montlake lid?**
Answer: WSDOT conducted an extensive public process and environmental review as the project design was developed. WSDOT heard community concerns about the footprint and width

of the reconstructed highway. Keeping the flyer stops 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. [Transit operations](#) on the lid and corridor will be determined by the regional transit agencies: Sound Transit and King County Metro.

3. Question: Will the bicycle and pedestrian path across 24th Avenue East be open during Montlake Project construction?

Answer: The 24th Avenue East crossing will be incorporated into the new Montlake lid, so the contractor, Graham, needed to close the crossing's bicycle and pedestrian path while building the lid. The 24th Avenue crossing closed to bicyclists and pedestrians in September 2019, and will remain closed during construction. However, Graham plans to open a bicycle and pedestrian detour route in fall or winter of 2019 that runs parallel to a new, temporary eastbound on-ramp from Lake Washington Boulevard. The path will go under SR 520 east of 24th Avenue East and connect into the existing trail system on the north side of SR 520.

Montlake Boulevard Market and 76 Station Property

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

Answer: WSDOT and the property's owner agreed on a purchase price in May 2019, and WSDOT took ownership in June.

2. Question: What will happen to the gas station and market now that WSDOT owns the property?

Answer: WSDOT has completed temporary leases with the gas station and market operators. The leases could keep the businesses open until Jan. 1, 2020. In addition, under a directive from the state Legislature, WSDOT is exploring options for vendors to operate a smaller, temporary market or food service on the Montlake property during the three- to four-year period between closure of the current market and completion of Montlake Project construction.

3. Question: Where would a temporary market or food service be located?

Answer: We believe there is sufficient space on the southwest corner of the existing Montlake Market property, along East Roanoke Street, for a smaller market or food service to operate during Montlake Project construction. A manufactured building or mobile food vendors could probably be located on the site to provide the service.

4. Question: Why couldn't the gas station and market remain in operation during construction?

Answer: WSDOT needs to build permanent SR 520 improvements within the gas station property as we reconstruct the Montlake interchange. In addition, we'll have to temporarily detour vehicles onto the station property to keep Montlake Boulevard traffic flowing during construction.

WSDOT analyzed whether the current market could operate during SR 520 construction. We estimated that retaining an operating market would increase Montlake Project costs by approximately \$20 million. We discussed the issue with state legislators, and there wasn't support for the added cost to taxpayers. As a result, WSDOT leadership determined that preserving the market was impracticable.

5. Question: What will happen to the property in the future, after SR 520 Montlake Project construction is over?

Answer: Seattle's 43rd District legislators sponsored a measure in the 2019-2021 state transportation budget that directs WSDOT to sell the property once the Montlake Project is completed in 2023. That sale is about six years sooner than WSDOT had earlier planned.

At the end of Montlake Project construction, we will sell the property, minus the portion used for permanent SR 520 improvements. At that point, the property will be in the hands of the purchaser, who could redevelop the property, possibly with a new market building. The property is zoned as "Neighborhood Commercial," which the city defines as "a small shopping area that provides primarily convenience retail sales and services to the surrounding residential neighborhood."

6. Question: What about the contamination WSDOT found on the property?

Answer: WSDOT is working with the state Department of Ecology on a plan for cleaning up the petroleum-related soil and groundwater contamination under and around the gas station. Once the gas station and market close, WSDOT will remove the buildings and complete the cleanup of contamination on the site.

Traffic

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

Answer: We expect the eastbound on-ramp in the Arboretum to close in late 2019. Before closing the ramp, however, the Montlake Project contractor plans to open a temporary eastbound on-ramp from Lake Washington Boulevard. Permanent traffic improvements to the Montlake Boulevard interchange will follow, and when those improvements are completed – sometime around late 2021 to mid-2022 – the contractor will remove the temporary eastbound on-ramp.

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

Answer: The ramp's pending removal is based on the strong community support this action received during the project's environmental planning process and public comment period. Comments supporting ramp removal outnumbered those opposed by more than 6 to 1. Ramp-removal advocates included the Seattle City Council, Mayor's Office, and then-Gov. Gregoire. The primary basis for their position was to enhance the Washington Park Arboretum. Additionally, the current on-ramp couldn't connect to a new, taller West Approach Bridge South that will be constructed during the Montlake Project.

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 make several traffic improvements in the Montlake interchange area:

- Add a second general-purpose lane to the existing eastbound "loop" on-ramp to SR 520 at Montlake Boulevard East.
- Add a second left-turn lane from northbound Montlake Boulevard East onto the eastbound loop on-ramp to SR 520.
- Add capacity to the westbound lanes of East Lake Washington Boulevard near the Montlake interchange, with a lane that will feed directly into the improved eastbound loop on-ramp at Montlake Boulevard.
- Add a traffic signal at 24th Avenue East and East Lake Washington Boulevard to enhance traffic flow through this key intersection and reduce backups.
- Add SR 520 direct-access ramps onto and off the Montlake lid for buses and carpools, creating more space on the loop ramp for general-purpose traffic.

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

Answer: During construction, there will be periodic short-term closures of the highway and local streets as well as temporary traffic detours. Where possible, WSDOT will try to minimize short-term lane closures and limit necessary closures to nonpeak commute times. Some nighttime work, however, will be necessary. As a result, WSDOT received a Major Public Project

Construction Noise Variance. You can read our [noise-variance Q&A](#) online (pdf 539 kb). WSDOT will work with Graham and the city of Seattle to minimize closures and keep traffic moving.

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 developed an update to the corridor's Neighborhood Traffic Management Plan (NTMP) to address a variety of concerns related to traffic on local streets and to help minimize traffic effects from construction. One of these concerns is local "cut-through" traffic. The [Montlake Phase NTMP](#) (pdf 4.3 mb) identifies measures and solutions for cut-through traffic and other concerns.

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 identified the need for a signal at this intersection based on projected traffic conditions in 2030. Since the release of that document, 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 projected traffic volumes at this intersection, traffic queues would consistently back up in both the westbound and eastbound direction with all-way stop signs. On the other hand, analysis shows that a signal at this intersection would minimize traffic backups substantially compared to an all-way stop. This signal will be installed as part of Montlake Project construction.

7. Question: Why is eastbound traffic shifting onto the new West Approach Bridge North structure when Montlake Project construction begins?

Answer: The switch is necessary to keep SR 520 traffic flowing in both directions while we demolish the old west approach bridge (which currently carries all eastbound traffic from Montlake to the new floating bridge) and to construct a new bridge for eastbound-only traffic. During Montlake Project construction, all SR 520 traffic will travel between Montlake and the new floating bridge on the West Approach Bridge North (WABN), which we opened in 2017. We will stripe the WABN structure to temporarily carry two lanes of traffic in both directions, without HOV lanes.

Following that traffic shift in late October 2019, we'll remove the old west approach bridge and construct a new West Approach Bridge South. Once the Montlake Project is complete in 2023, both the north (westbound) and south (eastbound) approach bridges will have two general-purpose lanes and one HOV lane. This graphic shows the [traffic shift during construction](#) (pdf 2 mb).

Construction Staging

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

Answer: A new stormwater filtration site on the MOHAI property was originally scheduled to be completed as part of the WABN project. When WABN construction began, however, funding was not yet approved for the highway's remaining improvements in Seattle – the Rest of the West – and so 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 constructed as part of the Montlake Project for maximum efficiency. The new stormwater facility will treat runoff both from the completed West Approach Bridge North and from the West Approach Bridge South, scheduled for completion in 2023.

SR 520 construction is taking place in a highly dense, urban environment. WSDOT must provide sufficient staging areas to its project contractors, and nearby staging areas are limited. Locating staging farther from the construction sites would add significant costs and schedule issues. For these reasons, we identified the former MOHAI site as essential for project staging. For reference, the Montlake Project is a \$455 million contract, approximately twice as large as the WABN contract, increasing the need for nearby staging areas.

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

Answer: We will finish this work by the time we complete the West Approach Bridge South, in approximately 2023. Until then, the old MOHAI site will be needed for staging and construction of that approach bridge, the pedestrian land bridge and the Montlake lid.

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

Answer: Because the remaining project phases are very large and complex, we will need the WSDOT-owned peninsula space, as well as other locations, for accessing the construction sites and staging materials, equipment, vehicles and personnel. WSDOT plans to restore the peninsula for incorporation into the Arboretum once all SR 520 construction is completed.

4. Question: Will traffic be affected 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 contractor will use I-5, SR 520 and the Lake Washington Ship Canal as the primary [haul routes](#) for moving equipment and materials, with set local arterial streets sometimes used as secondary routes. The project will provide advance notice of planned road closures and major detours.

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. This is a very tight, geographically constrained area, and project improvements require some tree removal due to space limitations and grade adjustments. WSDOT developed a [Tree and Vegetation Management and Protection Plan](#) (pdf 4.7 mb) that the contractor is required to follow.

The plan describes the standards and project-specific best management practices for preserving and protecting trees and vegetation within the limits of project construction. The plan presents a variety of methods for minimizing effects on trees and vegetation during construction. It also 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.

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

Answer: Three primary factors drive the removal of these unused ramps:

- The ramps serve no functional purpose and provide no transportation benefit to the public.
- The ramps' removal allows for restoration of parkland and natural space in the Arboretum.
- Their removal 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 Project Construction

1. What is WSDOT doing to minimize construction effects to neighbors and others who travel through the Montlake area?

Answer: Our contract with the project's design-builder establishes numerous work requirements and best management practices to limit the effects of construction on nearby neighborhoods and people traveling through the corridor. In addition, WSDOT is offering the contractor incentive bonuses of up to \$1 million for maintaining positive community interactions, such as responsiveness to neighborhood concerns about noise, dust, lights, and work-site appearance.

The contract requirements, work practices and incentives are discussed in various management plans to help guide Montlake Project construction. The plans include:

- **Community Construction Management Plan**
 - The [Community Construction Management Plan](#) (pdf 871 kb) outlines the ongoing process through which the public can provide input about construction management decisions to help avoid, minimize, and mitigate the neighborhood effects of construction. The plan guides the actions of the contractor and establishes general expectations for the Montlake Project. Moreover, it serves as a vehicle for gathering public feedback on ways to modify and improve the construction practices addressed by the plan.
- **Neighborhood Traffic Management Plan**
 - The [Neighborhood Traffic Management Plan](#) (pdf 4.3 mb) 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 to gather feedback on traffic concerns and identify traffic management measures to implement in the Montlake corridor. The final NTMP for the Montlake Project was published in 2017.
- **Tree and Vegetation Management and Protection Plan**
 - The [Tree and Vegetation Management and Protection Plan](#) (pdf 4.7 mb) is an appendix of the Montlake Project 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. The plan is available for public review as part of the CCMP review process.

2. What is WSDOT doing to limit construction noise for nearby neighborhoods?

Answer: WSDOT requires the contractor to comply with local, state and federal environmental regulations on noise from construction. The contractor plans to conduct all especially loud activities, such as pile driving and certain types of demolition, only during daytime hours, with quieter work happening at night.

To limit weekday traffic disruptions and enhance crew safety, a significant amount of the construction needs to occur at night. When possible, however, we look for opportunities to conduct noisy work during the day. Daytime work can reduce nighttime effects on a neighborhood – but it also can affect weekday traffic. A [Major Public Project Construction Noise Variance](#) (pdf 1.2 mb) granted by the city of Seattle establishes limits on the project's nighttime noise. The variance also has various requirements, including installing round-the-clock electronic noise meters within the project area, and having an independent noise inspector on site during all nighttime work. The inspector will report any noise violations to the city and has the ability to halt contractor work if nighttime noise exceeds limits set by the city.

The contractor's [Community Construction Management Plan](#) (pdf 871 kb) outlines numerous noise-limiting work procedures crews will follow.