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Hon. Christine Gregoire
Governor of the State of Washington
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RE: SR 520 Bridge Replacement and HOV Project

Dear Joint Transportation Committee and Governor Gregoire,

The Seattle Design Commission appreciates the opportunity to participate in the west-side solution for the SR 520 Bridge Replacement and HOV Project. Throughout the mediation process, we made every effort to contribute objective ideas and to give each alternative equal consideration while learning from the rich perspective each participant brought to the group. With much deliberation, we have responded to the two questions presented to each mediation participant.

Which west side interchange Option do you prefer and why?

We found it very difficult to choose between Options A (Montlake Interchange with Second Bascule Bridge) and K (Single Point Urban Interchange with Tunnel under the Montlake Cut), whereas too many aspects of Option L (Single Point Urban Interchange with Bascule Bridge over Montlake Cut) were found to be unacceptable. Ultimately, our preferred option looks most like Option K, in that we support a significant investment in the Montlake neighborhood to restore conditions and provide for the future. Three primary opportunities are created by Option K that are unique from the others presented so far:

- Option K significantly improves mobility for transit, general purpose traffic, freight movement, the boating community, as

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well as bicyclists and pedestrians. This option has the potential to solve the transportation problem for 50, possibly 100 years to come.

- The proposed Pacific & Montlake Lid is *the* crucial link to the complicated puzzle surrounding it. It manages an overwhelming number of people traveling in conflicting directions by separating out traffic in a depressed intersection. It creates direct transit access between the triangle, light-rail station, SR 520, and ultimately I-5 unlike any other option. It fits seamlessly with the University of Washington's Rainier Vista vision. It places light-rail patrons on a landscaped lid, with the option to move freely between the university campus, the Hospital, or transit connections below, without traversing a series of sky-bridges.
- The Montlake Lid at SR 520 creates a far superior space than any other option. The depressed single-point interchange combined with its easterly location results in a much larger, more functional, open space. As the City of Seattle and the Parks Department struggles to find open space with the urban core, transportation projects can provide real estate that would otherwise be cost prohibitive.

Other aspects of Option K that we support are use of quieter pavement and limiting noise walls to areas where there is neighborhood support and they are expected to be effective. We support the low vertical profile, specifically between the new single-point interchange and the west highrise.

Common to all Options, including Option K, we applaud the direct HOV ramps between SR 520 and I-5. It is imperative that this project improves transit mobility to meet the growing travel needs of our city and region. We support the Roanoke and 10th/Delmar landscaped lids across I-5 and SR 520, respectively. These lids are necessary to improve mobility for pedestrians, bicyclists, provide open space, and reconnect historical neighborhoods.

Potential issues with Option K

While Option K seems to do a great job at solving all problems for all people, it also encourages a great deal of new traffic growth in Seattle neighborhoods that are of concern. Most notable are the impacts to the Arboretum. Traffic volumes in the Arboretum are expected to increase by 16 percent over No Build conditions and 49 percent over existing conditions. Already today, traffic in the Arboretum is a slow, steady, and constant stream of cars between the 520 ramps and E Madison Street. The proposed "keyhole" alignment encourages vehicles to use the Arboretum (Lake Washington Boulevard E) to access neighborhoods to the south.

We suggest a much more restricted access plan for this area, by eliminating the keyhole and limiting access between the new single-point interchange and E Montlake Place E (south of SR 520) to occur *only* on

Lake Washington Boulevard E as it parallels 520 in an east/west direction would preserve the Arboretum. As depicted in the Option K drawings, there is an opportunity to create a frontage road along the mainline alignment, and still provide a green buffer between this road and the existing Lake Washington Boulevard E and its neighboring homes.

The neighborhoods north and west of the Pacific /Montlake triangle would also see a substantial increase in traffic as a result of the new capacity provided by Option K. Traffic volumes are projected to increase by 15 percent increase on NE Pacific Street and 23 percent increase on Montlake Boulevard NE over No Build conditions. Transportation mitigation beyond the footprint of this project should be evaluated to offset direct impacts. The project responsibility of Option K has not been fully met and more work needs to be done to identify solutions.

Are there changes that could be made to the other Options that would make them more acceptable?

Option K – Single Point Urban Interchange with Tunnel under the Montlake Cut

Our preferential support of Option K has required a philosophical shift in values. A shift that places great value on overall mobility and place-making for the city and region. That being said, we feel more work is needed to pay closer attention to conditions beyond the WSDOT right-of-way and protect Seattle neighborhoods in a manner consistent with the investment being made within the project limits.

Suggested modifications to Option K include:

- The keyhole configuration in the Arboretum should be replaced by more direct access to E Montlake Place E, via E Lake Washington Boulevard. All traffic between SR 520 and neighborhoods to the south should travel on city arterials, rather than through the Arboretum.
- If access between SR 520 and neighborhoods to the south is retained through the use of Lake Washington Boulevard E in the Arboretum, we urge Option K to use segmental tolling with higher tolls on this route.
- We recommend a design competition for the Portage Bay Bridge design. A design competition would generate a more diverse range of ideas to draw from. The *Corridor Aesthetics Handbook*, May 2006, should also be used as a resource for design concepts.
- We suggest removing the Foster Land Bridge from Option K's scope as a cost savings measure. We also question whether the construction impacts to the surrounding sensitive areas are worth the long-term environmental and recreational

benefits.

- Include HOV preferential treatment in the Montlake Cut tunnel. The current design calls for two general purpose lanes in each direction of the tunnel. We recommend one general purpose, one transit/HOV only lane in each direction. This shift would support the travel mode splits the City of Seattle is trying to achieve in our long-range growth goals and support Sound Transit's BRT plans, while potentially reducing new traffic demand impacts on areas north and west of the Pacific /Montlake triangle.
- Retain transit bus zones on Montlake Boulevard E at the interchange and increase local transit service serving areas between the Montlake Multimodal Center and neighborhoods to the south.

Option A – Montlake Interchange with Second Bascule Bridge

In many ways, we support Option A. It addresses many of the requirements stipulated by the Seattle City Council. The Commission holds many of the same core principals of Option A. However, the results of the Base A transportation analysis indicated much higher congestion than either Options K or L. To improve congestion, a combination of sub-options would have to be adopted. The sub-options as proposed by the proponents make great gains but at the expense of some of the core values of the alternative.

Retaining the Lake Washington Boulevard E ramps increases traffic in the Arboretum, adding a westbound auxiliary lane on Portage Bay results in the footprint found unacceptable by many people, and widening E Montlake Place E south of the interchange would require even more right-of-way acquisition making this alternative comparable to the others in terms of impact area.

However, we see Option A as a viable alternative with great potential. We suggest the following modifications and additions of sub-options to balance the transportation needs with the core principals of this Option.

- Split the westbound off-ramp traffic to occur in two locations: westbound to northbound Montlake Boulevard E at existing location, and westbound to southbound Montlake via the E Lake Washington Boulevard ramp, as depicted as a "Possible Addition". This split off-ramp configuration would ease congestion on Montlake Boulevard E.
- Configure the westbound to southbound off-ramp to E Lake Washington Boulevard so that it operates in a one-way direction, westbound towards Montlake Boulevard E. This new ramp would direct traffic away from the historic E Lake Washington Boulevard and protect the Arboretum. It could meet up with the historic E Lake Washington Boulevard in advance of the Montlake

- intersection.
- Align the westbound Transit Only Direct Access ramp adjacent to the westbound to northbound off-ramp, crossing over the mainline in advance of the intersection so these three right-turn lanes are in alignment.

We believe this combination of sub-options would provide transportation mobility comparable to Option K. To minimize the project footprint, we favor this combination over the sub-options of a westbound auxiliary lane or additional widening of Montlake Boulevard.

Option L – Single Point Urban Interchange with Bascule Bridge over Montlake Cut

Too many aspects of Option L are undesirable to support this option, even with modifications. The primary reasons we do not support any variation of Option L are:

- The concept of an elevated single-point interchange in vicinity of the Arboretum is contrary to the core principal of enhancing the natural and recreational environment.
- A second draw-span bridge within proximity to the Rainier Vista view corridor is unacceptable.
- The idea of a draw-bridge serving as an actual on- or off-ramp to SR 520 and its potential for creating congestion, delay, and safety hazards is unsupportable.
- The proposed gradual slope between the interchange and west highrise provides natural storm-drainage opportunities, which we support in concept, but the vertical profile creates a visual barrier to the surrounding neighborhoods that is undesirable.
- The in-water and near shore impacts associated with construction of the bridge abutments are too great.

The favorable aspects of this Option are only found in segments that are common to Options A and/or K. The unique aspects of Option K are not supported by the Commission.

We offer this position to help frame your decision on the SR 520 Bridge Replacement and HOV Project. We believe this project is a critical investment in the vitality of the city and the region as a whole.

Sincerely,

Mary Johnston
Chair, Seattle Design Commission