

Update May 9, from the Coalition for a Sustainable SR 520

What just happened?

The governor selected a “preferred alternative” for SR 520. This means that WSDOT can proceed to the final evaluation of impact on fish, etc, and can make more detailed construction plans. The state plans to finish this and to publish a final EIS around the end of the year. During the year, three workgroups established by the legislature will work on transit connections, mass transit on 520, and the arboretum issues.

The alternative that was selected was different from those in the SDEIS. On April 15, the governor said 520 would have 6 lanes including 2 HOV lanes, and on April 30 the preferred alternative was selected... probably before they even read our comments on the SDEIS. If you haven't read these, you can find them at <http://sustainable520.org/index.php/sdeis-response/>.

The project could still be stopped by lack of money, and the state is at least \$2 billion short of the \$ 4.6 billion construction cost. The coalition is working on the implications of this financing shortfall.

The project could also be stopped by problems with native remains or cultural artifacts, or implications on historic sites, or implications on other environmental issues, or lawsuits. Most of all, the project can be stopped by popular will. If the people rise up against it, we can stop it. We need to get more and more people understanding the problems created by this design.

Does the new design resolve our basic issues? NO!

1) The latest plan would still have two more lanes carrying cars into the city, and it would actually reduce the road space available to handle cars, by removing the connections to Lake Washington Boulevard. We believe that this end of the city simply can't handle more cars, and that if 520 is expanded, the only solution is mass transit bus and/or light rail... on lanes 5 and 6.

2) The latest plan would still do much too much damage. It would permanently destroys the bays, wetlands, parks, and open space that have characterized this area forever. It would harm historic sites including the Montlake Bridge and the Roanoke neighborhood. It would cause measurable health problems including fatal heart attacks and chronic asthma. The damage would be much less if light rail were used on lanes 5 and 6, and there were 4 lanes only from Montlake to I-5.

3) The funding is still not available. The SDEIS told us that there would be no lids or other mitigation if funding were not available. More than that, we are at risk as taxpayers and toll payers. The coalition is investigating this situation now.

Specifically how is this preferred alternative different?

First: The Arboretum got what it wanted...no ramps from Lake Washington Boulevard to the Arboretum... and the neighborhoods got shafted. It's good to protect the Arboretum, but to direct all its traffic... more than 15,000 cars a day... onto the surface streets without any plans to accommodate it

is infuriating. The results are likely to be: more traffic all the way from Madison and 23rd, across the Montlake Bridges (they are still planning 2 bridges here), and on Montlake Blvd. north; and overflow traffic on Boyer Fuhrman. These effects were predicted by the Nelson Nygard, consulting to the city, in its April draft report.

Second: The picture of the Montlake lid was enlarged, but all lids will be built only if funds are available, and we know that funds are \$2 billion short. The lid at I-5 and Roanoke was taken away, which has severe effects; on April 15 we saw for the first time what the new lane from 520 to the express lanes would look like, and it rises high over the existing I-5, creating noise, blocking Capitol Hill views, and adding pollution.

Third: Bike and pedestrian trails were improved, and the Montlake Intersection was made more friendly to bikes and pedestrians. These are good changes.

Fourth: At the new UW rail station, right near the Husky station, pedestrians and bikes will have their own lid on a level above Montlake Boulevard, which will be sunken below the current grade. The idea is good. It's too soon to know how it would be engineered. It still leaves the problem that people have to walk much too far from the light rail station to their buses, so it's not an easy connection for transit users.

Fifth: The Portage Bay viaduct was narrowed very slightly, maybe by 6 feet. Instead of 7 lanes plus shoulders, it will have 6 lanes plus shoulders, and one of the shoulders will be used for traffic. The plan now is to put planter boxes in the middle of the steep hill climb on the bridge, ostensibly to reduce noise. We can learn more, but it is hard to believe that it will really reduce noise by much.

Sixth: The new plan removes one of the three reasons that light rail would not work. The east and west bound lanes are now separated enough that light rail will function. However, there is still not plan on what to do with light rail as it approaches Seattle, and if the current plans are built they will probably preclude the light rail in Seattle. And the floating bridge still can't support light rail unless it has extra stabilizing pontoons stuck out the sides... which will add to the pressure for lanes 7 and 8. So there is still no resolution of whether or not lanes 7 and 8 will be built later.

We are developing the coalition's plans for the next months. All suggestions are welcome. More news soon!

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