

Comparison of City of Seattle resolutions to current plans for SR 520

By Jonathan Dubman, 12/31/09

Seattle Resolution 31109 reads:

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SEATTLE THAT:

Section 1. The City Council, having reviewed the SR 520 mediation group PIP, hereby concurs with the recommendation that Options A, K and L be studied as part of a WSDOT SDEIS. The City Council also urges the Governor and the State Legislature to make a decision on a preferred alternative for the west side alignment and interchange design after sufficient analysis has been completed through the SDEIS process.

Section 2. The City Council reaffirms the recommendations for design criteria made with regard to the SR 520 Project in Resolution 30974. The Governor and State Legislature are requested to designate a preferred alternative for the west side alignment and interchange design that best meets the criteria as outlined in Resolution 30974. The criteria are summarized as follows:

A. Design for transit connectivity and reliability;

Plan A+ fails to solve the two big challenges related to this transit connection:

1. Improving speed and reliability

With Plan A+, hundreds of buses each day, including 3 new Bus Rapid Transit lines, remain stuck in congestion on the Montlake Bridge.

2. Providing bus stops adjacent to the UW rail station.

With Plan A+, there's a 1200 foot walk across two busy streets carrying a total of 60,000 vehicles a day when emerging from the UW rail station and walking to a connecting bus.

B. Reduce congestion at the Montlake Bridge and improve north-south mobility between Seattle neighborhoods;

The second drawbridge proposed by Plan A+ fails to reduce congestion in the corridor; WSDOT's own traffic modeling shows it moves about the same number of vehicles across the ship canal.

20 minute backups remain heading southbound from NE Seattle to the UW light rail station and SR 520, thus precluding effective transit connections to University Village and Children's Hospital, not just to and from SR 520, but to the UW light rail station as well.

D. Reduce noise and visual impacts;

Plan A+ will create new visual impacts and new sources of noise all along the corridor, particularly across Portage Bay, across the Ship Canal, and through the Arboretum.

E. Protect open space, the environment, historic resources, and the Washington Park Arboretum;

The footprint of Plan A+ in the Arboretum is both wider and higher than necessary. Historic neighborhoods (including Roanoke Park, Montlake), city landmarks (Montlake Bridge, Seattle Yacht Club) are heavily impacted.

F. Promote bike and pedestrian access;

The Montlake Boulevard corridor is a critical connection for bicycles and pedestrians. On the north, we have the Burke-Gilman trail, the UW and the light rail station there. On the south, we have the Arboretum, the proposed SR 520 bicycle trail, and various Seattle neighborhoods. Plan A+ creates new ped/bike conflicts with vehicles in this corridor that cannot be addressed as a later refinement of the plan. Plan A+ precludes a safe connection in this corridor, widening the boulevard for cars and creating many new impediments in the form of new, additional highway ramps. Plan A+ reconstructs a free right turn to an on-ramp which forms a major pedestrian hazard. Plan A+ fails to address connectivity to and through the Arboretum for bicycles. Plan A+ fails to provide a safe and efficient connection between SR 520 and the Burke-Gilman trail.

H. Mitigate and address the concerns of the University of Washington;

Plan A+ creates avoidable construction impacts to the UW from the second drawbridge that do not solve any problem.

I. Mitigate and address neighborhood impacts; and

Plan A+ actually maximizes neighborhood impacts and precludes mitigation opportunities. Every directly affected community adjacent to the highway opposes this plan. Portage Bay / Roanoke Park, North Capitol Hill and the yacht clubs are faced with a 7 lane Portage Bay Viaduct. The proposed loop ramp (eastbound on-ramp at Montlake Blvd.) precludes the restoration of a greenbelt connecting the Arboretum across a new park on the lid down to the Montlake Playfield.

The proposed interchange in the Montlake area is profoundly out of scale with the neighborhood. Plan A+ proposes a lid in a location that serves neither the Montlake neighborhood nor the Arboretum; the lid is bisected by a high-speed curving highway off ramp.

Resolution 30974 reads:

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SEATTLE, THE MAYOR CONCURRING, THAT:

Section 1. The preferred alternative for the SR 520 Project should include and address the design elements and mitigation measures incorporated in this resolution. Transit operations and transit connectivity should have priority in the design, construction and operation of the SR 520 Project, and all feasible steps should be taken to ensure that priority.

Section 2. The City also recommends the following project design elements, mitigation strategies, and results to WSDOT.

A. Design for Transit Connectivity and Reliability.

1) Design, construct, and operate the SR 520 Project to provide that bus service on SR 520 directly connects to and a bus stop is located in close proximity to the planned Light Rail Station at Husky Stadium.

Plan A+ appears to make no attempt to address this critical issue.

2) Give priority to design elements that enhance transit. This includes designing the corridor with Bus Rapid Transit elements such as safe, attractive, aesthetically pleasing bus stops and shelters with real-time bus information for riders.

Plan A+ may facilitate Bus Rapid Transit on the highway itself, but removes all access to that transit from Montlake... the opposite of enhancing transit. No consideration appears to have been made for the safety or convenience of pedestrians once they step off a bus or train.

4) Coordinate the design of the SR 520 Project with the Sound Transit light rail station at Husky Stadium to be consistent with the Sound Transit long range plan.

5) Work with Sound Transit and King County Metro to optimize the development of the light rail station at Husky Stadium for ease, speed and convenience of bus to rail transfers for transit users.

The light rail station itself (under construction now) is suitable as is. Plan A+ appears to make no attempt to connect the transit that will run on SR 520 to that station.

D. Reduce Noise and Visual Impacts.

1) Accept neighborhood recommendations and preferences for sound wall design, height, and installation that are consistent with state policies and procedures.

2) Pursue the use of quiet pavement to reduce noise impacts.

Plan A+ appears to simply ignore neighborhood concerns about noise.

3) Provide, to the extent possible, that the SR 520 replacement structure does not adversely impact views of the surrounding natural environment.

Plan A+ creates major, new, avoidable view impacts all the way from Portage Bay to the east shore of Lake Washington, by building structures that are wider and higher than necessary, while failing to deliver on key goals of the project, particularly for transit.

E. Protect Open Space, Environment, and the Washington Park Arboretum ("Arboretum").

1) Provide that, at minimum, there be no net loss of publicly held (City or State owned)

parkland and/or other land used by the public as a result of the SR 520 Project.

Plan A+ consumes vast quantities of open space in parkland and critical habitat that are essentially irreplaceable.

2) Extend lids over SR 520 at North Capitol Hill and Montlake to the maximum lengths possible and match existing topography, landscape, and vegetation.

The proposed lid in Montlake is bisected by a highway ramp and fails to reconnect the neighborhood.

4) In coordination with the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT), implement traffic calming and traffic-reduction strategies on Lake Washington Boulevard through the Arboretum.

Plan A+ will increase traffic volume through the Arboretum and seemingly makes no attempt to address this critical issue.

8) Create a continuous greenbelt linking the lid at Montlake to the Arboretum.

The loop ramp proposed by Plan A+ at Montlake Blvd. precludes this greenbelt connection.

The lid proposed by Plan A+ is in the wrong place to enable this connection; the ramp connections to Montlake Blvd. would forever preclude this connection.

F. Promote Bike and Pedestrian Access.

1) Provide adequate bike and pedestrian access to local neighborhoods across Lake Washington along the SR 520 corridor, and to the Burke-Gilman Trail.

3) Coordinate with SDOT to develop a pedestrian/bike path connection from the Madison Park area to SR 520, and explore additional alternatives to the 37th Avenue E. and 43rd Avenue E. options, including alternatives that improve bicycle and pedestrian safety and mobility on Lake Washington Boulevard and through the Arboretum.

Unfortunately a connection to Madison Park is not achievable with the proposed bridge alignment. The Arboretum proposes to use Arboretum Drive as a bicycle route, making Arboretum Drive the link to Madison Park. Plan A+ fails to connect Arboretum Drive to the UW, Burke-Gilman or SR 520 transit, and precludes a good connection by adding traffic to Lake Washington Blvd. and building new ramps that conflict with pedestrians and bicyclists.

J. Give Priority to Interagency Cooperation and Coordination

1) WSDOT, SDOT, Metro Transit, and Sound Transit must work together to design, construct and operate their projects and systems to maximize transit connectivity.

2) The City of Seattle strongly recommends that high priority be given to interagency design meetings.

This does not appear to have occurred. The HCT (High Capacity Transit Plan) failed to meet this mandate. The city may need to be more explicit in setting expectations on this.

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