



October 16, 2006

Allison Ray
I-405 Corridor Program
600 108th Ave NE, Suite 405
Bellevue, WA 98004

RE: I-405 Northbound NE 8th Street to SR 520 Braided Crossing Project

Dear Ms. Ray,

The Bellevue City Council continues to support WSDOT's advancement of the projects included I-405 Corridor Master Plan and particularly encourages WSDOT to continue to advance the I-405 Northbound NE 8th St. to SR 520 Braided Crossing Project and its companion project, the southbound braided ramps project from SR 520 to NE 8th. We strongly support this project because it is vital to the continued growth of downtown Bellevue, the City as a whole, and the broader region. The project will complement the NE 10th St. Overcrossing, which will begin construction later this year, by providing part of the necessary infrastructure to implement a new regional transportation access point. In doing so, it helps to implement a key component of the City's Downtown Implementation Plan Update, which is consistent with the I-405 Master Plan.

We offer the following comments to help shape the Environmental Assessment (EA):

Access – NE 10th St. Northbound On-Ramp

During construction and once the project is completed, access to SR 520 from downtown Bellevue and neighborhoods east of I-405 could be limited to the NE 4th interchange. The NE 10th over crossing project will eventually allow access to and from SR 520. We believe providing more than one access point to SR 520 is critical to distributing trips on the city's street network to maintain acceptable system operations. As such, we believe WSDOT should construct the northbound NE 10th St. on-ramp as part of the I-405 Northbound NE 8th St. to SR 520 Braided Crossing Project in order to provide a second access point for SR 520 destined trips, thereby mitigating the loss of this access from NE 8th St. Additionally, we look forward to a collaborative effort to reconcile management of the city's transportation network and signage to facilitate access to I-405 and SR520 and efficient operation of the local street network during and after construction. Given heavy and growing travel demands in downtown Bellevue and surrounding areas, it will be particularly important to adequately notify motorists of temporary construction detours and permanent highway access modifications through clear signage and other methods. The EA must fully analyze the effects of changing I-405 and SR 520 access from downtown Bellevue to ensure that reasonable traffic circulation is maintained. We are concerned that forcing all SR 520 bound trips to NE 4th St. could overwhelm the street system and have severe traffic impacts.

Bel-Red Corridor Redevelopment and 124th Ave NE Off-Ramp Capacity

The city's Bel-Red Corridor Project has identified three land use and transportation action alternatives for evaluation in a draft environmental impact statement. All three alternatives consider increased housing and employment densities, and improvements to the transportation system. As the Bel-Red Corridor is adjacent to the Braided Crossing Project study area, the improvements made as part of the project become even more vital in light of the anticipated increased densities. At the same time, impacts arising from the project will affect a larger population than those captured with current projections for the Bel-Red Corridor. We hope to work closely with WSDOT to include the potential increased densities in the EA in order to fully account for project impacts. Of particular importance is the queuing capacity of the reconfigured 124th Ave NE off-ramp from eastbound SR 520. We believe that WSDOT should seek to maximize this capacity in light of likely increased travel demands associated with the future redevelopment of the Bel-Red corridor.

NE 12th St. Overcrossing

This project will expand the width of I-405 to accommodate the northbound braided ramps and the ultimate configuration of I-405 that includes the future southbound braided ramps from SR 520 to NE 10th St. and HOV to HOV connectors between I-405 and SR 520. In doing so, the NE 12th St. overcrossing will be reconstructed. The City has a long-standing plan to improve the NE 12th St. overcrossing to include pedestrian and bicycle facilities because it is identified as the primary bicycle route across I-405 in the downtown Bellevue vicinity. Bellevue staff have communicated the City's desires for 12.5 foot wide sidewalks (8 foot sidewalk, plus 4 foot planter/buffer, plus ½ foot curb) and 5 foot wide bicycle lanes in each direction on this overcrossing. We believe this is a critical investment for accommodating non-motorized modes and therefore expect it to be constructed as part of the project. We also expect that the new overcrossing (and the rest of the project) will be constructed in accordance with I-405 Context Sensitive Solutions aesthetic features.

Please also be aware that Sound Transit is currently evaluating light rail routing options in Bellevue. One option currently under review is an at-grade system that would cross over I-405 in the NE 12th St. corridor with a station between 112th Ave NE and 116th Ave NE. While Sound Transit has only begun their analysis and no routing or station location decisions have been made, it is important that WSDOT continue to coordinate with the City and Sound Transit to ensure that options are not precluded by the design of the new NE 12th overcrossing.

Noise Impacts

Noise has been an on-going concern for neighborhoods and jurisdictions along I-405 and the SR 520 corridors, and we appreciate that the SR520 project team has found ways to alleviate existing and anticipated noise issues west of I-405. We are concerned that noise impacts were identified east of I-405 by the SR 520 DEIS, but effective mitigation could not be found. Now that the Braided Crossing Project has subsumed the auxiliary lane on SR 520 from I-405 to 124th, we expect that the Environmental Assessment for the Braided Crossing Project will build upon the I-405 Corridor Program EIS and the SR 520 DEIS to find ways to address noise issues in the area. Noise impacts to single family neighborhoods north of SR 520 and east of I-405 are of particular concern. Please reference the City's noise abatement objectives that are outlined in Resolution 7375 (adopted June 2006) that we have shared with you previously.

Right of Way Impacts

The Braided Crossing Project is adjacent to an area of residential and business uses. The project footprint reveals the extent of potential impacts to these properties, which could be significant. In some cases, the project anticipates complete acquisition of properties, or acquisition of such a significant amount of the parcel as to render the existing use no longer viable. We expect that the EA will fully disclose impacts, include analysis to minimize adverse impacts, and seek to protect adjacent properties to the extent feasible. When impacts are unavoidable, we expect WSDOT to work closely with property and business owners to provide appropriate compensation and mitigation.

Impacts of Increased Impervious Surface

As the project will create an estimated additional 12.5 acres of impervious surface, we appreciate that the EA will include evaluation of the impacts to a range of environmental elements. The Bellevue community values both the beauty and functional integrity of our natural environment, and we expect that WSDOT will work closely with the city to identify local mitigation opportunities.

Construction Mitigation and Coordination with Local Improvements

We hope that the city and State can work collaboratively to coordinate the Braided Crossing Project and local projects to facilitate efficient implementation and mitigate construction impacts. The city has a number of planned Capital Investment Program (CIP) projects in the project study area and project footprint. Specifically, the City has a designed project at Northup Way and 124th Ave NE, planned pedestrian and bicycle improvements along Northup Way to Bellevue Way, and identified a potential bicycle connection from 124th Ave NE, a city-designated bicycle route, to the existing SR 520 trail. Additionally, city CIP projects adjacent to the study area present opportunities to make improvements to the local system in order to mitigate anticipated traffic impacts caused by project construction.

Additional Environmental Clearance

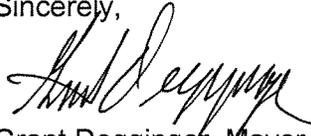
We request that you consider expansion of the project EA to include the continuation of the auxiliary lane eastbound on SR 520 to 148th Avenue NE. As a major employment center, access to Overlake is critical for the region. Past studies have examined the continuation of the auxiliary lane eastbound to 148th Avenue NE because of the importance of providing access to Overlake during the peak period. Projected congestion in the corridor is high, including backups on eastbound SR 520 past I-405 to approximately Bellevue Way. If budget becomes available, extending the auxiliary lane to 148th Avenue NE as part of the Braided Crossing project would provide important capacity for the region to a major employment center while providing the efficiency of building the desired configuration while construction is underway in the corridor.

We request that you consider expansion of the scope of the environmental review to include the evaluation of ramps to and from the east on SR 520 at 124th Avenue NE. At a minimum, the design of the project must allow for the future provision of these ramps. Similarly, the design should not preclude the build out of the corridor, consistent with the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), that calls for eight lanes as the ultimate configuration of SR 520 east of I-405. As explained above, the city is considering increases in housing and employment densities in the Bel-Red Corridor. Allowing for the future improvements, and advancing the environmental clearance for the ramps at 124th Ave NE, will ensure that the city and State continue to anticipate and meet the future

demand for the corridor in an efficient manner. We anticipate that these future demands may otherwise overwhelm the 148th Ave NE/SR 520 interchange.

Bellevue looks forward to a continued productive relationship with WSDOT during the Braided Crossing Project EA and subsequently to implement the project. Our hope is that the project will progress swiftly through a thorough environmental process and into design and construction. Central themes for this investment are safety and throughput improvements in advance of SR 520 Bridge Replacement and HOV Project implementation. We believe the I-405 Northbound NE 8th St. to SR 520 Braided Crossing Project will be critical to keeping the region and state moving during reconstruction of the SR 520 corridor, which will likely result with significant traffic diversion to I-90. Thank you for your continued work to advance this project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Grant Degginger". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light blue horizontal line.

Grant Degginger, Mayor
City of Bellevue

Cc: Bellevue City Council
Steve Sarkozy, City Manager
Goran Sparrman, Transportation Director
Matt Terry, Planning and Community Development Director