

Briefing Paper to Seattle City Council by Tim Payne, Nelson/Nygaard

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On WSDOT SR 520 I-5 to Medina Bridge Replacement and HOV Project, Establishment of Triggers, Second Montlake Bridge Technical Workgroup Report

Bicycle and Pedestrian Level of Service

Technical Finding: Current levels of service are approaching and, at times, exceeding thresholds that indicate action is appropriate to address the capacity limitations for pedestrian and bicycles on the current bridge.

Policy implications for the City to consider: The City is currently engaged in an update to the Seattle Bicycle Master Plan. This is the appropriate forum to weigh potential options to address the capacity limitations of the current bridge and look for creative alternatives that do not necessitate construction of a second bridge for vehicle traffic.

Transit Travel Time and Reliability

Technical Finding: Current transit operating conditions in the 2.5 mile corridor containing the Montlake Bridge are either approaching, or failing to meet, the City's standards (adopted in the Seattle Transit Master Plan) for transit travel time and reliability. However, there is no direct relationship between those conditions and the Montlake Bridge. The bridge is only one potential source of delay in the corridor and no evidence can be found suggesting the bridge plays any substantial role in creating transit delay or increasing transit travel time.

Policy Implications for the City to consider: The City recently adopted the Seattle Transit Master Plan which names this corridor as a high priority corridor for improvement of transit reliability and travel time. The City and King County Metro will work together to improve transit operating conditions in the corridor and monitor the results. At this time and for the foreseeable future it appears a second Montlake Bridge would have little benefit in addressing adverse transit operating conditions in the corridor.

SR 520 Mainline Operations

Technical Findings: Mainline operations are only influenced by Montlake Bridge openings for marine traffic. A second bridge will not change that condition. A second bridge could provide marginal benefit in assisting eastbound mainline traffic to recover more quickly following a bridge opening. However, the current level of delay incurred from these conditions suggests that an investment in a new bridge does not pass a cost benefit analysis test. Also noted in the technical findings is that the bridge has not approached its theoretical capacity and, based on traffic volume history, is unlikely to do so in the future.

Policy Implications for the City to consider: For the foreseeable future, given the decreasing incidence of bridge openings (documented in the technical report), reduced traffic volumes on SR 520 and Montlake Boulevard, and the limited benefit provided to mainline traffic recovery following a bridge opening, an investment in a second bridge is unwarranted.

Overall Policy Conclusions

A second Montlake Bascule Bridge does not provide sufficient benefits to balance its high costs, which are both financial and environmental. While there are issues in the corridor, other alternatives, short of a second bridge, need to be explored thoroughly and implemented if found to be effective in addressing those issues.

The legislature should consider reallocating the costs of the second Montlake Bridge to other, more beneficial, aspects of the SR 520 project relating to improving pedestrian and bicycle connectivity between SR 520 and the University of Washington/U-Link/Burke-Gilman Trail, improving transit operating conditions in the broader corridor, and toward improving the livability aspects of SR 520 project through the Madison Park, Montlake, Portage Bay, and Roanoke neighborhoods.

WSDOT and SDOT should continue to monitor conditions, as recommended in the report, to ascertain if a second bridge could be warranted at some unknown future date based on changes in conditions that are not currently discernible.