



**Washington State
Department of Transportation**

SR 520 Bridge Replacement and HOV Program
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LTR 2732

Seattle City Councilmembers
600 Fourth Avenue
Seattle, WA 98124-4025

Dear Seattle City Councilmembers,

WSDOT recently became aware of draft Council Resolution 31716, requesting that the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) preserve one support pier associated with the R.H. Thomson Expressway, stating the City's intent to fund an engineering study of the pier's structural integrity and, if preserved, assume ownership and maintenance responsibilities. WSDOT began discussing this proposal with city of Seattle staff (including Council, Department of Transportation, Parks and Recreation, and the Seattle Design Commission) in 2014, when the city chose to not move forward with the proposal. I'm writing to provide a summary of WSDOT's position on this proposal and key remaining questions for WSDOT as you consider the resolution.

Past WSDOT review of the proposal to retain a "Ramp to Nowhere" bent

The proposal to save one support arch (or "bent") of the R.H. Thomson "Ramps to Nowhere" was first proposed in 2014 by a citizens group, Seattle ARCH. Former Councilmember Nick Licata sent then Secretary of Transportation Lynn Peterson letters on January 8, 2014 and January 17, 2014 requesting WSDOT's support in retaining a bent of the ramps near the Lake Washington Boulevard Interchange in Seattle. Those letters are attached, along with Secretary Peterson's March 5, 2014 response, explaining how decisions were made to remove the ramps, and several key issues that need to be further considered with the proposal to retain a portion of the ramps in place.

As noted in the attached letter from Secretary Peterson, the decision to remove the ramps was based on extensive public outreach conducted through WSDOT's environmental analysis, coordination with the city of Seattle, state legislative coordination, formal public comment periods and was widely supported from a variety of stakeholders. It was included as part of the project, which received full funding from the Washington State Legislature in 2015. The Seattle Parks Department also conducted a visioning process regarding the north entry to the Washington Park Arboretum and heard significant support to remove the ramps.

WSDOT's position and key remaining questions

WSDOT has already decommissioned a portion of the Ramps to Nowhere as a part of the West Approach Bridge North (WABN) Project, currently under construction. The remaining portions of the ramps are planned to be removed with the construction of the West Approach Bridge South (WABS), scheduled to be advertised to contractors in spring 2017, awarded by late 2017 and begin construction in 2018. In order to replace the structurally vulnerable WABS as soon as possible, WSDOT intends to proceed with the current project schedule.

If Council proceeds with Resolution 31716, there are several key questions and considerations that must be resolved. Many of these are the same questions noted in Secretary Peterson's March 5, 2014 letter:

- **Constructability**
 - In addition to evaluating the structural integrity, is retaining a single bent structurally safe?
 - How would retaining a bent impact WSDOT's next construction contract and constructability of other SR 520 project improvements, including removal of the eastbound Lake Washington Boulevard on-ramp? Removal of the eastbound on-ramp is planned to occur with WABS construction.
- **Permitting requirements and costs**
 - Would the federally-approved SR 520, I-5 to Medina Project Record of Decision or other existing federal, state or local permits need to be modified? WSDOT does not have the funding available to modify these permits for a non-highway purpose.
 - Would this proposal be considered art (which cannot be funded by state transportation dollars)?
- **City of Seattle position**
 - Would the Seattle City Council modify its position as identified in the 2011 city of Seattle and WSDOT Memorandum of Understanding, which supports removal of the Ramps to Nowhere?
- **Stakeholder support**
 - Is there broad stakeholder support to retain a portion of the ramps to nowhere?
- **Property issues**
 - The ramps to nowhere are located within WSDOT right-of-way on the WSDOT Peninsula – an area that WSDOT plans on using for construction staging for all remaining SR 520 project improvements through the 2027-2029 timeframe. WSDOT intends to surplus a portion of the WSDOT Peninsula to Seattle Parks upon completion of the SR 520 Program, through a future real estate agreement. What additional property agreements are needed in order for the City to take on ownership, maintenance and liability of the structure prior to a future property transfer?

- **Timing**
 - If the City proceeds with the engineering study, we respectfully request that WSDOT remain engaged and that the outcomes of the study are completed, and the above issues are resolved by the end of 2016. The above questions also need to be resolved by the end of the year in order for WSDOT to stay on schedule to release the next construction contract by spring 2017.

We would be happy to discuss these key issues further, or provide additional background materials at your request. Thank you for your continued interest and engagement in the SR 520 Program and related activities in Seattle.

Sincerely,



Julie Meredith
SR 520 Program Administrator
SR 520 Bridge Replacement and HOV Program
Washington State Department of Transportation

Enclosure

cc: Mayor Ed Murray
Kevin Shively, Seattle Mayor's office
Calvin Chow, Seattle Department of Transportation
Michael Shiosaki, Seattle Department of Parks & Recreation
David Graves, Seattle Department of Parks & Recreation
Scott Kubly, Seattle Department of Transportation
Bernard van de Kamp, Seattle Department of Transportation
Michael Jenkins, Seattle Design Commission
Ron Judd, WSDOT