



CITY OF KIRKLAND

Department of Public Works

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MEMORANDUM

To: David Ramsay, City Manager

From: Daryl Grigsby, Public Works Director
Noel Hupprich, P.E., Project Engineer
David Godfrey, P.E., Transportation Engineering Manager

Date: December 23, 2009

Subject: SR 520 EASTSIDE TRANSIT AND HOV PROJECT –
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT COMMENT LETTER

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that Council authorize the Mayor to sign the attached letter containing comments on the SR 520 Eastside Transit and HOV Project Environmental Assessment (EA).

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION:

The EA was released on December 3, 2009 and the comment period closes on January 7, 2010. On December 16, the Transportation Commission reviewed the EA and prepared comments for Council consideration. The Commission reviewed and edited the attached letter. The complete EA is available on the [WSDOT website](#). More information on the scope of the project is contained in the SR 520 Council agenda item under special presentations.

Several comments involve pedestrian and bicycle facilities. The primary concern is that the proposed regional trail does not connect to the existing SR 520 trail which currently begins near 124th Avenue in Bellevue (figure 1). The missing segment shown in figure 1 aligns with Northrup Way but a connection would not necessarily have to maintain this alignment. A City of Bellevue sponsored project to complete bike lanes along Northrup Way is not funded. Other concerns involve treatment of proposed trail ends at Lake Washington Boulevard (Figure 2) and at 108th Avenue NE (Figure 3). Kirkland staff met with City of Bellevue and WSDOT staff and WSDOT is preparing to address these last two issues.

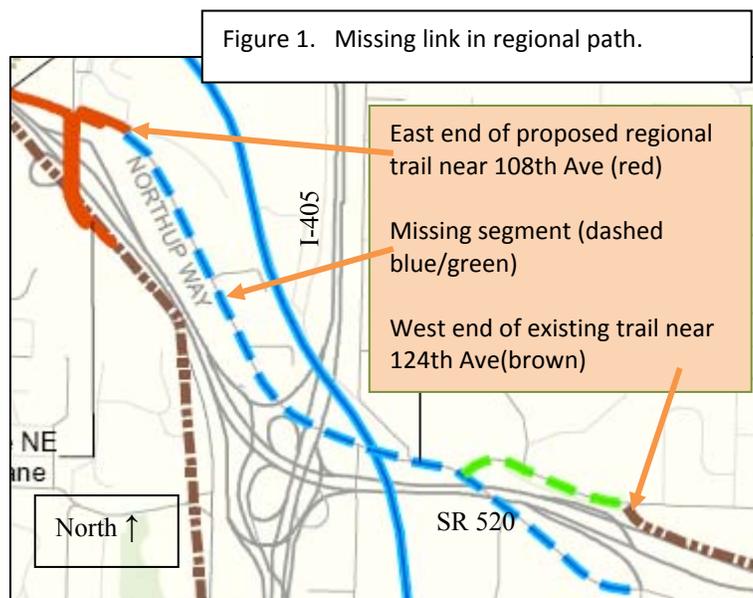


Figure 2 Proposed Bellevue Way/Lake Washington Blvd. Interchange

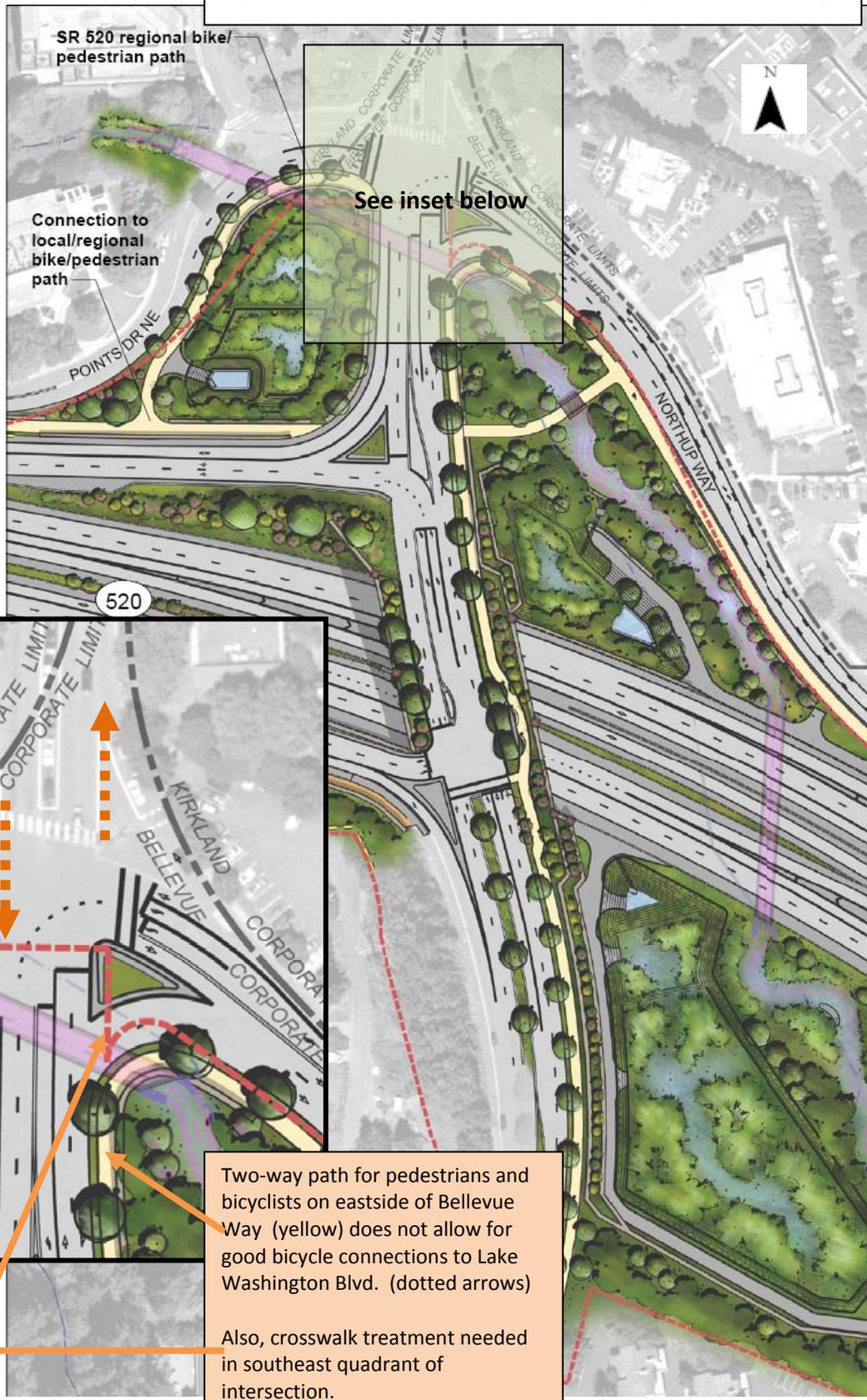
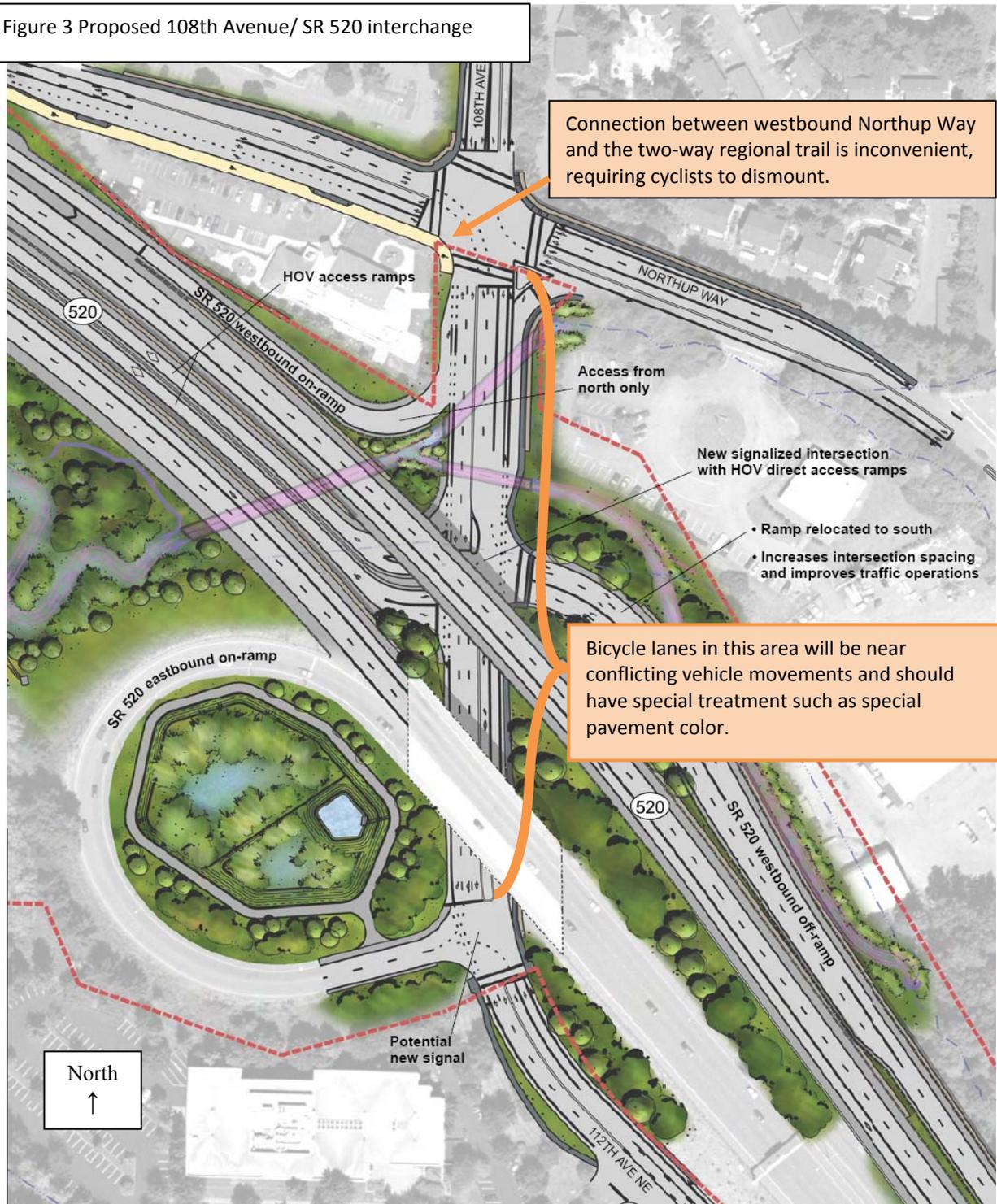


Figure 3 Proposed 108th Avenue/ SR 520 interchange



The proposed regional bicycle/pedestrian path alignment will pass under the Bellevue Way interchange and the lid at 92nd Avenue NE. The bike path would cross the lids at 84th Avenue NE and Evergreen Point Road at surface street grade. The path is designed with gentle inclines in compliance with ADA slope standards.

Detailed traffic analysis was done under the assumption that tolling would not be in place on SR 520 or I-405 and that the floating bridge would be in its current lane configuration. While this helps to isolate the impacts of the project, it is not necessarily realistic. Tolls are scheduled to be put in place on SR 520 beginning in late 2020/early 2011. Replacement of the bridge is also likely to be completed, at latest, soon after the eastside project is complete. This leaves a somewhat muddled picture of the project's exact impacts. On the other hand, it's likely that the project will provide benefits to all users, especially HOV and Transit users.

The existing interchange at Bellevue Way will be replaced with a "half-diamond" (so called because of its shape) interchange that includes two new signals. It's important that the new signals have the infrastructure necessary to communicate with the existing signals at Northup Way and NE 38th Street. This will require cooperation between the cities of Kirkland, Bellevue and WSDOT. Staff from all three agencies have had preliminary discussions that indicate a reasonable agreement can be reached.

Impacts to properties that access Points Drive may take place as the road is closed for reconstruction. The City of Kirkland will continue to work with Points communities and WSDOT to minimize these impacts.

January 6, 2010

Mr. Bill Blaylock
SR 520 Eastside Environmental Manager
WSDOT
600 Stewart Street, Suite 520
Seattle, WA 98154-1192

Dear Mr. Blaylock:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the SR 520 Eastside Transit and HOV project Environmental Assessment. The project will bring numerous benefits to the SR 520 corridor and to Eastside cities. Direct access ramps at the South Kirkland park & ride, along with other improvements will increase transit and HOV speed and reliability. Reconstruction of interchanges will provide travel benefits to all users and to the environment. The project also makes important improvements for cyclists and pedestrians. We appreciate the many years of work that have been spent by WSDOT both in developing the project and working with the City of Kirkland and other Eastside cities.

We are disappointed that the project does not include a connection between the proposed regional bicycle and pedestrian trail and the existing SR 520 trail. When the entire 520 project is completed, a connected path would provide a relatively flat route between Overlake on the east and the University of Washington on the west. This trip of about eight miles would be well within the range of many cyclists. Connections to the north and south would lead to Bellevue and Kirkland. We appreciate the fact that the path which was once planned to end at Points Drive has been continued to the 108th NE vicinity. During the 2007 eastside design process, WSDOT offered several alternatives for connecting the two trail segments but none of those ideas has been advanced further. Funding should not be a barrier because of the small cost of the trail connection relative to the entire project coupled with the fact that project funding has not been secured. Cities in the northwest, throughout the US and around the world have documented significant increases in bicycle use when facilities, particularly key regional facilities, are constructed. We cannot let this opportunity to connect the regional trail be lost. To that end, we remain available and willing to discuss how we can help WSDOT complete the trail connection.

Three other connections for bicyclists and pedestrians need further examination.

- The proposed separated path on the eastside of Bellevue Way ends at the intersection of Northrup Way and Lake Washington Boulevard. There are good connections for those seeking to use the regional trail to the west, but no facilities for those wishing to head north to Kirkland. At a minimum, a crosswalk with a pedestrian activated warning device must be constructed on the eastside of the intersection.
- Similarly, where the regional path ends at the Northrup Way/108th NE intersection, there is no convenient way for cyclists to move from westbound Northrup Way to the regional path or from the path to northbound 108th NE. Expecting cyclists to dismount to make these connections is unrealistic and not in keeping with good design practices.

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- Finally, we appreciate the provision of bicycle facilities on 108th Avenue NE north and south of Northup Way as it provides an important connection between Bellevue and Kirkland. However, the proximity of vehicle lanes and turning movements makes the cycling environment difficult and high visibility treatments such as colored pavement should be used to mark the bike lanes in this area.

The transportation analysis performed for the environmental assessment does not assume tolling on the SR 520 corridor or on I-405. It also assumes that the bridge is in its existing lane configuration rather than the planned expansion to 6 lanes. Increases in bus service that may come to the corridor through the Urban Partnership Grant are also not analyzed. A cumulative analysis section in Appendix Q briefly looks at some of the impacts of these assumptions but the detailed traffic analysis does not. Therefore, the conclusions of the EA are imprecise. The general findings of the EA are probably correct, but it is somewhat troubling to think that these important factors have not been included in the main analysis.

We support replacement of the loop ramps at the Lake Washington Boulevard interchange with two signals in a "half-diamond" configuration. The simulations you have shown the Council in the past indicate that queuing will decrease from today's conditions and overall traffic flow will improve. The two new interchange signals plus the existing signals at Lake Washington Boulevard/Northup Way and Lake Washington Boulevard/NE 38th Street will be closely spaced and must be operated as a system by the Cities of Kirkland and Bellevue. The SR 520 project should provide the infrastructure to interconnect the signals and make this possible.

NE Points Drive has no outlet to the west and the project's proposed culvert replacement work at Yarrow Creek may require closing the road. This closure could impact parking at the Plaza at Yarrow Bay office complex and access for residents west of the culvert crossing. It is possible to temporarily open Points Drive to the west, but this will require cooperation with the communities of Kirkland, Clyde Hill and Yarrow Point. The EA should address how planned work on NE Points Drive will impact and be coordinated with businesses, residents and emergency services.

Again, we thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Environmental Assessment and for the efforts of the WSDOT to move the Eastside projects forward independently of other portions of the broader SR 520 project.

Sincerely,
Kirkland City Council

Mayor