

September 15, 2006

Paul Krueger
WSDOT Environmental Manager
SR 520 Project Office
414 Olive Way, Suite 400
Seattle, WA 98101

Re: SR 520 Replacement Project Options
Position statement from Arboretum and Botanical Garden Committee

Dear Mr. Krueger:

New SR 520 bridge alternatives that slice into wildlife-rich and wetlands-sensitive areas of the Washington Park Arboretum or that have the potential to overwhelm the Arboretum with what some estimate to be 49 percent more traffic at 520 ramps are of deep concern to the Arboretum and Botanical Garden Committee.

We, the members of the committee, are appointed by Seattle Mayor Greg Nichols, University of Washington President Mark Emmert, Gov. Christine Gregoire and the Arboretum Foundation Board of Directors, with the task of acting as stewards of the Arboretum, the keystone facility of the University of Washington Botanic Gardens.

All proposals thus far would take Arboretum land and destroy valuable plantings – one alternative even uses three times the space already taken up by 520 in the Arboretum and eliminates long-lived specimens planted during the fledgling years of the Arboretum in the '30s.

We are concerned first and foremost about diminishing the Arboretum's plant collections, which include one of the most important tree collections in North America. Which plantings might have to be sacrificed depends both on which alternative is selected as well as where a temporary bridge, construction yards and assembly areas might be located.

We're also concerned about the loss of habitat. Native plants, wetlands and wildlife on Foster and Marsh islands, for example, would be affected not only by the taking of land but by the looming shadows created by roadways in various proposals.

Research shows that green spaces and trees are not only the lungs of a city, able to scrub away air pollution, but also places that improve our quality of life in ways that are often underestimated. Simply being able to look out over natural scenes has been proven to increase one's sense of well being and neighborhood satisfaction and even helps hospital patients heal more quickly.

Because we believe Seattle's green space contributes to everyone's well being, we are concerned about the potential loss of restorative, recreational and educational opportunities around Foster and Marsh islands, areas favored by kayakers, canoeists, nature walkers and birders.

We think proposals that take Arboretum land for freeways will dismay thousands of citizens and gutting parts of the Arboretum's master plan will trouble all the community members who worked so hard on its development in recent years.

Part of that plan includes an agreement to move office and facilities workers into part of the building now occupied by the Museum of History and Industry, which is going to move. Any 520 alternative where the museum building is eliminated means less space in buildings at the heart of the Arboretum for displays, educational opportunities and public meeting facilities.

We believe Lake Washington Boulevard East already has all the traffic the road and the Arboretum, through which it passes, can handle. Designed to handle 4,000 cars daily, it now carries 20,000. Students, faculty and Arboretum visitors have described crossing the street as "running for their lives."

The Washington Department of Transportation expects the connection from Lake Washington Boulevard East to 520 to be closed for four and a half years during construction, no matter which alternative is selected. If a suitable route has been in service for all that time, we would like the city to permanently abandon that connection to 520, thus protecting the Arboretum from ever-increasing amounts of traffic in the future.

The Arboretum is a much-needed place of beauty and peace for the 250,000 people who visit annually, so we are concerned about proposals that increase noise and air pollution or that compromise the views.

The Arboretum is an important part of our heritage and, because it holds collections of international significance, the world will be watching how this region protects this asset. Its degradation should not be taken lightly.

Approved by all of the Members of the Arboretum and Botanical Garden Committee -
Washington Park Arboretum

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