

COMMUNITY MEETING SUMMARY

Montlake Project Signage

Queen City Yacht Club, 2608 Boyer Ave. E

Thursday, Oct. 26, 2023 – 5:30 to 7 p.m.

Hybrid meeting format

- Facilitator:** Angie Thomson, Thomson Strategic
- Speakers:** Dave Becher, Director of SR 520 Construction
Todd Harrison, Director of SR 520 Project Development
David Goldberg, SR 520 Community Liaison and Ombudsman
- Participant attendance:** Approximately 50 attendees online; 50 attendees in person

Meeting materials:

- Link to meeting presentation: https://wsdot.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2023-11/SR%20520-Presentation-MontlakeSignBridge_0.pdf
- Link to meeting recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOTN5YYY87I>
- Link to community survey results: [Montlake Project Sign Survey - Public-view \(alchemer.com\)](https://www.alchemer.com/surveys/1234567890)

Meeting goals

The goal of the meeting was to provide signage context and history, review survey results, provide the opportunity for community members to ask questions and share their thoughts, and discuss community process and next steps.

Welcome – Group guidelines and community process (Angie Thomson and David Goldberg)

Angie began the meeting at approximately 5:40 p.m. by introducing the purpose of the meeting and her role as facilitator. She introduced speakers Todd Harrison, Dave Becher, David Goldberg, and Seattle Department of Transportation representative Ganth Lingam.

David thanked everyone for showing up and providing feedback on the signage.

Angie spoke to the Zoom participants and in-person attendees on how to participate in the discussion and established group guidelines.

Angie went over the community process regarding the Montlake signage and next steps following the community meeting. She then went over the meeting agenda.

Part 1 – Signage context (Dave Becher and Todd Harrison)

Dave Becher provided context around the sign bridges, including how the Montlake interchange and ramps to SR 520 used to operate and how they will operate when project is done. Dave used photos from 2019 compared to photos taken in September 2023 to walk through the traffic movements and changes. He used animations – one for northbound traffic and one for southbound traffic – to explain the new turning movements on Montlake Boulevard and East Lake Washington Boulevard. He then turned it over to Todd Harrison to talk about design parameters.

Todd provided broad context about sign design, including location, sign size and studies on how users take in sign information and make decisions. Todd applied this context to the Montlake signage plan, focusing on Sign Bridge #1. He discussed how the size and location of signage is affected by the “decision zone” for drivers. The goal is for motorists to see the sign and read it in advance of the decision

zone so they have adequate time to make a lane change by the time they reach the upcoming intersection. In summary, the size of the signs on Montlake corresponds to the visibility distance WSDOT is trying to achieve.

Todd provided context on previous community engagement and coordination with the Section 106 consulting parties, starting from 2011 and ending in December 2019. Todd acknowledged that prior to today's meeting, nearly four years had passed since the SR 520 Program shared further information with the public about the sign bridges. Todd noted that WSDOT could have done a better job following up with the community so people didn't feel surprised.

Angie opened the room up to comments and questions. These are reflected in the *Comments* and *Question & Answer* sections below.

Part 2 – Signage survey results and feedback (Angie Thomson)

Angie discussed the [survey results and comments received](#). She discussed the top-ranked results and concerns for sign bridges 1, 2 and 3.

Angie opened the room to comments and questions about the data and results. These are reflected in the *Comments* and *Question & Answer* sections below.

Part 3 – Community input and discussion (Angie Thomson)

Angie summarized alternative signage recommendations and decorative ideas from the survey results. She asked attendees if anything was missing from the list.

Next steps

Angie again reviewed the community engagement process and timeline, outlining next steps for the next several months. She noted that WSDOT will host a second community meeting in January. Following tonight's meeting, she said, WSDOT will send out the meeting materials, including the PowerPoint presentation and a link to the video recording.

Conclusion

David closed out the meeting at approximately 7:10 p.m., thanking those in attendance for their engagement and reminding them how to contact him or the Program.

Comment summaries

- Suggestion to confirm that all agencies and organizations in the area with an interest in signage (Seattle Parks, UW, Seattle Design Commission, etc.) are involved in this community process. Re-engage with city of Seattle to comply with all users of this area.
 - Todd recapped the coordination throughout 2016 that occurred with different agency partners. Confirmed he'll take suggestions for future.
- It's 40 minutes into the meeting and we are just getting to questions; very disappointed in the pace of the meeting.
- The signs are out of scale with the character of the neighborhood.
- Representative from Olmsted Parks suggested use of a signal mast arm instead of a sign bridge. Concerned that signage is not decreasing people's confusion and will have a negative impact on the historic boulevard.
- WSDOT did not have a sufficient public process in 2016/2017.
- Concerns about blockage of Montlake Boulevard, especially northbound at Lake Washington Boulevard. Directional signage will not address this problem; consider installing enforcement cameras.
 - Todd said this is a city of Seattle issue.

- New signage speaks to the general prioritization of vehicles through this area. It does not feel like there is less traffic than pre-pandemic times.
- I've gone to a lot of public meetings and there is never enough time provided.
- WSDOT should start with a blank slate and make sure the signage and lighting plans are clear so no other meetings like this need to happen.
- Safety is compromised by sign bridges because drivers feel like they're on the freeway and going to speed up and not pay attention to pedestrians. Priority should be pedestrians/bicyclists/transit rider safety.
- Pedestrian safety has been extremely impacted during construction at the Roanoke intersection.
- Sen. Pedersen on behalf of himself and Reps. Frank Chopp and Nicole Macri shared gratitude for engagement and plans to collaborate through legislative budget process for adjustments.
- Cut-through traffic is a main concern of the neighborhood.
- The survey results are only as good as the questions asked.
- The first 40 minutes of the meeting was about the response email. You don't need to give context.
- Cut-through traffic is an issue due to traffic not flowing on main streets. We need a stop sign right after the freeway.
- Paint signage further up for guidance.
- The meeting is not necessary due previous engagement with neighbors. Signage is improper given previous engagements and does not fit with historic neighborhood character.
- There is surprise over signage and lighting features.
- There is no signage at the eastbound entrance to SR 520; have dodged cars driving into the exit.
- WSDOT has a commitment to make visual buffers. If you can't move the signs, then you need to create a visual buffer for neighbors.
- Shocked at the size of the signage and incompatibility with historic neighborhood. Consider Section 106 requirements. Signage does not fit with this residential street.
 - Cassie Manetas (SR 520 Cultural Resources Lead) – Some of this information was shared in our Section 106 meetings, though there was an issue with low attendance. Emails were sent out with graphics. Section 106 requires minimization and mitigation. There is ongoing conversation about impacts. We also can't create something that gives a false sense of history.
- Someone with expertise in multimodal transportation should be involved in planning efforts.
- We should copy signage from Medina and Hunts Point.
- Lengthen the decision zone with smaller incremental signs north and south of Montlake.
- None of the signage examples you showed in the presentation were in front of a house.
- I don't have a problem with the signs. The University of Washington is a big destination (42,000 students plus 20,000 faculty) and there is always a lot of traffic. It's a natural transit hub.
- 60,000 people are not all driving, and those who are driving are familiar with traffic. Visitors to the hospital and U Village might need assistance with signs.
- Decision zone happens way before you get to Montlake; it happens when you first get in the car and when you're mapping out your route to the area.
- WSDOT makes plans in a vacuum; there is no authority looking at whole problem. Signs are one part of the problem.
- Being transparent and open about the process moving forward would be helpful.
- I want to see real results and next steps. Take down the sign bridges and reduce the scale. Drivers are familiar with traffic movements through this area.
- I would like to see more working group meetings, not just a January meeting.
- I am not sure what information was passed along to neighbors about communication in 2019. If it was listed as 'information' or 'update.' I would not have known my or anyone's opinion was looked for.
- Painting signs on the pavement is not a feasible solution because drivers stop directly over what they need to see.

Question and Answer

Question 1: Seems like using paint on the road up from the signs would help. Was that considered?

Answer: Yes, we considered using paint on the road as highway and directional markers. Though we didn't move forward with this option, many respondents suggested it [in the community signage survey](#). We will reconsider this option during our workgroup sessions.

Question 2: Can you provide the dimensions of the actual signs?

Answer: Please see the current sign dimensions listed below.

Sign Bridge #1 (located near E Roanoke Street):

- Sign 1 (520 EAST/TOLL BRIDGE): 17' x 9'
- Sign 2 (520 WEST/I-5): 5' x 10.5'
- Sign 3 (TOLL BRIDGE/HOV): 13.5' x 11.5'

Sign Bridge #2 (located on the Montlake lid):

- Sign 1 (520 EAST/TOLL BRIDGE): 12' x 14.5'
- Sign 2 (520 WEST/I-5): 13.5' x 6'
- Sign 3 (TRANSIT ONLY): 8' x 8'

Sign Bridge #3 (located near E Hamlin Street):

- Sign 1 (TOLL BRIDGE/HOV): 13.5' x 11.5'
- Sign 2 (EAST 520/WEST 520): 19' x 8'

Question 3: Have you looked at moving signs and adding smaller signs for advanced signing? Is there data or studies to address that? Have you looked at Rainer Avenue by Goodwill?

Answer: [Many survey respondents](#) suggested moving the signs, using smaller signs, and/or installing advance signing. The signage workgroup will consider all three of these options. We will also consider other signage examples provided by the community as part of this signage design process.

Traffic data and studies inform the Federal Highway Administration's [Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices](#) (MUTCD). The MUTCD defines the standards used by road managers nationwide to install and maintain traffic control devices on all public streets, highways, bikeways, and private roads open to public travel. The state of Washington adopted MUTCD standards into state law – the [Revised Code of Washington](#) (RCW). WSDOT aims to meet or exceed the MUTCD standards when designing signage within state right of way.

Question 4: Is there data about the number of buses that use the signs and whether there are workarounds?

Answer: There are currently eight transit routes that use Montlake Boulevard, including:

- King County Metro routes 43, 48, 255, 271, 986 and 988.
- Sound Transit routes 542 and 556.

Approximately 568 buses pass through this area every weekday (Monday – Friday).

We have temporarily removed King County Metro's overhead trolley wires to accommodate construction along Montlake Boulevard. Metro will reinstall the trolley wires once the project is complete. One of the challenges to changing the current signage design is that the sign bridge structures are integrated with

Metro's trolley wire support system. Removing any of the sign bridges may require installing additional poles to support the trolley wires. This would be a tradeoff to consider.

WSDOT has worked closely with Metro throughout the Montlake Project's design and construction to ensure the final product meets Metro's needs. This includes adequate wayfinding signs on Montlake Boulevard for bus drivers. We will continue to coordinate with Metro throughout this signage design process to ensure Metro supports any signage modifications.

Question 5: Are you going to retroactively apply national design standards to the signs on the Eastside? Can't we just do what they did?

Answer: Cities on the east side of Lake Washington follow the same national design standards used by WSDOT and the city of Seattle. There are key differences between the Montlake interchange and some of the Eastside examples we received. In particular, the SR 520/Montlake Boulevard interchange is one of the most complex interchanges in the state, with nine travel lanes across the Montlake lid and multiple turning movements to communicate to drivers in a relatively short distance. Montlake Boulevard also carries significantly more vehicles per day – approximately 41,000 (60,000 pre-pandemic) – than some of the roads in Bellevue, Medina and Hunts Point, which carry only a couple thousand vehicles per day.

Some locations on the Eastside, such as the 131st Avenue Northeast/SR 522 interchange in Woodinville and the Lake Washington Boulevard/SR 520 interchange in Bellevue, use sign bridges. These interchanges share similarities with the Montlake Boulevard interchange in the number of travel lanes and volume of daily vehicles.

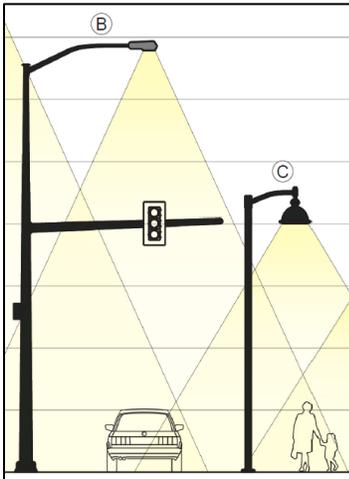
Montlake Boulevard's heavy traffic volumes and numerous lanes led WSDOT to design multiple larger signs as well as larger supports to carry the weight of the signs. The larger sign sizes help to provide drivers with enough sight distance and time to make decisions before approaching the intersection. If drivers are not in the correct lanes before reaching an intersection, they could affect the safety, efficiency and operations of all users in this major north-south corridor.

Question 6: What is the design standard of the structures for poles (and lighting)? How does it compare to the arboretum with their new lighting a few years back?

Answer: When the Montlake Project is finished, lighting along Montlake Boulevard will have SDOT's standard Cobra head fixtures, which are consistent with the rest of the fixtures along this corridor. Because Lake Washington Boulevard is a historic Olmsted Boulevard, we will use a more decorative Domus 50 fixture (see image below). The Domus 50 fixture is consistent with what Seattle Parks and Recreation uses along the rest of Lake Washington Boulevard as a nod to the roadway being a gateway to the Arboretum.

In 2014, the city upgraded lighting throughout the Arboretum along Lake Washington Boulevard with more decorative, black-painted light fixtures. These black fixtures helped inform the color selection for the light poles and pole-mounted fixtures that WSDOT will install on city streets throughout the project area. The Section 106 consulting parties and Seattle Design Commission generally favored how the black-painted fixtures fit into the Montlake historic district.

The final lighting plan for the Montlake Project was coordinated with, and reviewed by, Section 106 Consulting Parties and other stakeholders including SDOT and Seattle Parks and Recreation.



- (B) Cobra head fixture on “Montlake Black” steel pole per Seattle City Light standard
- (C) Domus 50 fixture on 21.5’ “Montlake Black” steel pole per Seattle City Light standard

Question 7: How are you going to mitigate surprise about other features (lighting, signage, etc.) to be installed as project completes?

Answer: Graham Construction and Engineering, the Montlake Project contractor, shares ongoing project updates, including visuals, during the Montlake Project monthly construction meetings. You can find the latest registration links and meeting materials on [our website](#) under the *Community Engagement* tab. We also share updates via our weekly email newsletter; sign up [here](#).

Question 8: Will there be an eastbound exit and entrance sign?

Answer: Yes, there are existing signs for eastbound SR 520 drivers to exit at Montlake Boulevard, and there will be signs directing northbound and southbound Montlake Boulevard and Lake Washington Boulevard drivers to take the on-ramp to eastbound SR 520. The signs have reflective materials for drivers but are not lit directly.

Question 9: What information was passed along to neighbors about this communication in 2019. In what ways were we able to provide comment in 2016 or 2017?

Answer: Conversations about larger scale signage on Montlake Boulevard began in 2016 with our Section 106 concurring parties. In 2017, we provided updates through our Section 106 quarterly meetings related to how we were addressing neighbor concerns about construction effects and how we were seeking to address the aesthetics of adjacent installations, such as these sign bridges. We made the following changes to the Montlake sign bridges to minimize the visual effects:

- Use smaller sign size (and font size) while still meeting WSDOT modern traffic and safety standards.
- Use black coatings on sign-bridge poles rather than gray to better suit the historic setting.
- Eliminate one of four traffic sign bridges planned for the interchange (when complete, there will be three sign bridges).
- Install adjacent landscaping to help blend structural elements into their surroundings (landscaping, trees, and planters will be installed by the end of 2023/early 2024).

At the beginning of 2017, we also began frontline neighbor meetings with Montlake neighbors. During a March 2017 meeting with neighbors in the southwest corner (by East Montlake Place East and East

Roanoke area), we talked about conceptual design specifics, including street trees, light and signal poles, and the sign bridges. The neighbors shared concerns about the visual effects of the sign bridges and encouraged us to consider alternatives that would be less visually conspicuous. We then worked with the city of Seattle over the next six months to explore alternatives that could meet the operational needs of the interchange and the safety requirements for signs.

In November 2017, we agreed with the city to include an option for the Montlake design-builder to use a span wire for the signs but left the final design and decision up to the contractor. Graham ultimately decided to install sign bridges due to design constraints and high wind risks. In May 2019, Graham held an open house with the public where Graham showed design visualizations with the sign bridges. In December 2019, Graham had another open house and included a visualization showing a sign bridge on Montlake Boulevard north of East Roanoke Street and a sign bridge located on the Montlake lid. A visualization of the sign bridge on Montlake Boulevard by East Hamlin was obscured by a label for the bike and pedestrian tunnel under Montlake Boulevard. We have continued to use this same visualization since 2019.

Question 10: Is there someone on the project whose interest is to ensure a safe design for pedestrians and bicyclists?

Answer: Yes. During construction, Graham Construction has a safety officer who oversees the safety of construction workers and the community during construction. Traffic control plans for closures and/or temporary travel configurations are reviewed and commented on by WSDOT. The Seattle Department of Transportation approves the plans for city streets.

In addition, as part of the Montlake Project Neighborhood Traffic Management Plan (NTMP) process, the community stated the following as one of its primary objectives for the project:

- *Efficient connections for bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit riders and improving accessibility in and around the Montlake neighborhood.*

To accomplish this objective, Graham designed the following permanent project elements to improve bicycle and pedestrian safety long-term. These final design enhancements were reviewed and approved by both WSDOT and SDOT:

- Reducing sidewalk crossing distances where possible throughout the Montlake interchange.
- Completing the SR 520 Trail connection to Montlake Boulevard.
- Building a separated bicycle and pedestrian bridge over SR 520.
- Enhancing the pedestrian crossing at Lake Washington Boulevard and East Roanoke Street.
- Adding pedestrian improvements at the Roanoke Plaza transit area and the intersection of East Roanoke Street and East Montlake Place East.

Question 11: Is there further adjustment to where East Roanoke Street and Montlake Boulevard meet?

Answer: Yes. When this project is complete, East Roanoke Street will be realigned into its new configuration. See below for a close-up view of the intersection, taken from the project visualization.



Question 12: It would be interesting to see [survey] responses for just people in the neighborhood.

Answer: Please see [this link](#) for a filtered report generated via the Alchemer platform. Filtering for the above report is set to only show the question “How would you describe yourself” with selected answers as one of the following: “Montlake Boulevard neighbor (you live along Montlake Blvd between E Louisa Street and E Shelby Street)” and “Montlake resident (you live elsewhere in the Montlake neighborhood).”

Answers provided by SDOT

Question 13: There is constant blockage of Montlake Boulevard northbound at Lake Washington Boulevard. Directional signage will not help; need signal timing help. Can you put enforcement cameras to ticket people blocking intersection?

Answer: The signals are currently in a temporary configuration. The signals along Montlake Boulevard between Lake Washington Boulevard and Hamlin Street will remain inefficient until we complete the final signal configurations between Lake Washington Boulevard and Hamlin Street. However, we have been monitoring and adjusting signal timing and doing our best to balance all movements through this congested area. Once the signal configurations are fully constructed, we will assess whether the permanent signal condition requires any traffic mitigation measures; SDOT manages the signals on Montlake Boulevard and will evaluate and implement the necessary measures.

Question 14: What is being done about cut-through traffic in the neighborhood?

Answer: WSDOT and the city of Seattle collaborated with the community in 2017 to develop a [Neighborhood Traffic Management Plan](#) (NTMP) for the Montlake Project. The Montlake Neighborhood Traffic Management Plan identifies a list of scheduled and proposed traffic-calming measures on local streets and future city of Seattle projects in the Montlake area.

During the design phase, WSDOT and the city worked closely to integrate permanent traffic management measures into the Montlake Project improvements. These design elements are intended to improve traffic flow around Montlake Boulevard and the new Montlake lid, resulting in reduced cut-through traffic in the adjacent neighborhoods. See the full list of design-related improvements on page 25 and 26 of the report.

In addition, as part of the previous SR 520 West Approach Bridge North Phase in 2017, WSDOT funded several traffic calming measures in the Arboretum. These measures, listed on page 22 of the NTMP report, were designed to improve safety and mobility for pedestrians and motorists through the Arboretum.

Lastly, the following permanent improvements (listed on page 30 of the final report) were implemented in the Montlake neighborhood prior to the start of Montlake construction. These preconstruction measures were intended to address cut-through traffic or improve access and mobility for people walking and riding bikes along the east side of Montlake Boulevard East; both were top concerns shared by the community during the public engagement process.

Projects planned for implementation			
Location	Concern	Treatment	Timeline
1 Lake Washington Blvd E at E Miller St	Illegal turns, wrong-way traffic and cut-through traffic	Install curb extension to discourage illegal movements	Construction planned for 2018
2 25th Ave E and 26th Ave E between Boyer Ave E and E Lynn St	Speeding, cut-through traffic	Install speed humps	Construction planned for 2018
3 Montlake Blvd E at E Shelby St	Curb ramps do not align, reducing pedestrian access	Widen and move curb ramps on east side closer to Montlake to align with E Shelby St sidewalk	Implementation during early construction of Montlake Phase improvements

At the conclusion of the NTMP process, we published a list of “Projects planned for implementation pending public petitions” (page 31). These were traffic management measures the technical team determined to be effective treatments but required a petition of support from the residents on the affected block. As of November 2023, six measures have been petitioned and implemented. For a map of all traffic-calming measures that were considered, please see page 35 of the final report.

During construction, SDOT and WSDOT continuously monitor traffic in the area and implement additional mitigation measures as necessary. Following completion of Montlake Project construction, residents may contact SDOT Neighborhood Traffic Operations (Neighborhood.Traffic@seattle.gov) for traffic-calming inquiries and recommendations.

Question 15: There’s lack of clarity around plans for SDOT/UW/WSDOT coordination around redesign of 24th Ave E.

Answer: The 23rd Avenue/24th Avenue corridor falls under SDOT’s authority. It is one of the main north-south transit routes (King County Metro Route 48) in the heart of Seattle, serving and connecting the Mount Baker, Beacon Hill, Judkins, Central District, Montlake and University District neighborhoods. Route 48 also connects Mount Baker, Husky Stadium, and University District Link light rail stations. Consistent with the goals of SDOT’s Transit-Plus Multimodal Corridor (TPMC) program, the objectives of the Route 48 TPMC project are to reduce transit travel times and improve service reliability. To enhance this busy corridor, SDOT plans to make multimodal improvements consistent with the voter-approved Move Seattle levy. The improvements may include:

- Transit travel time and reliability improvements: Bus-only lanes on 23rd Avenue South approaching Rainier Avenue South to separate buses from traffic.
- Safety and accessibility improvements: Targeted crossing enhancements at 24th Avenue East and Boyer Avenue East to help people access transit stops.
- Signal upgrades: Support transit signal priority on the corridor to keep buses moving by activating or extending green lights for buses.

The Route 48 TPMC project area includes 23rd Avenue/24th Avenue from Rainier Avenue South to just south of the Montlake Cut. SDOT completed a conceptual design study of this corridor in 2022 and SDOT completed the design based on the recommendations provided in this study and through continuous public outreach. The project is currently in the pre-construction stages, and the construction is anticipated to start in the spring of 2024. Visit the [project webpage](#) for more information.

Further, SDOT's 23rd Ave Vision Zero project (which was completed in July 2023) has enhanced safety and mobility on 23rd Ave E/24th Ave E between E Madison St and E Roanoke St as part of SDOT's Vision Zero efforts to reach zero traffic deaths and serious injuries by 2030. Visit the [project webpage](#) for more information.