City of Bellevue

10/22/2024

CITY COUNCIL AGENDA TOPIC

Update on the Grand Connection Crossing over I-405 and associated projects

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INFORMATION ONLY

City and consultant design teams have advanced design of the Grand Connection Crossing project, completing a Type, Size, and Location (TS&L) report reflecting feedback from community stakeholders. This marks a significant milestone for the project and sets the stage for engineering documentation and environmental review. Work is also underway analyzing potential uses for the City-owned properties along the crossing route.

Staff is seeking Council affirmation as staff finalize the 30% design in line with the completed Type, Size, and Location report and begin planning for further design and engineering of the Grand Connection Crossing.

RECOMMENDATION

N/A

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS

Introduction

In 2022, the City relaunched the Grand Connection Program as a multi-department effort to create 1.5 miles of interconnected, people-focused spaces stretching across Bellevue's Downtown and Wilburton neighborhoods. It will connect community-oriented places and spaces, including Meydenbauer Bay, Old Bellevue, Downtown Park, Bellevue Square, City Hall, and the Meydenbauer Center, and Eastrail.

One signature element is a landmark pedestrian- and bicyclist-oriented crossing of I-405. Currently, staff and a broad consultant team, including WSP, LMN Architects, Cooper Robertson, PRR, and others are completing the 30% design phase, including environmental documentation, site studies, and geotechnical and other technical analyses.

When complete, the crossing will be a series of spans connecting key properties and buildings along the route, creating a cohesive district filled with restaurants, retail, plazas, and other amenities. This memo provides an update on the 30% design work and associated projects on nearby properties.

Grand Connection Crossing

In August, the project team finalized the TS&L report for the Grand Connection Crossing structure. This summary document is a typical report completed at the early stage of a bridge design project, and it answers many of the key questions regarding the ultimate structure's design. It is used to inform later stages of design and engineering work, environmental analysis and documentation, and discussions with community stakeholders and members of the public.

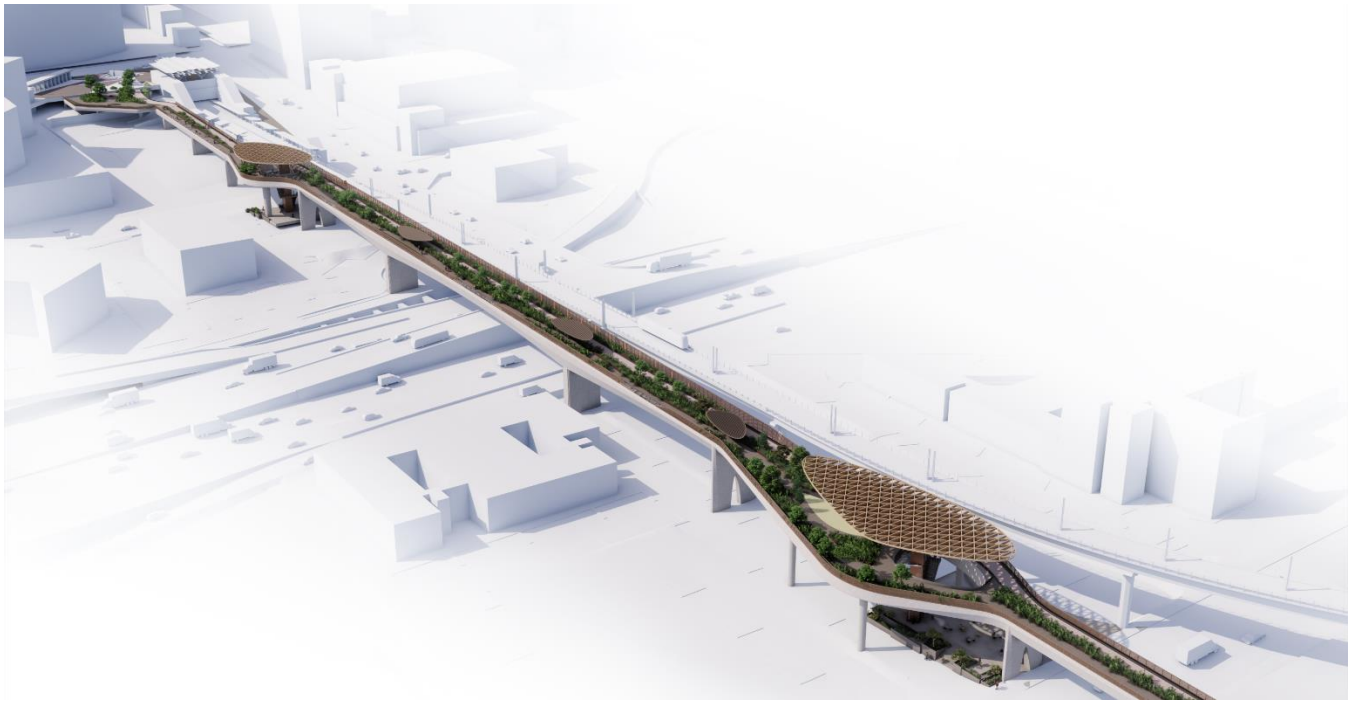
Alignment

As discussed in June, the recommended alignment of the bridge across I-405 takes a path **south of the Sound Transit light rail guideway**. From a constructability and usability perspective, this provides the most direct route for users, minimizes conflicts with the I-405 Master Plan, and readily integrates with adjacent redevelopment, delivering on a key objective to catalyze redevelopment of the Wilburton area. Friends of the Grand Connection and adjacent property owners also support this alignment.

The rendering in **Figure 1** provides an overhead view of the crossing as currently designed. Note that this rendering is conceptual, does not yet reflect adjacent redevelopment of City-owned properties, and will continue to evolve as the design is refined in further stages of engineering.

Additional attention will be necessary to inform how the Grand Connection Crossing ties in with existing and future bicyclist and pedestrian infrastructure at either end of the bridge. Elements of this work are already underway in partnership between the City's Transportation Department and King County Metro.

Figure 1. Conceptual rendering of the Grand Connection Crossing without City Sites integration.



Type and Size

The full TS&L report provides an overview of the analysis which informed the recommended bridge alternative. In general, three primary structure types were evaluated based on structural analysis, user experience, aesthetics, maintainability and life-cycle costs, compatibility with a future freeway lid, and the estimated construction costs. Each section of the half-mile crossing featured a different structure type, including cable-stayed concepts, steel truss concepts, and cast-in-place post-tensioned box girder concepts. Though some options, such as **a cable-stayed** or **steel-truss structure**, offer more visually-striking aesthetics, they can be more expensive, and they make close integration with adjacent redevelopment and a potential future freeway lid significantly more challenging. A **cast-in-place concrete** structure, on the other hand, may be more readily constructible and offer increased opportunity for placemaking and experience-building for users of the crossing itself.

Based on this evaluation of constraints and the City's goals for the crossing, the following combination of structure types was advanced for further analysis and engineering:

Location	Purpose	Recommended construction type
West tie-in	Extension of City Hall Plaza for additional gathering space and connectivity between modes (i.e. light rail)	Plaza extension with cast-in-place post-tensioned concrete box girders
West node	Provides public gathering space and access to 112th Avenue NE via stairs and elevators	Cast-in-place post-tensioned concrete box girders
I-405 Crossing	Wide crossing of I-405 with separation between pedestrians and bicyclists	Cast-in-place post-tensioned concrete box girders (one span—no pier in WSDOT right-of-way)
East node	Provides public gathering space and access to 116th Avenue via stairs and elevators	Cast-in-place post-tensioned concrete box girders
Eastrail connection	Connects the crossing into an active redevelopment and 42-mile trail network	Cast-in-place post-tensioned concrete box girders

Due to the uncertainty related to private redevelopment, the City's redevelopment of the Lincoln Center and Metro properties, and other factors, this preferred alternative was selected with the understanding that there are several decisions which could adjust elements of the crossing design in future phases of work. For example, redevelopment on properties adjacent to the crossing could create important and worthwhile opportunities to more closely integrate the structures.

The preferred alternative in this phase of design provides a reasonable approach to what is known today, balancing the needs of the crossing and the goals of a landmark user experience, while respecting stated limitations for the schedule and budget.

Additional details of the design selected for further analysis will be shared during the Council presentation.

Delivery Method

In addition to the TS&L study, WSP has completed a review of possible delivery methods for the crossing, including both a traditional design-bid-build (DBB) approach as well as alternative methods, including progressive design-build (PDB) and general contractor/construction manager (GC/CM).

The analysis found that PDB and GC/CM could be appropriate methods for this project. However, there are some uncertainties which make a PDB or GC/CM approach more complex. Staff will continue to evaluate the preferred delivery approach, considering the following factors:

- Funding availability
- Level of control that the City desires
- Staffing implications
- Timeline to completion

Typically, full funding for the design phase, at minimum, would be required for PDB or GC/CM.

Staff will continue analysis as we work toward the next phase of design and engineering.

Project Timeline

At present, the project is on-track for completion of a 30% design for the crossing by the end of 2024 (see timeline below). Once this phase of design is complete, the City will have reports and other documentation outlining:

- **30% design documentation**, outlining key decisions made about alignment, size, construction typology, and relationships to various properties. This also includes design drawings for the entire crossing alignment from City Hall Plaza to Eastrail.
- **Environmental documentation**, including a SEPA checklist and a planned documented categorical exclusion (DCE) for purposes of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).
- **Cost estimates**, including both a traditional engineer's estimate and a contractor's estimate for construction of the crossing as designed.

This information will help inform the City's next steps, including how to proceed with the next phase of design. Additionally, while it may be advantageous to immediately begin 60% design upon completion of this work, that would preclude future delivery through a design-build/progressive design-build (DB/PDB) or general contractor/construction manager (GC/CM) alternative delivery model, as discussed in a prior section.

Over the coming weeks and months, staff will review consultant work products and develop a recommendation on next steps, including recommended delivery method and how we plan to proceed with design and engineering work. We expect to bring this recommendation to Council in early 2025.

Approximate Date	Milestone
December 2023 **(Complete)**	Design workshop with City staff, major stakeholders, and consultant teams.
February-March 2024 **(Complete)**	Online open house to gather feedback on design principles, ideas, and project purpose and need.
May 2, 2024 **(Complete)**	In-person open house to gather feedback on design alternatives.
Summer 2024 **(Complete)**	Select a preferred design alternative for further design development and refinement.
October 16 through November 6 **(Ongoing)**	Online open house to share status of the project and more information about the structural considerations and options
Summer-Fall 2024 **(Ongoing)**	Refine preferred design alternative and begin 30% design and engineering documentation.
December 2024	Finalize preferred design alternative and complete 30% design and engineering documentation.

Public Engagement

The City and its design team have completed several major public engagement opportunities, including an online open house focused on and design principles and an in-person open house focused on design and alignment alternatives. Attendees have expressed a desire for amenities such as seating and greenery to make the crossing a comfortable place to be, and the primary thrust of given feedback has related to cost concerns and the long project timeline necessitated by the project's complexity.

Throughout 2024, the Grand Connection team also initiated several pilot programs to bring more people onto the corridor and showcase the potential of more active use of the west landing at City Hall Plaza. For example, the City:

- Partnered with Sound Transit and other organizations to host more than 10,000 people for the Grand Opening of the 2 Line in April.
- Partnered with community organizations and the Indian Consulate to host one of the Eastside's largest-ever India Day Celebrations.
- Launched a food truck pilot from June through September, successfully engaging employees at nearby office towers.
- Deployed tables, chairs, lawn games, and selfie stations to encourage people to use the space. Additional exploration next year may include weather protection.
- Supported ongoing activations and programming along the Grand Connection corridor organized by the Bellevue Downtown Association.

From **October 16** through **November 6**, the City is hosting an online open house to share the status of the crossing project and more information about selected alternatives. The City's engagement team will be sharing this opportunity through outlets like *Neighborhood News*, *It's Your City*, project newsletters, social media, and through trusted community partners. Members of the public are invited to participate in the online open house at **bellevuewa.gov/i405-crossing**.

Budget and Funding Development

As described above, cost estimates for the Grand Connection Crossing project will be developed as part of the 30% design work, including both a traditional engineer's estimate and a contractor's estimate for the construction of the crossing as designed. Simultaneously, the City is working with its outside funding development consultant to better understand different scenarios for use of private and philanthropic funds, as well as tools such as value capture, to fund construction. Staff expect to be able to share further information in Q1 2025.

To date, the City has been successful in socializing the project with state and federal legislative bodies, and has conducted tours with legislators and staff for familiarization purposes. Notably, staff have received a strong response from our federal delegation to a $2.5 million earmark request to fund further design and planning, though the City does not expect final confirmation on this request until 2025. Staff are developing additional options to seek federal and/or state funding for portions of the program, including through the state legislative agenda.

Finally, an allocation of $15 million is included in the City Manager's 2025-26 Preliminary Budget's Capital Improvement Plan to fund continued design and engineering work for the project. Additional information about this allocation will be shared through Council's budget study sessions in October. As of today, the City has committed a total of $18.6 million through 2026 to design and engineering. Friends of the Grand Connection and other private partners have committed $2.5 million.

Grand Connection City Sites Analysis

As an integral component of the Grand Connection program, the City is leading a collaborative process to realize transit-oriented development (TOD) at the City-owned Metro and Lincoln Center sites in Downtown and Wilburton, respectively.

- The **Metro Site**, located between City Hall and Link light rail on the north portion of the City Hall block, is adjacent to Meydenbauer Center and opens directly onto City Hall Plaza and Sound Transit's Bellevue Downtown 2 Line light rail station.
- The **Lincoln Center Site**, located within the Wilburton TOD area, is adjacent to I-405 directly east across the highway from City Hall, and one block west of Eastrail.

While the proposed crossing will be one use of these sites, the City intends to integrate the crossing into a wider redevelopment of both sites, including municipal needs, and potentially affordable and/or market-rate housing, higher education space, arts and culture space, and outdoor plaza or gathering space. Ultimately, the City intends for the properties to contribute to the experience of the crossing, support Bellevue's continued economic innovation, and seamlessly integrate Downtown and Wilburton into a connected urban neighborhood.

Project Scope

Currently, staff and a consultant team led by Cooper Robertson are working on a pre-development work plan that includes a site assessment and opportunity/constraints analysis and visioning and planning exercises for the two sites that will include targeted public engagement. The conclusion of the work will include a set of Guiding Principles that will inform decision making moving forward regarding development program and implementation. Other outcomes of this work will include visual and written documentation of the preferred vision and unique characteristics of each site, and evaluation criteria for validating future phases of work. Staff will lead a second phase of work in mid-2025 to determine the potential partnership approach and development program details for implementation and delivery of TOD on the City-owned sites.

LOOKING AHEAD

In the coming months, the City and its consultant teams will continue to advance work on the 30% design and engineering of the Grand Connection Crossing and a formal funding and financing plan.

Staff expect to return to Council in early 2025 for an update on the conclusion of the 30% design contract. At this point, more information on the refined design and anticipated cost will be shared, along with an update on the conceptual funding plan informed by stakeholders and partner organizations. Staff will also present the Lincoln Center and Metro sites Guiding Principles to the Council in 2025.

POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS

Policy Impact

This work continues implementation of the Grand Connection, which was first adopted as a City Council priority in 2012.

Over the years, the City Council has approved several policies and documents relating to the program, including the Grand Connection Framework Plan — Sequence 1 (which includes the section of the corridor between City Hall and Meydenbauer Bay) in 2017 and Sequence 2 (which includes the section between City Hall and Eastrail) in 2018. The first significant Land Use Code updates supporting the vision were adopted in 2021, and further updates in Wilburton and through the Comprehensive Plan will further support the vision.

Fiscal Impact

Work on 30% design for the Grand Connection Crossing project is fully funded by a $2.5 million contribution from Amazon and approximately $3.6 million in City CIP funds, including the design contract and staff time. Further design and construction will require collaboration across federal, state, local, and private individual and corporate philanthropic supporters.

OPTIONS

1. Direct staff to complete the 30% design for the Grand Connection Crossing project in line with the completed Type, Size, and Location report and continue with further design and engineering.
2. Provide alternative direction to staff.

ATTACHMENTS

A. Type, Size, and Location report
B. Delivery method memorandum

AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY

Grand Connection Framework Plan Sequence 1
Grand Connection Framework Plan Sequence 2