

# MEMORANDUM



Bellevue Parks &  
Community Services

**Date:** January 15, 2025

**To:** Parks & Community Services Board

**From:** Jesse Canedo, Chief Economic Development Officer  
Anthony Gill, Grand Connection Manager  
*Community Development*

**Subject:** Grand Connection Program and Crossing – Update  
For information and discussion - no Board action requested

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At this study session, staff will provide an update on the Grand Connection Program, including the 30% design for the Grand Connection Crossing.

This update is for information and discussion only. No action is requested.

## **Background and Context**

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The first plan for what would become the “Grand Connection”—at that stage, a simple “pedestrian corridor” through downtown—was adopted by City Council in 1981. The plan was intended to link Bellevue Square with the burgeoning office district to its east, and was amended many times over the years, including in 1983 and 1998. The most comprehensive plan update was spurred in the early 2010s as the city began to look east toward future redevelopment opportunities in the Wilburton commercial area.

The resulting *Grand Connection Framework Plan*, adopted by City Council in 2018, sets forward a long-term vision for a suite of improvements to existing downtown pedestrian infrastructure and a full freeway lid over I-405. The City has been working since 2019 with Bellevue Downtown Association (BDA) to improve programming and activation of public spaces in alignment with the *Framework Plan* vision, and use code updates were adopted in 2021.

In 2022, with a desire to move from planning to implementation, 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 Park, Old Bellevue, Downtown Park, Bellevue Square, City Hall, Meydenbauer Center, and Eastrail. There are now many Grand Connection-related projects, including:

- Meydenbauer Bay Park, Phase II (**planning**)
- Pedestrian improvements to Main Street in Old Bellevue (**planning and design**)
- Downtown Park NE Corner and *Piloti* (**complete**)
- Private redevelopment along the route (**underway**)
- Pedestrian crossing improvements along NE 6<sup>th</sup> St at 110<sup>th</sup> and 108<sup>th</sup> (**complete**)
- Redevelopment of City-owned sites (**planning**)
- I-405 Crossing (**design**)

- Eastrail (**underway**)
- Public space management and programming along the route (**underway**)

While prior efforts set an overall vision for the corridor, implemented important improvements to the land use code, and spurred private redevelopment projects like Vulcan's 555 Tower, the 2022 relaunch of the Grand Connection program broadened the City's perspective on the different tools available to guide implementation, recognizing that achieving the vision requires many strategies across almost every City department and external partners.

**Figure 1.** Overview of the Grand Connection route.



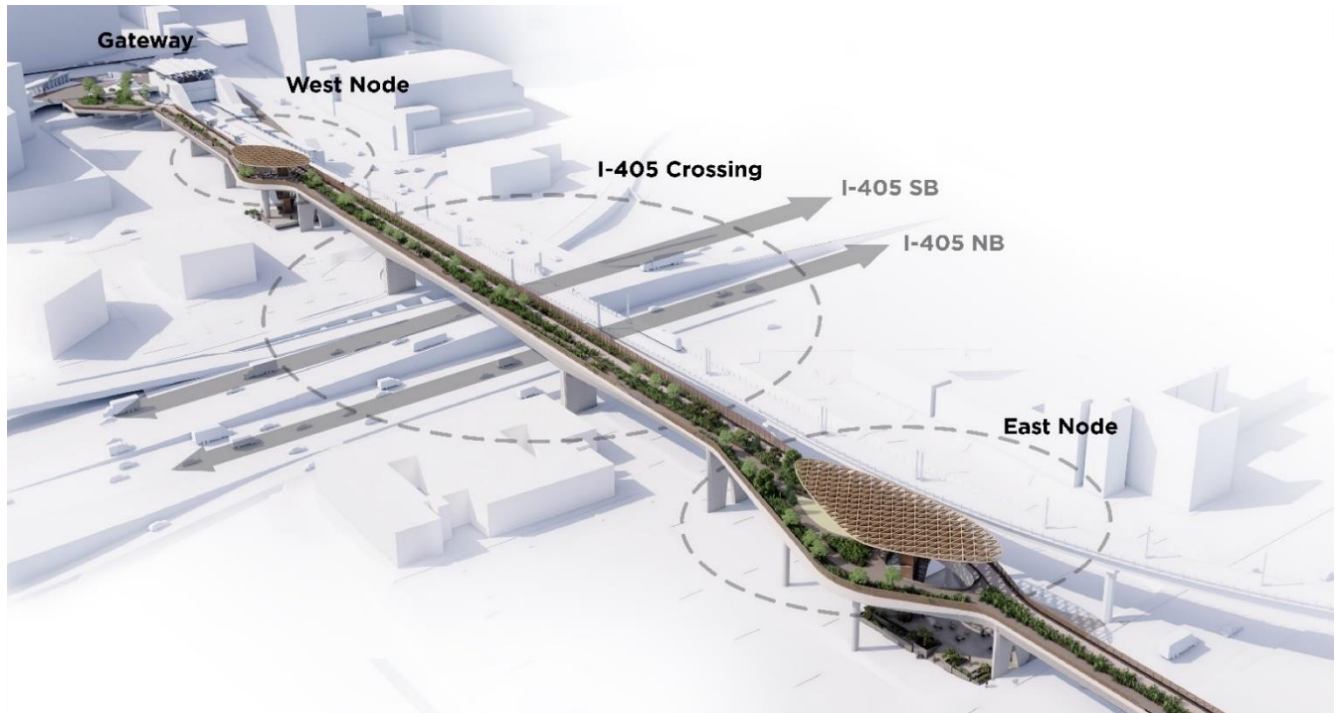
### Grand Connection Crossing

In 2022-23, galvanized by significant private-sector interest, the City began to advance implementation efforts for the I-405 section, envisioned as a signature pedestrian- and bicyclist crossing which would be forward-compatible with a freeway lid. This included contracting with WSP | LMN | OJB to advance a 30% design of the corridor, substantial public outreach and consultation, environmental analysis, and the launch of the nonprofit Friends of the Grand Connection (FOGC). This work was undertaken in 2024.

Late in 2024, the consultant team completed this 30% design, including a formal Type, Size, and Location (TS&L) report, structural and geotechnical analysis, environmental documentation, user modeling, cost estimates, and design renderings. Staff continues to review these documents and analysis with the consultant and expects to have additional information about this milestone soon.

The rendering in **Figure 2** 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. It will continue to evolve as the design is refined in further stages of engineering.

**Figure 2.** Conceptual rendering of the Grand Connection Crossing.



During tonight's presentation, City staff will share additional information about the design process and public outreach. Staff will also share additional renderings and visuals.

### Public Engagement

The City and its design team have completed several major public engagement opportunities, including a design charrette, an online open house focused on design principles and an in-person open house in May 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.

From **October 16** through **November 6**, the City hosted an online open house to share the status of the crossing project and more information about selected alternatives. While survey responses are now closed, Park Board members and interested community members can still review the Engaging Bellevue site at [engagingbellevue.com/i405-crossing-open-house](https://engagingbellevue.com/i405-crossing-open-house).

### Budget and Funding



As described above, cost estimates for the Grand Connection Crossing project were 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 and 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 this spring. Staff are pursuing 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. 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.

### Next Steps

Over the coming months, staff and consultant teams will work with major internal and external stakeholders to determine how to proceed with the next phase of work. We expect to bring this recommendation to City Council early in Q2 of 2025.

### Grand Connection City Sites

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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. It is currently home to a temporary, pop-up dog park.
- 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 Grand Connection Crossing will cross 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.

Currently, staff and a consultant team are analyzing site opportunities and constraints and developing Guiding Principles to inform decision-making. These principles will go before City Council in April. A second phase of work, beginning in mid-2025, will define specific development program objectives and ultimate delivery vehicle.

### **Public Space Management and Programming**

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Throughout 2024, the Grand Connection team initiated several pilot programs to bring more people onto the corridor and showcase the potential for more active use at 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, with more than 3,000 people in attendance
- Launched a food truck program which served more than 3,500 customers over a six-month period, driving \$60,000 in revenue for local small businesses.
- Deployed tables, chairs, lawn games, and selfie stations to encourage people to use the space. In 2025, expect to see new weather protection in the plaza.
- Supported ongoing activations and programming along the Grand Connection corridor organized by the Bellevue Downtown Association.

In 2025, City staff will continue to advance programs to improve use of public plazas and gathering spaces along the Grand Connection corridor and across the city. This includes work to improve the permitting experience for special events and programs, activate City Hall facilities in the evenings and on weekends, amend the city's sign code to better facilitate district development, and support community programs through organizations like the Bellevue Downtown Association and others that bring people together. These efforts and others support the Grand Connection vision of a lively, active corridor which brings people together 18 hours a day and 365 days a year.