

CITY COUNCIL AGENDA TOPIC

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

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**DIRECTION**

City and consultant design teams have completed a conceptual design for the Grand Connection Crossing project which envisions a landmark approach based on feedback from community members and project stakeholders. Based on the city's affirmation of an all-in budget for the project of \$150-200 million, analysis of constructability and cost, and desired Day 1 and long-term features, staff recommend advancing a phased approach to project delivery. Staff plan to seek state approval of a GC/CM contracting approach. Staff are seeking Council direction to move forward with procuring a consultant to assist with the City's application to the State for approval of the GC/CM process.

RECOMMENDATION

Consider directing staff to procure a consultant to assist with the City's application to the State for approval of the GC/CM contracting approach.

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS**Introduction and Background**

In 2023, the City officially launched its first-ever engineering effort for a pedestrian- and bicyclist-oriented crossing of I-405 as part of the Grand Connection Program. Over the past year, a consultant team comprised of WSP, LMN Architects, Cooper Robertson, PRR, and others have been conducting public outreach, completing a full Type, Size, and Location (TS&L) report, developing site studies and geotechnical analyses, and completing environmental documentation. The Grand Connection Crossing (GCX) is a critical element of Bellevue's Comprehensive Plan and development strategy for Downtown and Wilburton. Downtown will continue to add housing and jobs as a regional growth center. In addition, the Wilburton rezone will have capacity for almost 15,000 additional housing units and more than 35,000 jobs. The GCX will provide a high-quality pedestrian and bicyclist experience and important mobility infrastructure to support growth without exacerbating

vehicular traffic. Current modeling estimates that by 2044, more than 10,000 people will be using the Grand Connection Crossing on a typical weekday, with roughly 4.3 million annual users. Additionally, in closing a key gap in Bellevue's pedestrian and bicyclist infrastructure over I-405, the GCX supports the City's Vision Zero objectives. Currently, NE 4th and NE 8th Street are listed on Bellevue's High Injury Network. By providing an alternative safe, connected, and comfortable bridge over I-405, the crossing will remove conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians, particularly around freeway ramps.

Community Engagement and Outreach Themes

From December 2023 through November 2024, the project team surveyed and/or spoke with community members at 24 community engagement events and survey responses from the three open houses. The purpose of this outreach was to inform the community about the project and gather public input from future users of the Grand Connection Crossing. Participants in these community engagement events shared how they would like to use the crossing, and which amenities will make them feel safe and welcome. Where feasible, the design team used this feedback to inform the design concepts.

This year-long community outreach and engagement process revealed the following key themes:

- **Positive sentiments about the project:** There was overwhelming support captured by survey, email, and in-person responses. Most written respondents could envision themselves happily using the crossing in the future. At in-person outreach events, many community members echoed this support for and excitement about using the crossing, expressing appreciation for the connection to Eastrail from downtown Bellevue.
- **Concerns about the project:** Some respondents expressing concerns about the project cited the use of taxpayer dollars for a project they consider a lower priority than other issues facing Bellevue, such as homelessness, and expressed concern about the long construction timeline and lack of certainty about funding availability.
- **Priorities:** The public want the crossing to offer easy access to nearby shopping & dining and space for public art & performances. Across all input, the public emphasized the need for a safe Crossing that is accessible and welcoming to all users, regardless of age, race, ethnicity, language spoken, or ability.

Scope Adjustments for Finalized 30% Design

In December 2024, based on robust community and property owner input, WSP presented the City with a wide range of design options with varying levels of amenities, mobility benefits, and costs. Staff reviewed three options recommended by WSP to explore the level of public benefit and the City's ability to deliver. These included a "visionary crossing" in line with the 30% design renderings (which provided the greatest amount of amenities but was beyond the city's desired budget) and a "baseline bridge" (which would provide the lowest cost but the least comfortable user experience).

Based on the options and analysis received from WSP, staff have been working over the past several months with stakeholders, City staff, property owners, and community members to better understand which project elements are most essential to deliver on Day 1 and which elements could be delivered

several years later through adjacent redevelopment. For example, elevators and staircases serving the Grand Connection Crossing could be integrated into a redevelopment of the Lincoln Center property, as opposed to serving the Crossing exclusively. This may enable a more efficient use of taxpayer funds and reduce the cost of the span from Eastrail to Downtown Bellevue. This review included an analysis of unit and feature-level costs and analysis by WSP’s constructability subconsultant.

Based on conversations with executive leadership and the Friends of the Grand Connection (FOGC), staff recommend an option that maps to the project’s budget, desire to accommodate 10,000 weekday users in 2044, and the community’s most desired amenities. Some amenities and experiences shown in earlier renderings—such as crossing-level gathering space—will be delivered through the redevelopment of the City-owned parcels.

Informed by these conversations, staff are preparing to finalize the 30% design effort with the following feature goals:

Feature	Go-Forward Design
Crossing width	30 feet minimum over entire length, with up to 40 feet over I-405
Landscaping and weather protection	As much as possible, but at least one strip, likely on one side of the bridge. No weather protection, but maintain ability to add in the future. Maintain user type separation through grade separation instead of landscaping.
Gathering space	In the initial phase, focus gathering space on either end of the crossing, instead of on mid-crossing “nodes.” Explore possibility for some space on Lincoln Center property. Plan for private development to deliver additional public space.
Vertical circulation (stairs, elevators, etc.)	Provide at least one mid-crossing public access point with an elevator and staircase. At minimum, provide emergency access near 116 th Ave NE and near 112 th Ave NE.
City Hall Plaza	Extend City Hall Plaza slightly with additional space. Modify the existing plaza to accommodate public gathering and bicyclist/pedestrian access.

Over the coming months, WSP will work with the City to refine the existing design to align with these updated design objectives, which will then be used to inform final engineering and project construction.

Delivery Method

Parallel to completion of the refined 30% design documentation, City staff are developing a go-forward

plan to deliver and open the project. Based on staff analysis and a desire to streamline project decision-making and communications to minimize rework and achieve the desired opening date, staff will pursue a general contractor/construction manager (GC/CM) delivery approach.

This approach has been used by many government agencies in Washington state, but is used less frequently in Bellevue (the remodel of Bellevue City Hall in 2006 utilized GC/CM). The process requires additional up-front steps under Washington state law, including approval by the state Capital Projects Advisory Review Board (CPARB)'s Project Review Committee (PRC). To maximize the benefits of the model, the City will need to bring on additional contractors and finalize funding plans much earlier than in traditional methods. Staff are currently developing a series of Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for the additional external support. If staff are directed to move forward, Council can expect to see various contracts in the coming months on its consent agenda.

Budget and Funding Development

Staff recommend moving forward with an initial project budget of no more than **\$150 – 200 million**. This narrower range reflects opportunities to deliver amenities via redevelopment while still providing a memorable and achievable project.

If the Council concurs with the narrower budget range, staff will advance development of the financial plan for the project. In recent months, staff have reached a number of key funding milestones:

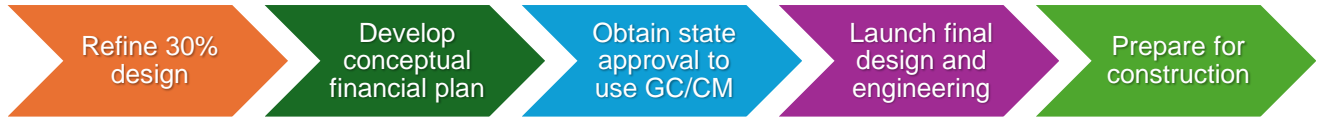
- **Peer project review:** The City's consulting team has conducted a review of peer projects' capital stacks and long-term operations funding, which helps inform leadership about the likely level of government and philanthropic funding necessary to complete projects of similar scale.
- **Philanthropic case development:** Campbell and Company, a local nonprofit and capital campaign advisory firm, is interviewing project stakeholders and supporters to help develop a clear case for philanthropic investment and community benefit. This information will be used in the coming months to gauge support in the philanthropic community and ultimately create a realistic capital campaign goal.
- **Benefits case:** Staff have received a draft benefits case for the project, which tells a compelling story about why the project is important from economic, social, and transportation mobility perspectives. After refinement, this case will be used in discussions with project stakeholders and potential funders and will help build excitement for the project.
- **Municipal tools:** Staff and financial advisors have begun review of various financial tools, including tax increment financing (TIF), local improvement districts (LIDs), and use of the City's general fund capacity. Analysis of possible scenarios will continue through the spring.
- **State legislature:** Intergovernmental Relations staff have been aggressively pursuing the City's legislative priorities, which include two requests for the Grand Connection Crossing. We anticipate having more information closer to the end of the legislative session on April 27.

Project Schedule and Next Steps

Now that the project has an agreed scope and budget, City staff and consulting partners can begin to advance additional work. In the coming months, the project team will refine the existing 30% design to reflect the phased approach outlined above, with an objective to complete this work by this summer. At

the same time, staff will finalize work on a conceptual financial plan for the project and contract with an owner’s advisor to assist with the GC/CM approval process.

This partner will work with City staff to obtain approval from the Washington State Capital Projects Advisory Review Board (CPARB) Project Review Committee and advise on development of the scope of work and RFPs for a general contractor/construction manager.



Based on these steps, we anticipate reaching two key milestones this summer or early fall:

- Approval from CPARB’s PRC to use GC/CM delivery
- Launch final design and engineering

Before launching final design and engineering, staff anticipate returning to City Council with an overview of our conceptual financial plan, which will include a mix of municipal tools, State contributions, and philanthropic dollars.

Following this, if all steps go smoothly and funding is available when required, construction could begin as early as 2027. We anticipate a construction schedule of approximately 30 months, based on the complex site involving an active interstate freeway and light rail line, property owned by multiple jurisdictions and private owners, and the long, half-mile span that the GCX crosses. At the earliest, the crossing could open to the public in late 2029.

Upcoming Council Engagements

Council can expect to review various contracts in the coming months related to the Grand Connection Crossing project, including an extension of our design contract with WSP and procurement of an owner advisor to assist in development of a CPARB PRC application for the project.

The next major engagement will take place in late summer or early fall, when we expect to be able to launch final design and engineering.

Additionally, work is underway to advance adjacent projects which will build into the crossing. In June, staff will return to Council to discuss next steps for the Grand Connection City Sites. This redevelopment project will create new public spaces and amenities on the “Metro” and “Lincoln Center” properties adjacent to the crossing, including possible integration of staircases and elevators for crossing access. Staff have developed draft guiding principles and vision statements for each property and expect to launch additional work later this year.

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

Funding the design and construction of the full vision requires collaboration across federal, state, local, and private individual & corporate philanthropic supporters. Current work on 30% design 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.

The Council appropriated an additional \$15 million in the 2025-26 budget to continue work. Staff aim to finalize a draft 100% funding plan in Q2 and will return to Council with those details, including funds needed in 2026 to complete design & engineering and prepare for construction.

OPTIONS

1. Direct staff to procure a consultant to assist with the City's application to the State for approval of the GC/CM contracting approach.
2. Provide alternative direction to staff.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Type, Size, and Location study
- B. Delivery method memorandum

AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY

Grand Connection Framework Plan — Sequence One
Grand Connection Framework Plan — Sequence Two