

CITY COUNCIL AGENDA TOPIC

Update on the Grand Connection Crossing over I-405

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**INFORMATION
ONLY**

The staff and consultant team completing the Grand Connection Crossing design has completed significant outreach and design work in recent months. The presentation will share information about the recommended alignment for further design and engineering work.

This update is for information only and no action is requested.

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. The program includes a series of projects and initiatives featuring new buildings and public spaces from Eastrail to City Hall Plaza with the most high-profile element being the crossing of I-405. The overall program, along with redevelopment in the Wilburton Transit-Oriented Developed (TOD) area, will solidify central Bellevue as a hub for our diverse, innovative community. Once complete, more than half a million Eastside residents will have easier access to Downtown Bellevue and more opportunities to celebrate and connect once they arrive.

In the near-term, the City's goals are as follows:

- Reach 30% design on the Grand Connection Crossing by the end of 2024.
- Advance contributing projects, such as Eastrail and Meydenbauer Bay Park Phase 2, while ensuring forward compatibility.
- Assist in the creation of an external partner organization to support the Grand Connection program in the long-term.

- Increase programming and amenities in existing public spaces leading to a long-term operations and programming plan for the full route.

Late in 2023, the City launched work on 30% design of the Bellevue Grand Connection: I-405 Crossing – Downtown to Eastrail project, which will construct a landmark pedestrian- and bicycle-oriented crossing of I-405. On September 11, 2023, Council approved a contract with a consultant team led by WSP to perform this work, with support from LMN Architects, Cooper Robertson, PRR, and others.

The crossing may be a series of spans connecting redevelopment sites along the route, creating a cohesive zone filled with restaurants, retail, plazas, and other amenities. Currently, the staff and consultant team are developing early environmental documentation, launching site studies for geotechnical analysis, and crafting design scenarios.

This memo provides an update on the 30% design work, including a significant milestone as the team selects a recommended alignment for further analysis and engineering.

Engagement and Timeline

The City and its design team have completed two major public engagement opportunities, including an online open house focused on priorities and design principles and an in-person open house focused on design and alignment alternatives.

The open house was held May 2 at Bellevue Botanical Garden from 5pm to 8pm, and welcomed more than 130 attendees, including 62 who had pre-registered. Project staff shared information about the program writ large, the project schedule, alignment alternatives, and future opportunities for input. Multiple activities were available, including drone footage of the crossing route, a roll plot satellite view of the crossing alignment, and a “mad libs” style activity, among others.

Figure 1. Amenities requested at in-person open house



Figure 1. Attendees expressed a desire for resting areas and seating, performance spaces, restrooms and drinking fountains, and greenery to provide shade and sound insulation.

Overall, open house participants expressed enthusiasm for the crossing and encouraged the City to build the crossing as quickly as possible. Attendees expressed a desire for amenities such as seating and greenery to make the crossing a comfortable place to be. The main feedback and questions related to cost concerns and the long project timeline necessitated by the project's complexity.

In addition to the open house, the project team tabled at the East Link 2 Line Opening Celebrations, speaking to more than 800 community members and sharing more than 300 invitations to the open house.

Alignment Analysis

During this initial phase of the project, the design team focused on refining earlier studies and analyzing possible crossing alignments. Due to the length of the crossing and the complexity of the alignment like multiple public and private parcels, an active interstate freeway, a new light rail system, and a partially open-channel creek, multiple design scenarios were considered for each site along the route. When combined, over 2,000 possible crossing alternatives were analyzed.

The numerous options were reviewed and filtered out those which did not meet the purpose and need statement created early in the project. Criteria included:

- **Purpose and need:** For example, safety, high-comfort, multimodal, and community connection.
- **Future compatibility:** Compatibility with adjacent private and City-owned development, a future lid over I-405, and WSDOT plans under the I-405 Master Plan.
- **Schedule and approvals:** Alternatives must be able to achieve all required permits and approvals for construction no later than the end of 2028.
- **Cost feasibility:** Alternatives should provide a strong value; that is, the benefit of an alternative should be commensurate with its cost.

Based on these criteria, four alignment options were advanced to a second, more comprehensive analysis. Based on this review, **an alignment running directly across I-405 on a path just south of the Sound Transit light rail guideway is the recommended alignment.** Staff will provide additional details during the presentation.

Anticipated Issues and Tradeoffs

Council's feedback from tonight's presentation will be incorporated into the work to finalize 30% design by the end of 2024. As the design team finalizes the type, size, and location (TS&L) study for the crossing, we anticipate future decisions will be needed between conflicting opportunities and tradeoffs, including:

- **Signature design and/or architecture:** While a more visually impressive structure over I-405 is likely feasible from an engineering perspective, it will be logistically complex to construct while keeping within WSDOT's strict design and operations standards, and it would be more expensive than a simpler crossing design. Simpler structures will be faster to design and build.

- **WSDOT considerations and forward-compatibility with a full freeway lid:** Because of the I-405 Master Plan, WSDOT's current working assumption is that no piers would be allowed in the highway right-of-way. There are design options for a *crossing* that do not require piers, but these are substantially more expensive and would make integration with a future full *freeway lid* more complicated. Reaching a compromise with WSDOT will require additional time. If integration of the bridge with a full freeway lid is critically important, it may be beneficial to work more heavily with WSDOT at this stage to find solutions to their concerns.
- **Integration with City-owned and other redevelopment parcels:** Analysis on redevelopment opportunities for the City-owned Metro and Lincoln Center properties is underway. A structure more closely integrated with the crossing on these properties may result in better public spaces and more development capacity for City, public, and partnership uses, but would require more time to design. The City is also considering the interface of the crossing with other redevelopment sites on both sides of I-405.
- **Cost:** The cost of some crossing alternatives may be significant. More information about the financial benefits and costs would help us better understand the return on investment. The additional information may also be important context for private and public funders. HR&A will help us develop some of this information, as discussed below.
- **Phasing:** The current working assumption is that the crossing must be open in its entirety on Day 1 from Eastrail to City Hall. Options which utilize a phased approach may alleviate some of the issues raised above, but these would require additional thinking from the design team about how phasing would affect engineering decisions. This would take more time to develop.

The number of complex opportunities and tradeoffs embedded in this project is not unusual for a project of this magnitude and scale. However, they do require careful consideration to ensure the selected design achieves the desired outcomes for the City and its partners both now and in the future.

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). However, to meet the ambitious goal to complete the project by the end of 2028, the City must plan to roll directly from 30% design to final design with minimal to no gap in the work.

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	Select a preferred design alternative for further design development and refinement.

August 2024 (Tentative)	Online open house to share status of the project and more information about the structural considerations and options
Summer-Fall 2024	Refine preferred design alternative and begin 30% design and engineering documentation.
December 2024	Finalize preferred design alternative and complete 30% design and engineering documentation.

As discussed above, tradeoffs associated with design decisions, integration with City-owned parcels and a potential future lid, cost, and phasing may benefit from additional time at this phase to make high-quality decisions about how to proceed.

Funding Development

To help the City and its private partners prepare and meet aggressive timelines for completion of the crossing, the City is working with a consultant this year to analyze the variety of options for fully funding the crossing's construction. After a thorough consultant search, staff selected national firm HR&A Advisors to advise the City on funding options for the crossing. HR&A brings a wealth of experience with large-scale public space and public-private partnership projects, including New York's High Line, Seattle's and Toronto's Waterfronts, and Dallas' Klyde Warren Park.

HR&A has already begun developing a comprehensive "benefits case" for the project, which outlines the value provided by the crossing from an economic, social, environmental, and development perspective. This review will help City staff develop federal, state, and local—as well as corporate and individual philanthropic—grant applications. It will also be used to help us understand the additional value created by the crossing which might be leveraged to help fund the crossing.

Over the coming months, HR&A will be meeting with City staff, the WSP consultant team, the Friends of the Grand Connection, and various other stakeholders to help develop a conceptual funding strategy for the entirety of the crossing.

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.

We expect to return to Council in the fall for an update on the TS&L study and later in the year for an update at 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.

POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS

Policy Impact

This work continues implementation for 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.

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

N/A

ATTACHMENTS

N/A

AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY

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