

October 24, 2016

CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION ITEM

SUBJECT

Update on the Grand Connection Visioning process, including I-405 crossing alternatives and new elements for the initial sequence of work.

STAFF CONTACTS

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POLICY ISSUES

On December 7, 2015 Council provided direction to proceed with the Wilburton-Grand Connection Land Use and Transportation project. The project has been defined as a Council priority.

DIRECTION NEEDED FROM COUNCIL

ACTION



DIRECTION



INFORMATION ONLY



Staff will provide an update on current design proposals for key nodes along the Grand Connection route and alternatives for the Interstate 405 Crossing. For the latter, staff will present evaluation criteria for each alternative and will be seeking initial Council input and feedback on which, if any, of the presented I-405 Crossing alternatives appears most promising.

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS

On December 7, 2015, City Council approved the work plan for the Wilburton-Grand Connection project. The Grand Connection is a Council priority initiative to establish a vision for a non-motorized corridor that connects from Meydenbauer Bay, through Downtown Bellevue, and to the Wilburton Commercial Area and Eastside Rail Corridor. The Grand Connection will serve as a unique and signature element to Bellevue's urban landscape and will create opportunities for a new land use and urban design vision for the Wilburton Commercial Area.

A key feature of the Grand Connection will be the Interstate 405 Crossing. The connection presents an opportunity to establish connectivity between Downtown and the Wilburton Commercial Area, as well as creating a unique urban experience in its own right. Tonight staff will provide three high level alternatives for crossing I-405, as well as an analysis of each alternative. Staff will also present new concepts for additional elements at key locations through Downtown along the Grand Connection.

As part of the Wilburton – Grand Connection project, staff is preparing to launch the land use, transportation, and environmental analysis of the Wilburton Commercial Area. On October 17th Council granted consent to contract with NBBJ to conduct the land use and urban design analysis. In advance of

this analysis, staff will be seeking appointment of members to the Citizen Advisory Committee this evening. The Mayor will be bringing names forward for Council confirmation under a separate agenda item.

Grand Connection Visioning Process – Sequence One

Scope

This portion of the work seeks to identify a unifying element or theme for the entire route that will create a unique urban design experience. The goal of the unifying identity is to establish a context that will connect the individual places along the route within a common framework. Underscoring these unified themes will also be consistent elements in paving, weather protection, design, and other features that create additional layers of elements that are identifiable to the route.

As part of Sequence One, the consultant was also asked to consider new and unique public space concepts at strategic points along the route such as the Downtown Park, Compass Plaza, and Transit Center, employing the identity alternatives and creating places that encourage people to linger and engage. The consultant was tasked with identifying solutions that could be completed in the short and long term. These solutions should provide opportunities for a long term vision of the route, while creating opportunities for concepts to be implemented early and quickly.

Earlier Briefings and Additional Work

On July 25th staff presented designs and proposals related to Sequence One of the Grand Connection Visioning. The first sequence included the overall identity of the route, cohesive design strategies, and improvements to existing public spaces. Following these earlier Council presentations, work has continued on Sequence One including additional proposals for the Downtown Park, the intersection of Bellevue Way and NE 6th Street, and the Bellevue Transit Center. These improvements seek to create new opportunities for public space as well as improve and prioritize the overall pedestrian and cyclist experience on the Grand Connection. The proposals include the creation and expansion of public space at the Downtown Park and Transit Center, and improvements to enhance the ‘street as plaza’ concept for NE 6th Street at Bellevue Way.

Concepts have also been developed to improve pedestrian and cyclists access, connectivity, and range. These concepts include new and exciting transportation alternatives that could improve connectivity and range for users of all abilities through Downtown and into the Wilburton Commercial Area. These approaches embrace technology and innovation for pedestrians and cyclists while providing solutions to Bellevue’s challenging topography.

This new work is presented in the context of the existing vision that has been developed. Staff is seeking initial feedback and input from Council on these new concepts.

Grand Connection Visioning Process – Sequence Two

Scope

This portion of the work addresses the crossing of I-405 and its interface with Downtown, the Wilburton Commercial Area, and the Eastside Rail Corridor. The connection seeks to create a place, as well as a safe and comfortable connection that provides a signature element for Bellevue’s urban landscape. In addition to the physical crossing, the consultant has been tasked with identifying programming opportunities and the interface with potential future development.

Work to Date

The consultant was asked to provide three alternatives that investigated various levels of complexity related to constructability, cost, and timing. Additionally, the work considers the interdependence with existing and future land uses and transportation. Prior to development of the alternatives, staff and the consultant analyzed the existing conditions and infrastructure including opportunities for structural support and the opportunity to create a signature or public space. This analysis also considered precedents and other placemaking examples that will be included in tonight's presentation.

The three alternatives range in complexity and scale, including a direct route that integrates with existing infrastructure, a dynamic crossing that creates moments of public space, and a sweeping vision that would create a new public space while concealing the interstate between NE 6th and NE 4th Street. The alternatives will be represented through geometric and movement diagrams, in addition to high level conceptual sketches. Staff has analyzed the alternatives based on a number of variables as well as the ability of each alternative to satisfy the original Council principles and goals of the project. The criteria for evaluation included:

- Cost
- Constructability
- Timing
- Land Use Interdependence
- Transportation Interdependence
- User Experience
- Potential for a Signature Design
- Potential for a Signature Place

Staff is seeking initial feedback and input from Council to determine which alternative(s) appear most promising.

Next Steps

Following tonight's presentation staff will continue to engage with key stakeholders and conduct a second online open house to obtain feedback and input from the public. Using feedback from Council, stakeholders, and the public, the consultant will be directed to proceed with further refinement of the I-405 crossing alternatives.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Project Timeline
- B. Grand Connection Long Term Route

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N/A