



### Improving Lives Through Bicycling

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To: Bradley Calvert, City of Bellevue  
Community Development Program Manager

Date: October 4, 2017

**Re: Grand Connection Draft Framework Sequence One Comments**

Dear Mr. Calvert,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Grand Connection draft framework plan for sequence one, between Meydenbauer Bay and Civic Center District. Cascade Bicycle Club will provide comments on sequence two –crossing I-405 and connecting to the Eastside Rail Corridor– as it comes available.

Cascade works in communities throughout Washington state to advocate for bicycling as a safe, intuitive, healthy and affordable transportation option. Cascade views Bellevue as a high-opportunity community, poised to make great strides in the near-term towards being a more bike-friendly community, where bicycling is a viable transportation option of people of all ages and abilities. Visionary planning efforts like the Grand Connection, as well as the 2016 City of Bellevue study trip to Copenhagen, demonstrate an exciting commitment by the city to invest in a multi-modal future.

Bellevue is at the heart of new and exciting regional connections, including the Eastside Rail Corridor (ERC) and SR-520 trails. The need for Bellevue's street network to connect into and serve people arriving via these regional active transportation corridors is more pressing than ever. That need will grow as new connections come online later this year (SR-520 trail and first segments of ERC trail) and in 2020 (more of the ERC trail through Bellevue). The Grand Connection's role in Bellevue will be further elevated by demand for first/last mile connections via the street network to serve the multiple Link Light Rail stations opening in Bellevue by 2023. The Grand Connection vision for a safe walking and biking path east/west through and to downtown Bellevue will create the much needed active transportation backbone to enable people throughout the whole of downtown to benefit from these exciting regional investments.

Below, Cascade provides comments in response to the Grand Connection draft framework plan for sequence one, focussing on chapter 7: connectivity and mobility, and chapter 3: the route.

### **Build the Grand Connection so all ages and abilities can use it by bicycle**

There is currently no safe, comfortable way for people on bikes to travel east/west, to and through downtown Bellevue. Cascade supports the Grand Connection as a safe, simple, and connected east/west spine through downtown that is separated from vehicle traffic and is inviting for users of all ages and abilities. As the city refines the route and design for the Grand Connection active transportation spine, we encourage using the both the lenses of “safe, simple and connected” and “all ages and abilities” to evaluate alternatives.

### **Articulate Grand Connection’s intersection with other planning initiatives, especially for a downtown bike network**

We recognize that the Grand Connection plan is not advancing in isolation from other concurrent downtown planning projects, including the 2017 Downtown Livability Zoning update and the 2016 Bicycle Rapid Implementation Program (BRIP). Integration with the BRIP is especially important because of the shared goal of creating spaces for people on bikes. The Grand Connection is an essential east/west spine that will help form the all ages bike network envisioned in the BRIP. Seamless integration from the Grand Connection to the rest of the street network should be actively anticipated and incorporated during this planning process. For example, further refinements of the Grand Connection plan should include intersection design standards that will safely transition people on bikes and people walking onto and off of the Grand Connection.

### **Leverage new technology, but don’t create a plan that gets ahead of the rapidly evolving autonomous vehicle technology**

The Grand Connection’s vision for autonomous group transit to provide efficient cross-downtown travel is an exciting one. Small group transit has the potential to significantly reduce the number of single occupancy vehicle trips in dense environments, and enables cities to rethink how to most effectively apportion their road rights-of-way. Cascade is excited that Bellevue is looking at emerging technologies and how they can shape the downtown Bellevue of tomorrow. Cascade hopes that further refinements of the Grand Connection documents articulate the city’s vision for how autonomous vehicles can make the street experience better, including impacts on curb management and use of travel lanes.

The draft framework includes images that mix people on bikes and people walking with autonomous vehicles. Vehicle automation is a rapidly evolving technology, yet at this time best practices research and policies recommend mode separation. Autonomous vehicle testing to date has identified the highest risk conflicts being between autonomous vehicles and people walking and on bikes. Cascade recommends that separation between autonomous vehicles be built in to this plan. The following resources provide further details and latest research on autonomous vehicles and active transportation modes:

- [Pedestrian Bicycle Information Center, Discussion Guide for Automated and Connected Vehicles, Pedestrians, and Bicyclists](#)

- [NACTO Policy Recommendations for the Future of Automated Vehicles](#)

### **Include placemaking assets that will be essential for an inviting Grand Connection**

Placemaking components will bring the Grand Connection to life. Human scale land use, plus a shared use path infused with art and landscaping will serve as subtle cues for people on bikes to keep to safe speeds.

End of trip bike facilities are essential. Beyond providing convenient places to park a bike and access local businesses and participate in civic life, bike racks also activate public spaces by adding human scale elements. Increasingly common in cities and commercial sub-areas is having a custom bike rack design that is used consistently throughout an area. Designs can reflect the values, character and/or history of the area and are an effective placemaking element. For example, Seattle's Alliance for Pioneer Square just commissioned and installed custom bike racks in the neighborhood that reflect the historic qualities of the district.

Bike tools, including bike pump, multi-use tool and tools for a quick tire change are a highly useful asset to people biking, yet they take up very little space. For example, McGraw Square in Downtown Seattle has such a tool station.

Cascade supports the draft framework recommendations to raise crosswalks throughout the Grand Connection to sidewalk level and encourage extending pedestrian crossing times; adding signal priority for active modes at intersections; and using curb bulbs to narrow the roadway and slow down cross-traffic. As referenced above, intersection design should enable people on bikes to safely transition on and off the Grand Connection, for example by protected intersections that create a buffer between vehicles and bikes at intersections, which are known conflict zones. Lower speeds on arterials (25 miles per hour) adjacent to, or that intersect with, the Grand Connection also support safety and placemaking goals.

### **To Ensure Change, the Grand Connection Needs a Realistic Implementation Strategy**

We understand that a project at the scale of the Grand Connection will not happen overnight. Yet, the investment in a human-scale, active transportation spine through Bellevue's downtown will reap immediate benefits. Cascade encourages the city to adopt phased implementation, and consider what low-tech, low cost solutions could be embraced in the near term to realize the core "active transportation vision" of the Grand Connection. As stated in the Grand Connection Executive summary introduction, the ideas set forth in the Grand Connection plan build upon a foundation of work seeking to improve non-motorized movement in downtown that includes several plans that date as far back as 1981. The Grand Connection plan must be action oriented, phased, and realistic enough to help the city of Bellevue finally realize the 35 year-old vision for inviting biking and walking in downtown Bellevue.

We look forward to reviewing further refinements of the Grand Connection plan, and to being an ongoing community partner in articulating the importance of expanding active transportation options in downtown Bellevue for economic vitality, community sustainability, and in service of creating a livable Bellevue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Blake Trask", with a stylized, flowing script.

Blake Trask  
Senior Policy Director  
Cascade Bicycle Club

CC:

Dave Berg, City of Bellevue Director of Transportation  
Franz Loewenherz, City of Bellevue Principal Transportation Planner