

CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION

South Downtown I-405 Access Study to develop, analyze and select a preferred alternative to improve South Downtown access to and from I-405.

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DIRECTION NEEDED FROM COUNCIL

DIRECTION	Staff is seeking direction to proceed with the South Downtown I-405 Access Study by carrying forward certain alternatives for further evaluation.
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RECOMMENDATIONS

Direct staff to proceed with the South Downtown I-405 Access Study by carrying forward the following five alternatives (shown in Exhibit A) for further evaluation:

1. Lake Hills Connector southbound on-ramp
2. SE Sixth Street extension with southbound on-ramp
3. SE Sixth Street extension with express toll lane access to and from the south
4. NE 2nd Street extension to Wilburton
5. No new interchange

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

The I-405 Corridor Program Master Plan approved in 2002 includes a new half-diamond interchange at NE 2nd Street vicinity to improve vehicle access to/from the south (I-405 Project #108). However, the specific location and configuration of access has yet to be decided. Recent proposed private sector redevelopment along 114th Avenue, and the East Main transit oriented development (TOD) land use code amendment (LUCA), as well as the development concepts proposed for the Wilburton area, have created a pressing need for the City to identify a preferred I-405 connection alternative.

Staff had been scheduled to brief the Council on April 20 to kick off the study. The City Attorney's Office determined that the meeting could not be conducted as it did not satisfy the "necessary and routine" requirements for City Council meetings as per the Governor's issued Emergency Proclamation due to the COVID-19 crisis. Staff then briefed Councilmembers individually. Following the briefings, the decision was made to initiate the study and return to Council later for a mid-point review following stakeholder and public engagement.

Alternative Development and Screening

Including the alternatives analyzed in 2015-2016, the study team identified a total of a dozen alternative concepts between NE 2nd Street and SE 8th Street to improve I-405 access in South Downtown area (Exhibits A and B). The study team then performed fatal flaw screening of these concepts using the following three criteria:

- Consistency with Bellevue policies and plans;
- Consistency with WSDOT/FHWA policies including the I-405 Master Plan; and,
- Constructability.

Through fatal flaw screening, the study team identified seven of the 12 alternative concepts as having one or more fatal flaws. The team then presented these preliminary findings to various community groups for their comments and inputs.

Community Engagement

Staff, with the support of consultant PRR Inc, carried out a robust community engagement process using several online venues. These included stakeholder forums, public open houses, consistent online presence, community-based organizations outreach, and special interest groups presentations.

Stakeholder Forums

Stakeholders are identified as people who may be directly impacted by the outcome of the study. They include the following individuals:

- Business/property owners or developers within the study area
- Representatives of neighborhood associations that are entirely or partially located within the study areas:
 - Downtown Bellevue Residents Association
 - Surrey Downs Community Club
 - Wilburton Community Association
 - Bellecrest Neighborhood Association
 - Woodridge Community Association

Thus far, the study team has conducted three of the four planned stakeholder forums. At the first forum, staff shared study goals, project purpose and needs statement, study process including alternative development, alternative screening and evaluation, and how a preferred alternative will be selected. At the second stakeholder forum, staff presented the 12 alternative concepts and findings from the initial round of fatal flaw screening of these alternatives using the three criteria described above. At the third forum, the study team presented additional findings from constructability review conducted by WSDOT staff. Below is a list of major themes from the inputs received from stakeholders:

- They are generally supportive of a new access to I-405 but are concerned about potential property impacts and impacts to 114th Avenue.
- Overall, the alternatives in the south part of the study area received more favorable responses than those in the north part of the study area.
- They would like to see the planned land developments transportation facilities be included in the study.
- They would like to see a multimodal approach to solving future congestion with the understanding that people trying to access I-405 will not be walking or cycling.
- They would like to see impacts to existing properties, wetland and mitigation costs be considered in the study.

- Some are concerned that new access may bring more traffic to local streets. They would like to see traffic calming and directional signs be part of the solutions.
- Some would like the City to integrate siting of a new interchange with other planned initiatives such as Grand Connection and Lake to Lake Trail.
- Some expressed preference of the Main Street access alternative and wondered why it has been dropped from further study.
- Some wondered why a “no-action” alternative is included in the study because it would not meet study goals and objective.
- They like to see the study team present a full analysis of benefits and costs of the alternatives.

Public Open House

Two public open houses are planned. One has been conducted. The study team launched the first online open house on August 3 to introduce the South Downtown I-405 Access Study to the public and ask for feedback on the interchange alternatives. The online open house was live for three weeks at engagingbellevue.com. The study team hosted the online open house in English, Korean, Japanese, Russian, Chinese and Spanish. Participants could read background information about the study, learn about study alternatives and submit open-ended comments. During the three-week period, 2,383 people visited the online open house, seven visitors contacted study team members directly with questions and 247 visitors submitting a total of 1,164 comments. Below is a list of themes summarized from the responses:

- Each of the alternatives presented received both favorable and unfavorable comments.
- Concern about a new interchange may encourage vehicle traffic, or “induce demand”, and contribute to climate change.
- Prioritize transportation improvements and access for people walking, biking and riding transit.
- Concern about a new interchange would not help improve access to I-405 until congestion on I-405 is addressed.
- Concern about a new interchange may bring more traffic to local streets.
- Interest in an east-west connection over I-405 without access to I-405.
- Consider combining alternative features.
- Coordinate the new interchange with other City initiatives, including Grand Connection.

Presentation to Interest Groups

At invitation, staff made presentations to the Bellevue Chamber of Commerce Transportation Committee, board members of Wilburton Community Association, board members of Eastside Easy Rider Collaborative (EERC), and business owners and developers within the study area. Comments received at these presentations generally fall within the themes received at stakeholder forums and public open house.

Recommended Alternatives to Carry Forward

Based on the findings from the fatal flaw screening and inputs received from stakeholders, general public, and interest groups, staff recommend carrying forward five of the 12 alternatives forward to the next round of evaluation. They are:

1. **Lake Hills Connector Southbound On-ramp.** This alternative would construct a southbound on-ramp from Lake Hills Connector to SB I-405. It would complement the existing I-405 northbound off-ramp to Lake Hills Connector.
2. **SE 6th Street extension with southbound on-ramp.** This alternative would elevate and extend SE 6th Street over 114th Avenue and I-405 to 116th Avenue and construct on-ramp to I-405 southbound. This new ramp would pair with the existing I-405 northbound off-ramp to Lake Hills Connector to form a half-diamond interchange. Bike lanes and sidewalks will be provided on the new east-west connection.
3. **SE 6th Street extension with express toll lane access to and from south.** This alternative would elevate and extend SE 6th Street over 114th Avenue and I-405 to 116th Avenue and construct direct I-405 express toll lane access ramps to and from the south. Bike lanes and sidewalks would be provided on the new east-west connection.
4. **NE 2nd Street extension to Wilburton.** This alternative would extend NE 2nd Street to 116th Avenue without ramp connections to I-405. It could go either south or north of the Hampton Inn. Bike lanes and sidewalks would be provided on the new east-west connection.
5. **No new interchange.** This option would look for improvements to local streets and existing I-405 without adding a new interchange.

Depictions of these five alternatives are shown in Exhibit A. Alternatives that did not pass fatal flaw screening are shown in Exhibit B.

Recommended Alternative Evaluation Criteria

Staff recommends that the following criteria and performance metrics be used to evaluate the remaining alternatives to help inform the selection of a preferred alternative or a combination of alternatives. The criteria have been shared with the stakeholders.

- Congestion reduction/travel time consideration
 - Modeled travel time between selected major destinations
 - Traffic operations on City roads
 - Traffic operation on I-405
- Access and safety considerations
 - Access to 114th Avenue
 - Connection between Downtown and Wilburton
 - Potential conflicts for people walking and biking
 - Ease of access for people walking or biking to East Main Light Rail Station
- Property and economic development impact considerations
 - Complete and partial property impacts
 - Property access restrictions
 - Economic development impact
- Existing plans and urban design considerations
 - Consistency with existing plans and policies
 - Environmental stewardship
 - Vision Zero
 - Compatibility with adjacent land use

- Fish barrier removal and stream connection restoration
- Cost considerations
 - Right-of-way
 - Construction
 - Wetland/stream mitigation
 - Utilities relocation
 - Fish barriers removal and stream connections restoration
- Stakeholder input considerations
- Public input considerations

Alternative Evaluation Process and Schedule

Using the evaluation criteria and performance metrics described above, the study team will evaluate the five remaining alternative concepts. Staff will then share evaluation findings with stakeholders at the fourth stakeholder forum to solicit their feedback before hosting the final public open house in early December. Following the final stakeholder forum and public open house, staff will come back to the Council to present study findings and community input. The Council would be asked to select a preferred alternative at that study session. The preferred alternative could be one or a combination of more than one of the remaining concepts.

The diagram shown in Exhibit C depicts the study key milestones and the stakeholder, public and Council involvement process.

POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS

Policy Impact

The City's Comprehensive Plan identifies NE 2nd Street as a tentative location of a new interchange with I-405 (Comprehensive Plan Project List – 67). Additional City policy considerations that inform the location of further connections to I-405 in the South Downtown area include:

- **Policy TR-1:** Integrate land use and transportation decisions to ensure that the two mutually support the Comprehensive Plan.
- **Policy TR-2:** Strive to reduce congestion and improve mobility.
- **Policy TR-26:** Increase system connectivity for all modes by providing for vehicular, transit, pedestrian, and bicycling facilities to create a Complete Streets network throughout the City.
- **Policy TR- 52:** Design arterials and streets to fit the intended character of the areas through which they pass.
- **Policy S-SW-69:** Support a future corridor design for Main Street that emphasizes safety and aspects of the character of the Old Bellevue district such as wide sidewalks, planter strips, shade trees and lighting.

Fiscal Impact

Funding for consultant assistance for public/stakeholder engagement support is included in the South Downtown Bellevue I-405 Access Project (CIP Plan No. PW-R-203). Alternative conceptual design support will be carried out by WSDOT staff through the interagency agreement (GCB3253) as approved by the Council (Resolution No. 9777).

OPTIONS

1. Direct staff to proceed with the South Downtown I-405 Access Study by evaluating the five remaining options as proposed by staff.
2. Direct staff to proceed with the South Downtown I-405 Access Study with a different set of alternatives.

ATTACHMENTS & AVAILABLE DOCUMENTS

- A. Alternatives Recommended to Carry Forward for Further Evaluation
- B. Alternatives Did Not Pass the Fatal Flaw Screening
- C. South Downtown I-405 Access Study Schedule
- D. CIP Project Description (CIP Plan No. PW-R-203)

AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY

N/A