

November 19, 2018

City of Bellevue
Bellevue City Council
450 110th Avenue NE
Bellevue, WA 98004

Re: Grand Connection I-405 Crossing Alternatives

Dear Mayor Chelminiak and Council Members:

On behalf of the Bellevue Downtown Association (BDA), we're writing to inform your consideration of the Grand Connection I-405 crossing alternatives. BDA Members have tracked the Grand Connection visioning process over the past two years, with regular check-ins with City Staff and forward-looking discussions about design and implementation. The BDA has supported the Grand Connection's overall vision and see the potential for a transformative project.

We're eager to review more details about the timeline, costs and phasing, resulting from the selection of a preferred alternative. Based on the Land Use & Livability Committee review and recommendations, as well as Board review and support, we share the following points.

- We hold a preference for Alternative 3, noting it could achieve three key benefits: 1) create new open space with a lid over I-405; 2) support, not preclude, future development capacity; 3) possibly result in lower land acquisition costs for the City. Alternative 3 presents a bolder and more attractive project. However, this support is not "at any cost." Funding analysis is needed to clarify the magnitude and cost/benefit tradeoffs. The cost consideration should also factor longer-term maintenance requirements.
- The Grand Connection is a priority and significant opportunity. The vision and design should be feasible and achievable within a reasonable amount of time. We support examining a phased approach to accomplishing the larger vision, one that allows incremental crossing improvements based on funding availability and development plans. The City should also initiate and fund improvements and activation along the Grand Connection corridor prior to the crossing's completion. These critical, incremental steps will further support momentum for the crossing project.
- The project must support future property development on both sides of I-405. Design the Grand Connection crossing with consideration given to the adjacent properties, the transitional connections, and the impact the project will have on livability.
- Communication will be key between the City and property owners to ensure functional and attractive transitions between public and private spaces. The Grand Connection project should not create additional delay for future development.
- Preliminary land values used for cost estimates are likely understated by a large degree. Updating the land acquisition costs based on current and projected values, with future changes in Wilburton, could level the estimates for the three alternatives.

- Future planning should include an economic analysis to measure project costs alongside potential future revenue streams. For example, measure the costs of Alternatives 1 and 2 with parks envisioned on the eastside of I-405 to Alternative 3's economic benefits of future development on both sides of I-405.
- Prioritize the pedestrian and non-motorized experience around safety, comfort, and enjoyment.
- Address impacts of elevation and grade changes. The relationship between 112 Ave NE and the Grand Connection needs special attention and consideration for a design that will allow future development to leverage foot traffic on the corridor.
- Work closely with WSDOT to seek the State's approval, cooperation and feedback. Future Grand Connection crossing plans must not preclude the I-405 Master Plan, and it should minimize impacts to I-405 during construction.
- Evaluate and communicate available or potential funding mechanisms to build the crossing; including eligibility for federal, state, and local matching. LIDs (local improvement districts) as a funding mechanism are disfavored by Downtown property owners.
- Future design refinements should address anticipated travel and parking demand generated by the Grand Connection and I-405 crossing as a popular public amenity.

A successful project will benefit the entire City as an iconic landmark with purpose. The corridor should improve access to transit, the ERC, the Lake Washington waterfront, and Downtown and Wilburton destinations as a whole. New open space will serve the growing residential and workforce populations. Employers will have a new urban amenity to attract and retain talent.

The BDA will continue to actively track the Grand Connection progress. We remain committed to providing timing input and partnering with the City to advance the project. Thank you for your leadership and moving the vision forward.

Sincerely,



Brian Brand
BDA Land Use & Livability Committee, Co-Chair



Warren Koons
BDA Land Use & Livability Committee, Co-Chair



Patrick Bannon
BDA President