



MEETING SUMMARY
Montlake Project Signage Workgroup – Meeting #4
Wednesday, January 24, 2024 | 1 – 2:30 p.m.
Virtual via Zoom

Facilitator: Angie Thomson, Thomson Strategic

Speakers: Greg Meadows, Montlake Project Construction Manager
Todd Harrison, SR 520 Director of Project Development
David Goldberg, SR 520 Community Liaison and Ombudsman
Suryata Halim, SR 520 Disciplines Manager

Attendees:

WSDOT – SR 520 Program

- Chelsey Funis
- January Tavel
- Ron Paananen
- Tony Black

WSDOT – Northwest Region

- Christina Strand

WSDOT – Headquarters Traffic

- Trevor McCain

Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT)

- Tom Le
- Amanda Tse

Seattle Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD)

- Lyle Bicknell

Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP)

- Maureen Elenga

Friends of Seattle’s Olmsted Parks (FSOP)

- Kyle Capizzi

University of Washington

- Aaron Hoard

U District Partnership

- Katy Ricchiuto

Neighbor representatives

- Bruce Balick, Montlake
- Gayle Seely, Montlake
- Rachel Ben-Shumel, Montlake
- Michael VonKorff, Arboretum
- Peter Haley, Eastlake
- Steve Beaudry, Montlake

Meeting materials (see Appendix A):

- Meeting agenda
- Sign Bridge #2 color options

Welcome and agenda review

Angie Thomson welcomed the group, reviewed the virtual meeting logistics and provided an agenda overview. She noted that the purpose of this fourth and final workgroup meeting was to discuss color options for the three new mast arms and Sign Bridge #2, discuss the format and materials for the Jan. 31 community meeting, and share the latest information about the interim signage plan.

Review consensus recommendations

Angie reviewed a written summary of the workgroup’s recommendations (see image below) and recapped decisions that were made in the previous meeting.

Montlake Signage Workgroup Recommendations
January 24, 2024

Sign Location #1: Workgroup recommendations

Smaller signs supported by a new mast arm.

The mast arm should be installed as far north as technically feasible (approx. 10 ft from the current sign bridge location).

Install advance signs at 24th Avenue E supported by a new mast arm (vs. side-mounted signs).

Understanding/agreement that the existing sign bridge be removed as soon as possible.

Sign Location #2: Workgroup recommendations

Smaller signs supported by the existing sign bridge.*

**The workgroup understands the technical limitations at this location and the need for the existing sign bridge to remain in place. However, while the group came to consensus about the smaller signs, the group does not specifically endorse leaving the sign bridge in place.*

Sign Location #3: Workgroup recommendations

Smaller signs supported by a new mast arm.

Install an advance I-5 sign on an existing luminaire pole between E Hamlin Street and E Shelby Street.

The group provided feedback on some of the wording of the recommendations to make them clearer ahead of the Jan. 31 community meeting. In addition, there was a request to make the recommendations for Sign Bridge #2 more representative of the workgroup's feelings and lack of alternatives for removing it.

Following this discussion, the group continued to express concerns about the sign bridge remaining in place. Todd Harrison and Suryata Halim went through the technical constraints at this location again and explained why it's not feasible to remove the sign bridge. The two key reasons are that the roadway has nine lanes and we need overhead signs over the middle lanes for northbound drivers turning left onto westbound SR 520. There isn't another structure that can extend that far into the roadway. Additionally, the sign bridge's foundation is integrated into the Montlake lid structure. Removing the foundation would be technically difficult and could compromise the structural steel embedded in the concrete.

Workgroup member question: Did we cover exactly where the advance signs related to Sign Location #1 would go?

Answer: Yes, these signs would be installed on a new mast arm on the east side of the roadway where 24th Avenue E turns into Montlake Boulevard, just north of E Louisa Street.

Workgroup member comment: I think there should be an acknowledgement of failure from WSDOT about poor notification and communication to the public about the sign bridges and them going up.

Workgroup member comment: WSDOT probably had a quick chat with the legislature before this workgroup was formed and agreed to mast arms. I feel like the outcome may have been predetermined.

Response from David Goldberg: Since we received the initial complaints from the neighborhood last fall, there has been no discussion between WSDOT and 43rd district legislators. I can assure you this workgroup process has been genuine and there weren't any pre-determined outcomes. That said, there are still a lot of pieces that need to fall into place during this legislative session so there's no guarantee these recommendations will be implemented.

Workgroup member comment: I feel there were a lot of "nos" from workgroup members that eventually got to "yeses." I don't want to be a part of a presentation that says I am fully on board with all of these recommendations because I am not. I don't want this portrayed to the neighborhood that this was 100% agreed upon.

Response from Angie: I hear you. The question for consensus was “can you live with it” and not “do you 100% agree with this option.” There is some nuance here and I think we can change the way the recommendation for Sign Location #2 is written to reflect that nuance.

Workgroup member comment: There’s a difference between being presented with “can you live with it” or “can you endorse it” and “I have to live with it.”

Workgroup member comment: I wish we could have been more involved earlier. Moving forward, we’re getting improved signage at location #1 and #3. Those are good and we’ll be happy with them. Location #2 is one we’re going to have to live with. I think if the sign bridge is going to stay, we really need to consider painting it another color. The black is so predominant and is too strong visually.

Workgroup member comment: What I’ve heard from the technical team is that Sign Bridge #2 is critical to the design of the Montlake lid. The lid is a community benefit and there isn’t a way to have the lid without the sign bridge. So, if you want the lid to cover the highway and reconnect the neighborhood, then you need to have the sign bridge.

Workgroup member question: The need for a sign bridge at this location assumes that having a median in the middle of Montlake Boulevard for side-mounted signs isn’t possible given the current design. Is this true?

Answer: Yes. There was a lot of stakeholder and agency coordination and engagement that went into the final design of the roadway and specifically not having a median or median barrier on the lid. This is the design we have and we’re working within that pre-determined constraint. We must have the signs overhead at this location and the sign bridge was the only feasible way we could support those signs.

Design history and background

January Tavel, WSDOT’s Architectural Historian, joined the meeting on behalf of Cassie Manetas to discuss some of the decision making that went into the final design and color selection for elements along Montlake Boulevard and Lake Washington Boulevard.

Starting in 2011, WSDOT began coordination with Seattle officials, design professionals and the public to refine the conceptual design for the SR520 corridor. Out of this coordination, WSDOT sought to create a consistent visual and aesthetic relationship among elements throughout the corridor (referred to as “elements of continuity”). One of these aesthetic treatments was to paint all the vertical-type structures (e.g., light poles, signal poles, trolley wire poles, junction boxes, transit canopies, etc.) black. Black was selected because of the way it fits with the more modern urban design of the Montlake improvements while still honoring the historic character of the neighborhood.

January also noted that WSDOT will install these same, black-painted elements – signal poles, light poles, electrical boxes, etc. – as part of the future Portage Bay Bridge Project. So, the visual continuity will continue through the final stretch of the SR 520 corridor.

Structure color discussion

Angie opened the discussion to the group. She noted that we’ve heard a lot of different thoughts and opinions about the color of the mast arms and the sign bridge. The goal of today is to dive into this topic and see if the group can come to consensus.

Angie noted that, for visual and long-term maintenance reasons, the group was limited to only a few different color options. In addition to black, the color alternatives include:

- Washington Grey
- Montlake Bascule Bridge Green

A visualization of Sign Bridge #2 was shown to the group with the existing, black-painted sign bridge, as well as the sign bridge “repainted” with grey and green paint (see image below). Angie acknowledged that these images are not a perfect representation of what the sign bridge would look like, and that weather and seasons would affect how well the colors blend into the background. However, the images were produced provide some visual assistance.



Workgroup member comment: I went out this morning in the rain and looked at the sign bridge from different angles. The best camouflage depends on which angle you're looking at it from. Black looks great from some angles, but from other directions I feel that grey would be the best camouflage.

Comment from FSOP: When you think about design elements, you need to think about the scale. Black generally helps things fade into the background. However, all the other elements such as signal poles and light poles are much smaller. When it comes to the sign bridge, surface area matters.

Comment from DAHP: I worry this may be a “be careful what you wish for moment” with the color. Right now, yes, the structure stands out visually. However, once the plantings are in and all the other black-painted elements are installed, if you paint the sign bridge a different color it's almost as if we're making a feature out of it. There's no way to make the structure invisible. However, the grey color to me is what you would see on a highway and would likely stand out more than the black.

Workgroup member question: Is the sign bridge powder coated? Is it even possible to change the color and ensure the coating is durable and will hold up well?

Answer: Yes, we did investigate this. The structure is powder coated. It could be repainted but it's not as simple as just painting over the top of it. We would need to first give the structure a low-pressure sand blast, which would require containment and road closures to do the work. Then the actual repainting would also require containment and road closures.

Comment from OPCD: If the sign bridge were repainted green, I think that would be a thoughtful prelude to the Montlake Bridge. The sign bridge feels somewhat like an entrance to the neighborhood and if it were painted green it would be a nice nod to the green-painted Montlake Bridge. However, I'm fine if the group prefers to keep it black.

Comment from UW: I am worried about the idea of blasting off the powder coat. I feel like we may be opening a can of worms that, later down the line, we might regret.

Angie took a vote of those who felt strongly about changing the color of Sign Bridge #2. Six voted to change the color of the sign bridge. If the sign bridge were to be repainted:

- 7 workgroup members were in favor of green.
- 2 workgroup members were in favor of grey.

The initial majority was to change the color of Sign Bridge #2 to green. However, after being shown a visualization of what Montlake Boulevard would look like in the next several years with mature plantings, the black-painted transit canopies installed, etc., the group felt the decision was too difficult to make right

now. Many workgroup members expressed concern that they did not want to make the “wrong” decision on behalf of the community.

The group came to an agreement that it was best to let the community weigh in on the sign bridge color discussion during the Jan. 31 community meeting.*

Angie then asked about the desired color for the three new mast arms at locations #1 and #3. After some discussion, the group ultimately came to a consensus that the new mast arms should be painted black to maintain the visual consistency with all other elements along Montlake Boulevard.

****Important post-meeting update: After internal discussions with SR 520 Program leadership, Chelsey emailed the workgroup members asking them to consider pausing on the color decision for Sign Location #2 until this fall when the Montlake Project is closer to completion. Responses from workgroup members were in favor of this decision.***

Interim signage plan update

Greg Meadows, Montlake Project Construction Manager, provided a quick interim signage update on behalf of Dave Becher. He noted that WSDOT has already sent the larger signs back to the manufacturer to be recycled and the smaller signs designed by the technical team have already been order. WSDOT expects the new, smaller signs to be placed on the existing sign bridges in late spring when Graham plans to open some of the new turning movements on Montlake Boulevard.

Community meeting coordination

David shared that he spoke to Rachel and Erin to ask if they would be willing to present the workgroup's recommendations at the community meeting. They graciously agreed. He noted that one of the goals of the community meeting is to demonstrate that this was a collaborative effort. WSDOT wants the group to feel confident about and take ownership of final recommendations.

The initial plan was to review the PowerPoint presentation with the workgroup during today's meeting to ensure the group felt confident about what was being shared with the community. Due to time limitations, the group agreed to review the draft meeting slides offline and provide their comments and feedback via email.

Final thoughts and adjourn

Angie thanked the workgroup members for their time and commitment to this process. She felt that it was a collaborative process, and everyone came to the table with an open mind and a willingness to think creatively and find compromise.

Appendix A

Montlake Project Signage Workgroup Meeting #4

Materials packet



SR 520 BRIDGE REPLACEMENT AND HOV PROGRAM



AGENDA

Montlake Signage Workgroup Meeting #4

Wednesday, January 24, 2024 – 1-2:30 p.m.

Zoom

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86271666957?pwd=TXhUSGI1TW1LeUVHcVBkcHJhdUZOUT09>

Purpose: Finalizing recommendations and preparing for the community meeting

Time	Topic	Lead	Materials
1:00 p.m. (15 min)	Welcome, agenda review, review consensus recommendations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Zoom logistics Agenda review Summary of where we ended last time Review consensus recommendations & next steps 	Angie Thomson	Meeting agenda
1:15 p.m. (30 min)	Discuss structure color <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design history & background Sign bridge color Mast arm color 	January Tavel Todd Harrison	
1:45 p.m. (30 min)	Community meeting coordination and workgroup recommendations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Selecting two representatives to present PPT slides Review draft meeting agenda & PPT slides Participation at open house stations 	David Goldberg Chelsey Funis	
2:15 p.m. (5 min)	Interim signage plan update and timeline	Greg Meadows	
2:20 p.m. (5 min)	Next steps <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community meeting on 1/31, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Wayfinding signs and pedestrian safety 	Angie Thomson	
2:25 p.m. (5 min)	Final thoughts and adjourn		

Attendees

Facilitator

- Angie Thomson – *Founder of Thomson Strategic*

Community representatives

- Bruce Balick, Montlake
- Gayle Seely, Montlake
- Erin Baebler, Montlake
- Steve Beaudry, Montlake
- Rachel Ben-Shmuel, Montlake
- Michael VonKorff, Arboretum
- Peter Haley, Eastlake

WSDOT – SR 520 Program

- Cassandra Manetas – *WSDOT Cultural Resources Lead*
- Chelsey Funis – *SR 520 Program Communications*

- David Goldberg – *SR 520 Program Community Liaison and Ombudsman*
- Greg Meadows – *SR 520 Project Construction Manager*
- January Tavel – *WSDOT Architectural Historian; Senior Manager, Historic Preservation*
- Suryata Halim – *SR 520 Program Disciplines Manager*
- Todd Harrison – *SR 520 Program Director of Project Development*
- Tony Black – *SR 520 Program Communications*

WSDOT – Northwest Region

- Christina Strand – *Area Traffic Engineer, King County*

WSDOT – Headquarters Traffic

- Trevor McCain – *Transportation Signing Specialist*

Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT)

- Amanda Tse – *Interagency Project Manager*
- Ganth Lingam – *Interagency Program Manager*
- Tom Le – *Supervisor, Design and Layout, Transportation Operations Division*

Seattle Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD)

- Lyle Bicknell – *Principal Urban Designer*

Seattle Design Commission (SDC)

- Valerie Kinast – *Strategic Advisor*

WA Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP)

- Maureen Elenga – *Architectural Historian*

Friends of Seattle’s Olmsted Parks (FSOP)

- Anne Knight – *Advisory Board Member*
- Kyle Capizzi – *Board Member*

University of Washington (UW)

- Aaron Hoard – *Interim Director, Office of Regional & Community Relations*

The U District Partnership

- Katy Ricchiuto – *Urban Vitality Manager*

Black



Washington Grey



Montlake Bascule Bridge Green



NOTE: Images not fully reflective of what the alternate paint colors may look like. Above images are for discussion purposes only.