

October 5, 2007

Paula J. Hammond
Interim Secretary of Transportation
Washington State Department of Transportation
PO Box 47316
Olympia WA 98504-7316

Dear Interim Secretary Hammond:

The Queen Anne Community Council is concerned about the continuing problem of suicide attempts using the George Washington Memorial Bridge (Aurora Bridge). On November 13, 2006 the Magnolia/Queen Anne District Council heard from the Seattle Department of Transportation and the Seattle Police Department about a proposal to reduce suicide attempts from the Aurora Bridge by installing call boxes and signs. Recent information in the Queen Anne News confirms our previous concern that this, while admirable, was inadequate. Our Council takes note of the proposal by SDOT to install suicide barriers over the existing bridge railings.

However our safety concerns about Aurora Bridge safety are broader than suicide prevention. In 2002 we sent a letter suggesting that a solution, which takes pedestrians off the bridge vehicular level and would reduce the opportunity for suicides. We also suggested that a divider in the middle of the bridge would reduce head-on collisions. Please reference the enclosed WSDOT publication of fall 2002 related to the SR99 North Corridor Study carried out under the staff leadership of Rebecca Sowers. "The Aurora Bridge" element of this study proposes this concept:

- Grind down the existing asphalt to rebar, replacing it with lightweight latex modified concrete.
- Utilize this weight savings and widen the existing roadway to 11-foot wide lanes.
- Install a lightweight median barrier.
- Relocate the sidewalks underneath the bridge decks.

WSDOT has produced this conceptual plan for the Aurora Bridge that both minimizes the ability to jump, separates pedestrian and bicycle traffic from motorized vehicle lanes, and reduces the probability for motorized vehicle head-on collisions. These head-on collisions have caused death, danger to emergency staff, congestion, and delays caused by closing the bridge.

In the 2002 SR99 North Corridor Study WSDOT developed a plan for U.S. Highway 99 north of the tunnel to North 145th Street.

The Queen Anne Community Council endorses this plan, which includes the Aurora Bridge concept noted above, a concept that would put a lane divider in the center of the

bridge roadway minimizing head-on collisions, eliminate the walkways on the vehicular level, put a bicycle/pedestrian path under the existing bridge in a cage-like structure, which would limit the ability to jump, and add adequate lighting and emergency access to that walkway to minimize criminal activity.

The Queen Anne Community Council believes it is the responsibility of the Washington State Department of Transportation to implement the infrastructure changes necessary to protect the public. A long and detailed planning process has provided WSDOT's conceptual plan for the Aurora Bridge. While we wait for its implementation, or a similar implementation, people continue to jump, crash head-on, and endanger Seattle's citizens and first responders..

The Queen Anne Community Council endorses Aurora Bridge modernization, a much-deferred issue in the need to update this in-city element of SR99.

Our Council urges you to do now what is practical to protect the citizens of this community on and under the Aurora Bridge. We understand that there are primarily state responsibilities, but the city should do what it can to cooperate in this effort..

We call on you to work to bring the Aurora Bridge up to 21st century standards. We would appreciate hearing from you as soon as possible. Please direct communications to our Transportation Co-Chair., John Coney 3227-13th Ave. W., Seattle WA 98119, djohnconey@aol.com.

Sincerely

Ellen Monrad, President

cc: Senator Jeanne Kohl-Wells
Representative Helen Sommers
Representative Mary Lou Dickerson
Mayor Greg Nickel
Seattle Department of Transportation Director Grace Crunican
Police Chief Gil Kerlikowske