

03 VISION STATEMENT AND DESIGN FRAMEWORK

“When seen from space, Seattle is quilted with streets, building roofs, parking lots, patches of trees, boulevards, parks, and waterbodies. Collectively, the planted (‘green’) component of our city influences air and water temperatures, air and water quality, and surface water runoff. Our green infrastructure is an important means of reducing global warming.”

Urban Forest Management Plan, City of Seattle, 2007

VISION STATEMENT AND DESIGN FRAMEWORK

OVERALL VISION

The SR 520 corridor will be the premier gateway to the City of Seattle by reconnecting to the early Seattle vision of **“Nature meets City”**

A Vision for Current Users and Future Generations

The SR 520 corridor is a critical regional highway facility that travels through Seattle, across Lake Washington and to the Eastside. The WSDOT team has developed the vision for this corridor to: **unify the relationship** of the project to the adjacent areas and opportunities; **build upon the footprint** of the early 20th-century Seattle parks and boulevards plan; and focus on creating the **premier gateway to the City of Seattle** by reconnecting to the early Seattle vision of “Nature meets City.” This builds upon the vision set forth in the environmental documentation and previous stakeholder engagement.

WSDOT intends to implement the SR 520 program in a manner that yields affordable solutions and fosters **groundbreaking sustainability practices** that support regional and local connectivity, ecology and the use of low-carbon materials. Further, the design of the corridor will balance aesthetics, functionality, scale and sense of speed along the SR 520 facility to provide a memorable experience for all users.



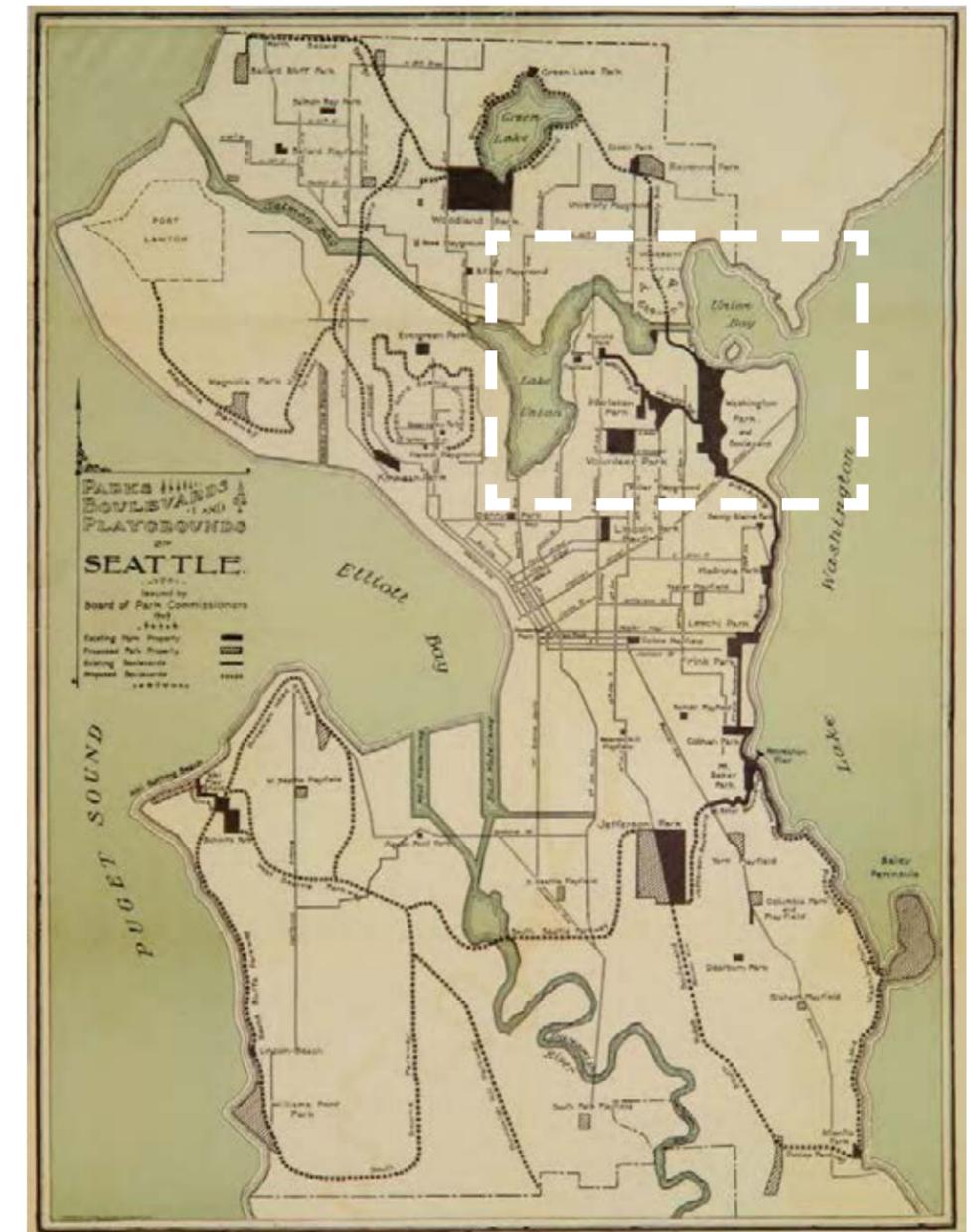
SCDP public workshops welcomed participants of all ages

Specifically:

- For motorists, the highway corridor will offer a **safe, efficient roadway** that represents a series of gateways to and from downtown Seattle, across Portage Bay, Montlake, and the shoreline of Lake Washington.
- For pedestrians, **pathways will be comfortable, visible and safeguarded from vehicles** on adjacent roadways. They will be well-marked and offer a mixture of amenities to suit specific needs including efficient pathways to transit stops, playgrounds and other destinations, and pathways for recreational purposes.
- For cyclists, routes will provide **excellent connections, sufficient sight distances, and reasonable grades.**
- For transit users, convenient access to transit systems will be supplemented by safe, comfortable shelters.
- For community, design features will be scaled to their location and vantage points including bridge elements, tunnel portals, and overlooks.
- For community, aesthetic features will be **“naturalistic-contemporary”** and complement their natural and residential surroundings.
- For habitat, the corridor will complement and enhance the **blue-green** (water-land) **ecological setting** through which it passes.

“The blue-green qualities of the corridor can be more vibrantly revealed and enhanced by the SR 520 project, benefiting those who live nearby and those who pass through.”

- Final Report on SR 520 Westside Sustainability and Urban Design, Sustainability Expert Review Panel, September 24, 2011



1909 Seattle Parks and Boulevard Plan based upon recommendations by John and Charles Olmsted for the City of Seattle master planning

Blue-Green Natural and Urban Axes

The SR 520 project has the opportunity to highlight a sequence of **stunning gateways and scenic panoramas** for the City of Seattle not present on I-5 and I-90. Existing and potential gateways include: Lake Washington, the wooded Foster Island, the portals of the Montlake lid, Portage Bay Bridge, the gateways of East Lake Washington Boulevard and Washington Park Arboretum, and the portals of the 10th and Delmar lid. As users on SR 520 travel through this sequence of gateways, they experience a blue-green tapestry of lakes, marshes, glades and urban forests. This natural tapestry transitions into the urban fabric of Montlake and Roanoke/ North Capitol Hill neighborhoods and parks as **“Nature meets City.”**

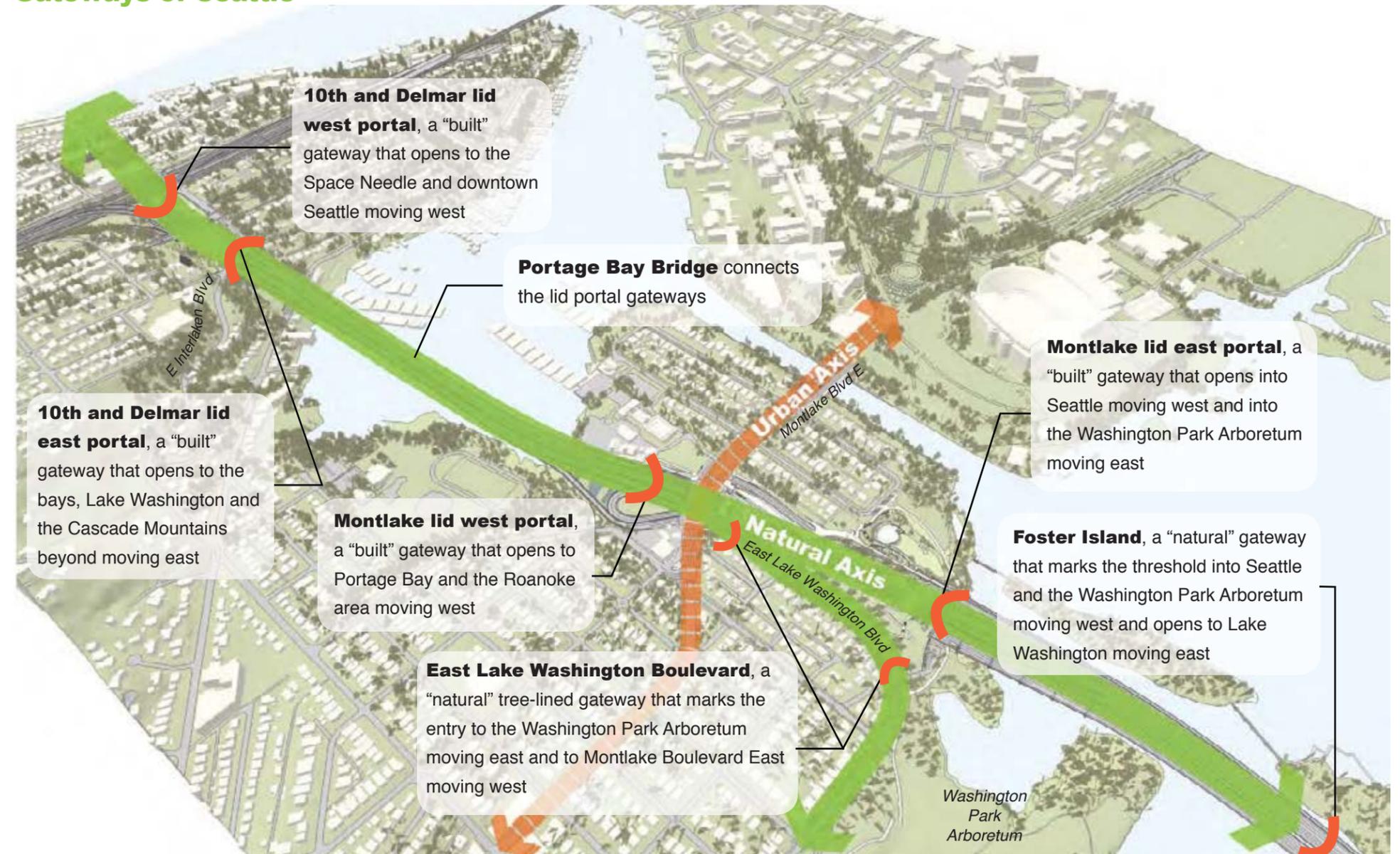
The SR 520 project has the potential to be a catalyst for connecting or reconnecting these vital **natural (ecological)** and **urban (built environment) axes**. The project honors the legacy established by the Olmsted brothers in the City of Seattle 1909 Parks and Boulevard Plan and looks forward to future sustainable infrastructure needs. These axes comprise:

- An east-west **natural axis** along which a reforested SR 520 project corridor and restored shorelines can complete a gap in the Seattle

open and green space network plan by linking East Interlaken Boulevard, the Washington Park Arboretum and Lake Washington

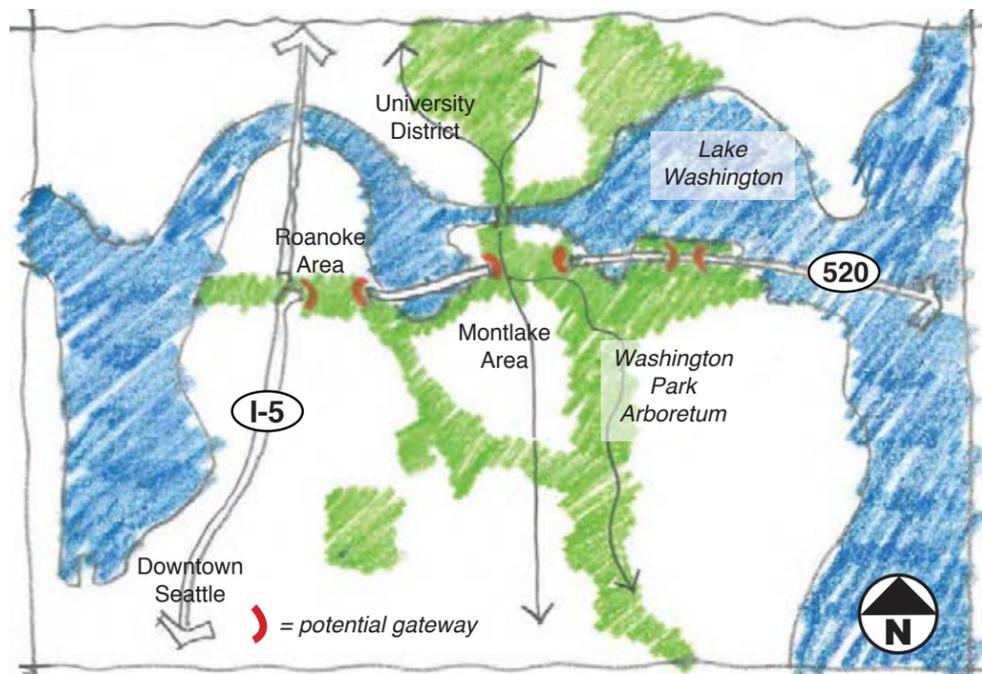
- A north-south **urban axis** that begins with Montlake Boulevard Northeast at the University of Washington and extends south along 23rd Avenue East to Capitol Hill as well as extending to East Lake Washington Boulevard, where the opportunity exists for the project to recreate the Olmsted vision of a grand “parkway” that extends through the Washington Park Arboretum.

Gateways of Seattle



What is a gateway?

Gateways are natural features, such as trees or waterways, or built elements, such as bridges, buildings, signage or art work, that define a city or area entrance or boundaries and provide a sense of identity and arrival. A gateway can be large or small in scale, and linear or singular, depending on context.



A conceptual-level diagram of how SR 520 could enhance gateway opportunities and build upon the 1909 vision to connect Seattle's existing green spaces, boulevards and waterways

DRAFT ONLY
for public comment

Design Framework

The design framework is the structure that supports the work of exploring **design opportunities**, developing **design preferences** and making choices that will lead to a coherent, integrated set of **design recommendations**. The framework is built upon the foundation established by the vision statement, and its structural elements are the shared goals and guiding principles that emerged through the SCDP.

The vision presented in the preceding section was derived from extensive feedback received during SCDP concerning the function, character and quality of the new places and connections created by the SR 520 project. They build upon the refined vision, which is rooted in the Olmsted brothers' concept of connected parks and green boulevards for the City of Seattle. These goals can be organized into the three broad principles of **Expression, Sustainability** and **Utility**.

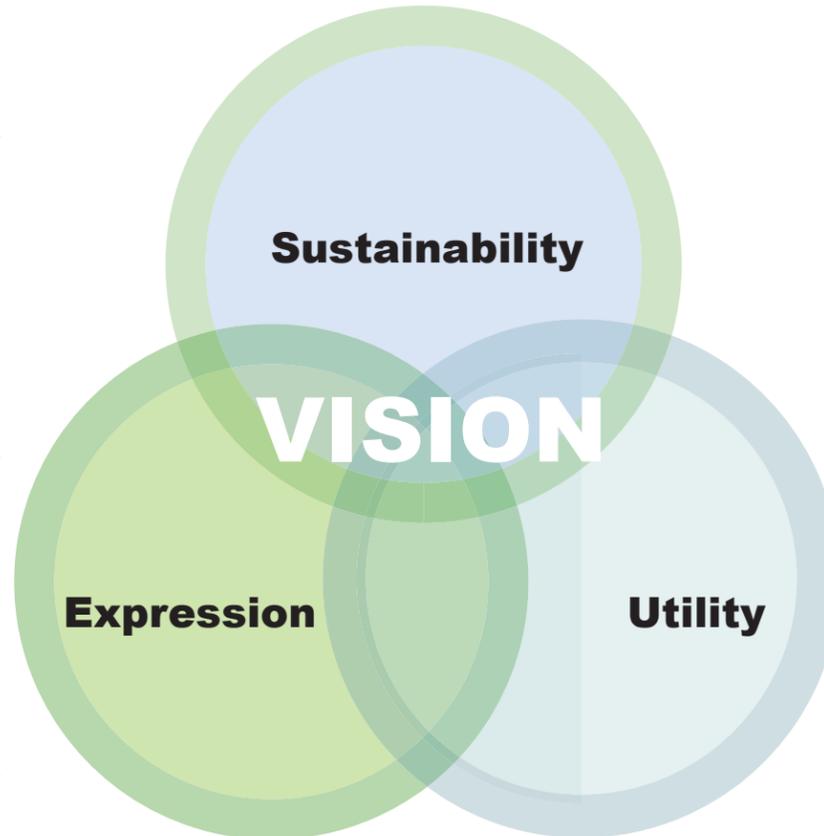
The principle of **Expression** conveys the importance of creating a corridor that is visually and physically compatible with the surrounding landscapes and communities and is hospitable to a variety of uses by people of all abilities. This supports the goals of providing safe travel routes, engaging a “naturalistic/contemporary” aesthetic that is in keeping with the surroundings and establishing the west side of SR 520 as a memorable and identifiable regional approach, or gateway, to Seattle.

The principle of **Sustainability** expresses the commitment to identifying design solutions that support the long-term reduction of greenhouse gases, the use of low-carbon materials and maintainable facilities. This supports the overarching goal of implementing affordable solutions and sustainable practices that support regional and local connectivity, ecology and the use of low-carbon materials.

The principle of **Utility** seeks to create places and connections that are functional during and after construction. In exploring urban design solutions, particularly around the 10th and Delmar and Montlake lids, the design team sought to maximize the benefits derived from the lids by “layering” as many functions (or “program elements”) as practical into the lids: ecological, social, aesthetic. Utility also seeks to reduce impacts during construction phasing and ensure that final design allows for flexibility and opportunities for innovation.

“Design this project with walking and biking as a priority. As with the rest of SR 520, let's not miss this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to finish connecting our communities for use by all people.”

- Participant comment, SCDP Public Workshop, May 19, 2012



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Existing East Lake Washington Boulevard, looking west

Elements of Continuity and Distinction

The refined vision and design principles that provide the foundation for continued design development build upon historic precedents, extensive public input and professional design experience. As part of the conceptual design process, the WSDOT design team explored opportunities for creating a consistent visual and aesthetic relationship among elements that appear throughout the corridor, or **elements of continuity**, to improve user guidance and experience. These include maintaining a similar treatment of:

- Architectural components (columns, railings, portals, etc.)
- Planting palettes and signage for the regional shared-use path
- Belvederes (a widened area of the shared-use path that provides a place to stop, rest, and enjoy the view, typically including benches and interpretive signage as well as a low screen wall for protection from the main path)
- Roadside vegetation
- Facility retaining walls

“One of the enduring principles that helped with neighborhood redevelopment along the Southwest Corridor in Boston is that every square foot of the highway corridor was to be owned (and maintained) by someone. Neighborhoods and businesses championed, adopted, and built elements along the Southwest Corridor in a way that enhanced the neighborhoods’ livability.”

- Final Report on SR 520 Westside Sustainability and Urban Design, Sustainability Expert Review Panel, Sept. 24, 2011

In other areas, the WSDOT design team listened to public feedback that indicated a desire for unique aesthetic approaches, or **elements of distinction**, based upon the surrounding context to the design - the “look and feel” - of singular elements such as the lid portal entries or the Portage Bay Bridge. These elements of continuity and distinction are articulated in subsequent sections of this document.



Conceptual Rendering

The planting strip on the south side of East Lake Washington Boulevard will be widened to protect and improve health of existing large trees and to be consistent with the design of the boulevard to the south and the north entrance to Washington Park Arboretum (view facing north)