

## **Federal Judge Upholds 520 Environmental Analysis, Construction Continues** **Local News**

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - Just two weeks after the case was argued in court, a federal judge has dismissed a lawsuit that sought to overturn the Washington State Department of Transportation's environmental analysis of a new State Route 520 bridge. U.S. District Court Judge Ricardo S. Martinez issued the ruling July 25, rejecting an effort by a group to force further analysis of alternative designs for improvements to the SR 520 corridor from Seattle to Medina. Our analysis was thorough and exhaustive, and we hope that the ruling by Judge Martinez puts an end to the debate about mobility improvements to this vital corridor - state Transportation Secretary Paula Hammond *With the court's decision, WSDOT can continue with construction of SR 520 improvements as planned and funded.* The lawsuit targeted WSDOT's final environmental impact statement (FEIS) for the "SR 520, I-5 to Medina: Bridge Replacement and HOV Project" and the Federal Highway Administration's Record of Decision (ROD) concluding the analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Opponents criticized WSDOT for not further considering a four-lane bridge design.

The SR 520 program replaces the aging and vulnerable four-lane floating bridge with a six-lane corridor that includes a transit/HOV lane and two general-purpose lanes in each direction. Planning and environmental analysis began in 1997 to improve safety and mobility in the SR 520 corridor from Seattle to Redmond and was completed in 2011. Judge Martinez's ruling noted that WSDOT's goal for the project was not unreasonably narrow, fits within state and legislative goals for improving traffic flow across Lake Washington on all routes, and is consistent with the regional priority of improving the region's HOV system. In his ruling, Judge Martinez said: "The voluminous record in this matter reflects great concern on the part of defendants (WSDOT) for the impact of the SR 520 replacement bridge project upon the environment and the community, as to the immediate neighborhood of the bridge itself and the greater regional community which will use the bridge. Plaintiff has not challenged the decision to replace the existing bridge; the dispute is over the choice of design and footprint for the new bridge. Through the analysis set forth above, the Court is satisfied that the agencies have taken the requisite "hard look" at the environmental consequences of the proposed project. The Court finds that the FEIS and ROD in this matter fulfill both the letter and spirit of NEPA, and by analogy, SEPA (state Environmental Policy Act). The Court also finds the elimination of the 4-lane Alternative from consideration after the DEIS (draft EIS) was neither arbitrary, capricious, nor an abuse of discretion." Construction of components for a replacement floating bridge on Lake Washington is under way in Kenmore, Tacoma and Aberdeen. The first 12 of 77 pontoons needed for a replacement floating bridge are complete in Tacoma and Aberdeen, and are expected on Lake Washington this summer. The full text of the ruling is posted online at [www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/SR520bridge](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/SR520bridge).