

Alaskan Way Viaduct Replacement Program
North Portal Working Group – Aug. 2, 2012
Meeting Summary

Working Group Attendees

- Warren Aakervik, Ballard Oil
- Glenn Avery, Queen Anne Community Council
- Rachel Ben-Shmuel, Vulcan
- John Coney, Uptown Alliance
- Matt Curry, South Lake Union Chamber of Commerce
- Tessa Greigor, Cascade Bicycle Club
- Tim Hillis, Charlie's Produce (on behalf of Bob Viggers)
- Robert Nellams, Seattle Center
- Eugene Wasserman, North Seattle Industrial Association

Working Group Members Not in Attendance

- Howard Cohen, Seattle Hotel Association
- Stephen DeForest, Magnolia Community Club
- Tom Graff, Belltown Business Association
- Lorie Groth, South Lake Union Community Council
- Ron Hildebrandt, Trident Seafoods at Interbay
- Jim Miller, Millionair Club
- Bree Moore, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
- Lee Newgent, Seattle/King County Building and Construction Trades Council
- Vince O'Halloran, Puget Sound Ports Council and Sailors Union of the Pacific
- Elaine Wine, Ballard
- Bruce Wynn, Interbay Neighborhood Association

Agencies and Staff in Attendance

- Matt Preedy, Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT)
- Bob Chandler, Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT)
- Mike Johnson, SDOT
- Angela Brady, SDOT
- Eric Tweit, SDOT
- Mike Merritt, Port of Seattle
- Victor Obeso, King County Department of Transportation (KCDOT)

Agenda Item #1 – Welcome and Introductions

Bob Chandler, SDOT Assistant Director, Strategic Projects, welcomed the working group members and the public to the meeting. The meeting's focus was to provide a look at upcoming construction, including associated traffic or other impacts, and gather feedback from working group members.

Agenda Item #2 – North End Construction

Angela Brady, SDOT Project Manager, provided an update on the Mercer Corridor Program. Victor Obeso, KCDOT Metro Manager, provided an update on the Aurora Avenue North

Business Access and Transit (BAT) lane. Matt Preedy, WSDOT Deputy Program Administrator, provided an update on north end SR 99 Tunnel Project activities and reviewed the previous meeting's action items.

Mercer East Project

SDOT expects to open Mercer Street to two-way traffic on Aug. 27. After two-way traffic begins, expect restrictions of Valley Street and Fairview Avenue North until early 2013. The Mercer East Project is anticipated to be complete in summer 2013.

Mercer West Project

The Mercer West contract will be advertised this October, with construction expected to begin in early 2013. Starting in early 2013, SR 99/Aurora Avenue North will be narrowed to two lanes in each direction near Mercer Street through the end of 2015 in order to reconstruct the Mercer Street underpass. Construction of the Mercer West Project is anticipated to be complete in mid-2015.

Aurora Avenue North BAT Lane

In June, a BAT lane was added to southbound SR 99/Aurora Avenue North between the Dexter Avenue North exit and Mercer Street. This new lane keeps buses moving during Mercer West Project construction and SR 99 tunnel utility relocation work. Expect RapidRide E Line to start serving Aurora Avenue North between downtown Seattle and Shoreline in 2013.

SR 99 Tunnel Project

At the north portal, crews continue to relocate utilities near Sixth Avenue North and John Street through spring 2013. Initial work on the boring machine receiving pit will begin in September with the installation of a noise wall and piles for the receiving pit's walls.

John Coney: During Mercer East Stage 3, will the right lane from westbound Mercer Street to Fairview Avenue North be right-turn only?

Answer: Yes.

Matt Curry: What happens at the junction of Mercer and Broad streets in Stage 3?

Answer: We will connect Mercer Street to Broad Street. There will be three westbound lanes on Mercer Street that will narrow to two lanes at approximately Ninth Avenue North.

Warren Aakervik: When westbound Mercer Street narrows to two lanes at Ninth Avenue North during Stage 3, will there be a right-turn pocket?

Answer: Yes, there will be a right-turn pocket, two through lanes to Broad Street, and a left-turn lane to southbound Ninth Avenue North.

Matt Curry: Despite right-turn-only signage on eastbound Mercer Street at Dexter Avenue North, cars continue to block the intersection.

Answer: When we open Mercer Street to two-way traffic, we will remove that drop lane and move it to Ninth Avenue North.

Matt Curry: Tenants at the Mirabella retirement community will be concerned about bus reroutes on Eastlake Avenue and Fairview Avenue North.

Answer: SDOT has reached out to Mirabella and is coordinating closely with Metro on outreach.

Warren Aakervik: During Stage 3, there will be dozens of trucks traveling out of South Lake Union toward Fairview Avenue North. How are they expected to get to I-5?

Answer: They can take Terry Avenue North or Ninth Avenue North.

John Coney: Are you opening the section of Mercer Street east of Fairview Avenue North for access to Eastlake and Capitol Hill?

Answer: We hope to open that up when the Mercer East Project opens Mercer Street to two-way traffic this fall. We will report on it when it opens.

Tessa Gregor: What are your planned bicycle detours related to the final stages of the Mercer East Project?

Answer: We will advertise bike and freight maps and routes on the project website soon.

Eugene Wasserman: How long will the reconstruction of Aurora Avenue North between Harrison Street and Denny Way take? What will be the name of this street when complete?

Answer: Construction will occur between 2016 and mid-2017. We have not determined a name for the street yet.

Eugene Wasserman: What is the length of time between the opening of the SR 99 tunnel and the decommissioning of the Battery Street Tunnel?

Answer: At the end of 2015, the Alaskan Way Viaduct, including the Battery Street Tunnel, will close entirely up to 17 days before the SR 99 tunnel opens, while we make the final connection to the new tunnel.

Eugene Wasserman: I'd like to see a schedule for the narrowing down to two lanes of SR 99 /Aurora Avenue North.

Warren Aakervik: What is happening at the intersection of West Mercer Place and Elliott Avenue?

Answer: We are not making any changes.

Warren Aakervik: Will right turns on southbound Aurora Avenue North to Denny Way accommodate freight?

Answer: We think so but will look into it.

Warren Aakervik: What haul routes will trucks use for the boring machine receiving pit?

Answer: We haven't determined those yet.

Robert Nellam: Off-peak hours (for receiving pit hauls) are often the Seattle Center's peak hours.

Eugene Wasserman: Our north end groups are upset about the southbound BAT lane on SR 99/Aurora Avenue North, especially that it was implemented during utility relocation work. I never see buses in the lane and it is backing up freight. You should consider limiting the lane to peak hours only.

Answer: We have been working on this change for several years and have coordinated with the City of Seattle and businesses along the corridor. The purpose of the BAT lane is to improve through traffic and speed and reliability for transit.

Warren Aakervik: Have you studied allowing trucks with more than five axles to use the BAT lane?

Answer: It would likely negatively impact both trucks and transit. The stop-and-go movement of buses is not ideal for freight.

Eugene Wasserman: The Magnolia Community Club is unhappy with the BAT lane on 15th Avenue Northwest. Some think that the BAT lane has made the street unsafe and it affects businesses.

John Coney: The Uptown community considers the Aurora Avenue North RapidRide vital for Seattle Center and Uptown. Also, allowing hazardous freight vehicles in the BAT lane seems unsafe.

Matt Curry: Those in the South Lake Union neighborhood and near the Gates Foundation experience safety improvements with the new BAT lane. When the lane closure is lifted on southbound SR 99/Aurora Avenue North, will the BAT lane extend farther south?

Answer: There will be no changes to the BAT lane.

Agenda Item #3 – Other SR 99 Tunnel Construction

Matt Preedy provided an update on the boring machine launch pit near the stadiums and viaduct reinforcement work. The SR 99 tunnel settlement monitoring program will be reviewed in more detail at another meeting. Near SODO, excavation continues on the launch pit. Fabrication of the tunnel boring machine is approximately 30 percent complete. Crews continue to reinforce a two-block section of the viaduct, between South Washington and Columbia streets, to prepare for when the boring machine passes beneath. To complete this work, southbound SR 99 is closed between the Battery Street Tunnel and the West Seattle Bridge Sunday through Thursday nights. These nighttime closures will last through the fall and are weather dependent.

Installation of monitoring equipment will begin in August and will last through mid-2013. The equipment will be installed on buildings and in the ground along the tunnel route to detect ground movement due to tunneling.

Eugene Wasserman: Please allow an opportunity for north and south portal working group members to view the boring machine when it arrives next year.

Agenda Item #4 – South End Construction

Matt Preedy provided an update on the south end viaduct replacement project. The new northbound SR 99 bridge will open in September. When open, there will be two northbound SR

99 lanes and a bus lane from the West Seattle Bridge to South Massachusetts Street, and three southbound lanes. Guy F. Atkinson Construction will construct the South Atlantic Street overpass, which is scheduled to open by the end of 2013.

Agenda Item #5 – Working Group Member Feedback

Bob Chandler asked the group to provide feedback on the topics discussed. An overall theme from the group was concern for bicycle and pedestrian safety throughout construction of the Mercer corridor and SR 99 tunnel projects.

The concerns expressed by the group included:

- Bicycle and pedestrian safety in the South Lake Union and Uptown neighborhoods.
- Adequate countdown signals at intersections and clear crosswalk markings.
- Bicycle safety during the closure of Ninth Avenue North.
- Construction schedules and impacts to access to the Queen Anne neighborhood.
- Enforcement of jaywalking and illegal biking.
- Fairview Avenue North closure and associated traffic impacts.
- Mercer West Project funding and coordination between projects to minimize disruption to the Seattle Center.

Tim Hillis: With more construction upcoming on the waterfront related to the new Alaskan Way, what will you do to alleviate congestion for cruise ship tourism on the waterfront?

Answer: We can address the waterfront schedule in more detail at a later date. The Port of Seattle works very closely with the cruise industry.

Agenda Item #6 – Southend Transit Pathways

Victor Obeso provided an update on the downtown southend transit pathways. King County Metro examined transit pathways to replace the loss of the viaduct's mid-town ramps when the viaduct is removed and traffic begins using the new Alaskan Way. The pathways at Columbia and Main streets were analyzed using modeling and public surveys. King County Metro is focusing on the Columbia Street pathway as a preferred option and will continue with additional evaluations.

Matt Curry: There doesn't appear to be a difference in the travel times between the two proposed transit pathways.

Answer: The difference is that the populations served vary and there are delays at different intersections.

Warren Aakervik: I see the Columbia Street pathway as problematic for bus turning radiuses.

Answer: The turning radius at Third Avenue and Columbia Street is a concern, but not a fatal flaw. We are considering what changes would be needed to make these pathways operational.

Matt Curry: Most people I work with prefer the Columbia Street pathway option. How would this pathway conflict with ferry terminal operations?

Answer: Once a pathway is selected, we will revisit how it will function with the new Alaskan Way and the ferry terminal.

Warren Aakervik: If the Columbia Street pathway is selected, could transit use the South Main and South Washington routes in bad weather?

Answer: Metro always has snow or inclement weather reroutes.

Eugene Wasserman: I would like to see how the different transit pathways would affect travel times on Alaskan Way.

Answer: We can give you some information on this when we provide the new Alaskan Way updates at another meeting.

Eugene Wasserman: It would be great if buses traveling to the north end neighborhoods could bypass downtown instead of entering at Columbia or Main streets. Also, addressing bus engine noise may make the pathway options more agreeable in Pioneer Square.

John Coney: The northwestern neighborhoods enjoy using transit to reach Pioneer Square and the stadiums. The Columbia Street pathway may create a need for additional transfers to reach these areas.

Answer: There would be a transit stop at South Dearborn and South King streets, available to both north and south directions.

Eugene Wasserman: What are the Pioneer Square neighborhood's main objections to transit pathways in their neighborhood?

Answer: Primarily noise and bus volumes.

Warren Aakervik: Are the new RapidRide buses quieter?

Answer: Marginally so.

Matt Curry: Did your analysis of the transit pathways take into consideration the Spokane Street Viaduct's new Fourth Avenue South off-ramp and First Avenue South on-ramp?

Answer: Yes, we considered the Spokane Street Viaduct Widening Project as complete during our analysis.

Agenda Item #7 – Action Items and Adjourn

Discussion of the new Alaskan Way will be postponed to a future meeting. Bob Chandler thanked everyone for attending and reviewed the meeting's action items.

Action items:

- Discuss upcoming waterfront construction, including schedule and coordination with southend transit pathways, cruise ships and the ferry terminal, at a future meeting.
- Provide more detail at a future meeting on the SR 99 tunnel settlement monitoring program.
- Provide follow-up on the freight turning radius from southbound SR 99/Aurora Avenue North to Denny Way.
- Provide information regarding timing and scope of lane closures on Aurora Avenue North when SR 99 tunnel north portal/Mercer West construction begins. Create an easy-to-share handout with this information.

- Determine the future name of Aurora Avenue North between Harrison Street and Denny Way.
- Distribute a copy of the SDOT/WSDOT policy regarding future special events on the viaduct.
- When feasible, offer a tour to working group members of the tunnel boring machine when it arrives in 2013.