

Alaskan Way Viaduct

Central Waterfront Public Scoping Open House Summary

Feb. 23 and 24, 2009

Meeting overview

In January 2009, Governor Chris Gregoire, King County Executive Ron Sims and Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels announced their recommendation to replace the central waterfront portion of the Alaskan Way Viaduct and Seawall. The recommendation includes a bored tunnel beneath downtown, transit investments, and downtown waterfront and city street improvements. The seawall will also be replaced between Colman Dock and Pine Street.

WSDOT, King County and the City of Seattle hosted two open houses to give the public a first look at the plan to replace the Alaskan Way Viaduct since the January announcement. The open houses also served as public scoping meetings for the NEPA process. The purpose of scoping is to gather public input on the environmental issues that should be considered in the environmental review.

Advertisement

Several methods were used to advertise the open houses:

- An announcement in an Alaskan Way Viaduct (AWV) program e-mail update to more than 5,000 subscribers.
- A notice on the AWV program Web site (www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/viaduct).
- An e-mail to elected leaders and key stakeholders, including Seattle-area state legislators, City Council members, County Council members, and Stakeholder Advisory Committee members.
- A notice to the community calendars of citywide and community newspapers.
- Print advertisements in The Seattle Times, Seattle Post-Intelligencer and the Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce.
- Online display advertisements on the Web sites of The Seattle Times, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, West Seattle Blog, Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce and The Stranger.
- Posters distributed in public buildings and popular businesses in the West Seattle and Ballard neighborhoods.
- Press release to print, radio and television reporters.

Format of the open houses

After signing in at the registration table, attendees received a meeting guide and had the option of picking up informational materials. Though attendees could visit the stations in any order, a logical progression was suggested.

- Station 1 – Welcome and overview
- Station 2 – Investments in the transportation system

- Station 3 – Providing mobility for the future
- Station 4 – A fiscally responsible solution
- Station 5 – Project scoping and next steps

Attendees were given the opportunity to provide verbal comments to a court reporter. They were also encouraged to complete comment forms, which included questions regarding the bored tunnel hybrid and issues that should be considered in the central waterfront environmental document.

Attendance

Approximately 120 people attended the West Seattle open house, and 100 people attended the open house held in the Ballard neighborhood.

What we heard – Ballard

In Ballard, 17 comment forms were collected and eight people gave verbal comments to the court reporter. The comments below are from the comment forms only.

A common concern with the bored tunnel alternative was the loss of on- and off-ramps at Elliott and Western avenues. Five people made comments on this topic.

- Add Western/Belltown interchange or dramatically improve western part of Mercer Street for access.
- Lack of Western on/off ramps severely limits access from Belltown/Queen Anne/Magnolia.
- Connections to and from Magnolia, Ballard/Interbay industry and cruise ship terminals are not addressed in the intended tunnel design.

A related concern was access to the bored tunnel from northwest neighborhoods and downtown. Four people made comments on this topic.

- I have concerns about access to the north entrance of the tunnel from Magnolia, Ballard, Interbay and west Queen Anne.
- Lack of access from the tunnel exit to Magnolia and the Ballard industrial area will have a devastating effect on the maritime and fishing industries.
- Access to the tunnel's north end from Magnolia, Ballard, Interbay, West Queen Anne residents is awful – going on Mercer is a bottleneck when made two ways.

Other concerns ranged from reduced capacity with the bored tunnel to its cost.

- How is the bored tunnel going to be paid for? I believe there are other, less expensive options that should have been considered.
- It looks to me that we are losing traffic lanes with a bored tunnel, which is only two lanes each direction, and loading the surface streets with local traffic.
- I object to going from 6 lanes down to 4!
- The bored tunnel will only have two-thirds the vehicle capacity as the existing viaduct and the tunnel has not been vetted for cost overruns.

What we heard – West Seattle

In West Seattle, 26 comment forms were collected and nine verbal comments were given to the court reporter. The comments below are from the comment forms only.

As in Ballard, West Seattle attendees also commented regularly about access; however, they were more concerned about access to downtown. Eight people made comments on this topic.

- Going under the city with no access to downtown makes for much longer commute times on surface roads.
- Access to downtown from south and southwest Seattle and from Ballard becomes much worse.
- Cost, capacity, no access to downtown provides less of a service to taxpayers than the present viaduct, which serves us very well.

Five people expressed concern about reduced vehicle capacity in the bored tunnel compared to the current viaduct.

- It is a lot of money for only two lanes each way when we have three now, and it can't keep the flow moving.
- Traffic will be choked off by the reduction of lanes. There will be back-ups like you haven't seen on the viaduct.

Three people commented about transit or the proposed motor vehicle excise tax.

- The RapidRide bus option needs to enhance the transit riding experience - clean, well-lighted, safe and reliable.
- Transit links to the southbound Sound Transit light rail to the airport from West Seattle aren't great. We don't want to transfer from buses with our luggage at downtown stations such as Pioneer Square or the International District.

Five people expressed enthusiasm for the bored tunnel hybrid alternative.

- I am in favor of this alternative! How lucky we are to have the best solution agreed to by the state/county/city.
- No plan is perfect. The current proposal is better than any other so far. I hope we move ahead as quickly as possible.

Four people commented that all of the properties around the viaduct benefitting from its removal should pay a large property tax due to increased property values; and two people commented about tolling the tunnel.

A transcript of speakers' comments and a list of comments received on comment forms are available upon request.

Next steps

Comments from the public scoping open houses will be shared with program leadership and the environmental team.