

Alaskan Way Viaduct and Seawall Replacement Program
South Portal Working Group – June 1, 2011
Meeting Summary

Working Group Attendees

- Jerome Cohen, West Seattle Chamber of Commerce
- Jim Davis, Feet First (on behalf of Lisa Quinn)
- Jan Drago, The Alliance for Pioneer Square
- John Huey, Viking Bank and Duwamish Transportation Management Association
- Ron Kieswether, Oak Harbor Freight Lines
- Don Newby, Burien
- John Odland, MacMillan-Piper
- Vlad Oustimovitch, West Seattle
- Susan Ranf, Seattle Mariners
- Paul Schieck, Qwest Field and Event Center
- Pete Spalding, Delridge
- Herald Ugles, International Longshore and Warehouse Union
- Bill Weise, Silver Cloud Inn
- Cynthia Welti, Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust

Working Group Members Not in Attendance

- Linda Anderson, Amalgamated Transit Union
- Michael Beranbaum, Joint Council of Teamsters No. 28
- Bill/Robert Bloxom, Bloxom Company
- Barbara Cole, International District
- Marty Oppenheimer, South Park
- Mike Peringer, SODO Business Association
- Ed Shilley, Nucor Steel
- Brent Stavig, Starbucks

Agencies and Staff in Attendance

- Ron Paananen, Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT)
- Linea Laird, WSDOT
- Matt Preedy, WSDOT
- Bob Chandler, Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT)
- Mike Johnson, SDOT
- Eric Tweit, SDOT
- Ron Posthuma, King County Department of Transportation (KCDOT)
- Mike Merritt, Port of Seattle

Agenda Item #1 – Welcome and Introductions

Ron Paananen, WSDOT Program Administrator, welcomed the working group members and the public to the meeting. He introduced a new member of the group, Jan Drago, representing the Alliance for Pioneer Square.

The meeting's focus was to provide information about south end viaduct replacement construction and several topics related to the bored tunnel alternative, including the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and the proposed construction schedule.

At the last meeting it was suggested that WSDOT install billboards to relay construction-related information to drivers coming from Burien and other areas south of the project area. WSDOT has been using new electronic driver information signs on SR 99 and SR 509 to announce traveler information. Both SDOT and WSDOT Traffic Management Centers have shared messaging and strategy. We also continue to work with Burien and West Seattle blogs, as well as others, to get the word out about upcoming closures.

Another suggestion was for project staff to work with transportation companies such as cruise lines, the airport and rental car companies to ensure their customers are aware of upcoming traffic revisions and closures in the south end. We are working with the Port of Seattle to get notifications to the cruise lines and with Sea-Tac airport to share this information. We are still working to get information to the rental car companies.

Agenda Item #2 – General Program Updates

Ron Paananen provided general program updates and Bob Chandler, SDOT Project Manager, provided updates on the Elliott Bay Seawall and Waterfront Seattle projects. Mike Merritt, Port of Seattle Manager of Local Government Relations, provided an update on the East Marginal Way Grade Separation project.

Major Public Project Construction Variance

At the last working group meeting we provided information about construction-related noise and mitigation measures and gathered feedback on WSDOT's Draft Major Public Project Construction Variance. This noise variance is for construction work at the proposed bored tunnel's portals. The City's Department of Planning and Development is hosting a public meeting on June 8 on our noise variance application.

Tolling Advisory Committee

A provision in one of the three City-State agreements for the bored tunnel project established a Tolling Advisory Committee. The committee has not yet been formed but it would help to assess and make recommendations to mitigate traffic changes caused by tolling the proposed bored tunnel. Information will be sent to working group members regarding the committee makeup and first meeting date once they have been determined.

Automated Viaduct Closure Gates Project

During the next viaduct weekend closure, the system will undergo further testing. We anticipate testing to be complete by mid-June.

Third Avenue S. Street Repairs

Members of the working group asked that we look into repairs along Third Avenue S. between S. Stacey, S. Walker and S. Holgate streets. Traffic could use this street during viaduct replacement construction. We are working with SDOT to improve the condition of this street.

South Spokane Street Project

Construction is nearing 60 percent completion. SDOT anticipates opening the First Avenue S. ramps in the fourth quarter of 2011. Later this year, after the First Avenue S. ramps are opened, traffic will be shifted from the old structure onto the new structure so the deck on the old structure can be refurbished.

Referendum Update

On May 20 a King County Superior Court Judge ruled that one provision of the City-State bored tunnel agreements will go to the voters. That one section is about the process the Seattle City Council will use to confirm the agreements after the project's environmental process is concluded. The judge said that the vote would have no effect on whether or not a tunnel is built. The agreements are important because they protect the city's interests with regard to street use and utilities during construction. As directed by the Legislature, WSDOT is continuing to move forward with publishing the project's Final EIS in July, issuing the Record of Decision in mid-August and giving the contractor notice to proceed for final design and construction in late August.

John Huey: When is the Final EIS expected to be complete?

Answer: It will be released in mid-July.

East Marginal Way Grade Separation Project

This summer, construction will continue with the concrete deck pavements and roadways. Substantial completion is scheduled for September. SDOT will be working on S. Horton Street, which will also involve a detour on East Marginal Way S.

First Avenue S. Work

Seattle City Light is constructing concrete utility ducts for new power lines under First Avenue S. Major power lines will be moved from the existing viaduct and will run through these new ducts. First Avenue S. through Pioneer Square will be closed in segments through mid-June to complete this work.

Construction Coordination

The agencies coordinate – both short-term and long-term – with private developers, private and public utilities, other projects and special events. An example of this coordination is the Horton Street Bridge Project. Super girders needed for the S. Holgate Street to S. King Street Viaduct Replacement Project were scheduled to be delivered prior to the start of the Horton Street Bridge Project, allowing them to be transported through the area without the added complication of a bridge detour.

SR 99 Intelligent Transportation Systems

The electronic message boards that are part of this system are fully operational now. SDOT can manage the ones on city streets from their Traffic Management Center. The new signs have proved to be very useful during weekend closures, work on Mercer Street and with the recent lane reduction on the south end of SR 99.

Waterfront Seattle

The Waterfront Seattle project had its second public design presentation on May 19, with more than 900 people attending. At the meeting James Corner and the project team presented very early design ideas for the new waterfront, such as new pedestrian connections from Steinbrueck Park to the Aquarium above the new Alaskan Way surface street. More information can be found at www.waterfrontseattle.org. In late summer or early fall there will be more definitive ideas of what this project will look like.

Elliott Bay Seawall Project

The project team has presented two seawall alternatives to the City Council. They are framing the alternatives as bracketed options. Alternative A keeps the wall more-or-less in place and adds habitat improvements along the waterfront. Alternative B includes a more dramatic change from today's seawall, pulling the wall inland in all areas, particularly from the historic piers up to Pier 62. This presents opportunities for additional habitat enhancements and different design possibilities. The decision on where the seawall will be located will happen sometime later this year. The intent is to start construction before the Alaskan Way Viaduct is removed, so the new seawall is in place when waterfront improvement construction begins.

Agenda Item #3 – S. Holgate Street to S. King Street Viaduct Replacement Construction Update

Matt Preedy, WSDOT Director of South End Construction, provided an update on south end viaduct replacement construction. Mike Johnson, SDOT Project Manager, provided information on the Alaskan Way S. closure.

SR 99 On- and Off-Ramps in SODO

At the last meeting in February, WSDOT was preparing to demolish the SR 99 off-ramp that touched down on First Avenue S. Crews completed that job three weeks ahead of schedule, in time for both the first Mariners' home game and the first Sounders' home game. Matt pointed out a photo of one of the emergency gates installed as part of the automated viaduct closure system. The gates in the S. Holgate Street to S. King Street area will be moved around during the next five years as the ramps are reconfigured in that area.

East Frontage Road S.

This new street, a north south arterial between S. Royal Brougham Way and S. Atlantic Street, will be a part of the new SR 99 detour route. Currently, it is absorbing capacity from First Avenue S. and providing access to the interstate via S. Atlantic Street and Edgar Martinez Drive S. It also plays a key role in the northbound Alaskan Way S. detour route.

New Southbound SR 99 Roadway

Foundation work on the new southbound mainline bridge began in February. This work consists of deep soil mixing, pile driving and drilled shafts and will continue for about another month. The foundation depth of parts of the new bridge is 280 feet, while the existing viaduct foundation depth is approximately 80 feet.

After building the foundations, we build the columns that will support the new roadway. We have been pouring columns and building cross beams since March and have about three quarters of them complete at this point.

Once the columns are built, piers are formed on top of them. We have about half of these completed to-date. Two piers will support super girders over S. Atlantic Street and the BNSF railroad tracks. These super girders are 205 feet long and 8.5 feet tall and are the largest girders that WSDOT has ever built. They are built this size in order to span S. Atlantic Street and the railroad tracks as well as to accommodate freight turning movements. Additionally, the size accommodates the vertical/horizontal clearance for trains on the railroad track.

Interactive Construction Simulation

There is a simulation tool on the project's website, which shows the construction sequencing and how traffic will remain open during construction. The tool is updated any time significant changes are made to the south end project. We also plan to create similar tools that reflect construction activities associated with the proposed bored tunnel for the north and south portals areas.

Reduced Capacity on SR 99

There is a curve near S. Holgate Street where the new SR 99 bridge infringes upon the existing southbound bridge. To provide construction crews with the space they need to complete the new southbound bridge, capacity on SR 99 was reduced from three to two lanes in both directions between the West Seattle Bridge and Seattle's sports stadiums. The southern mile of the viaduct corridor will remain two lanes in each direction through 2013 and possibly longer, until the central waterfront portion of the viaduct is replaced. These long-term lane closures will enable us to take down the southern half of the viaduct within the next year.

We will have another weekend closure of the viaduct from June 10 through June 12 to continue construction work on the southbound lanes. Crews will install micropiles to shore up the viaduct before removing two columns to make room for additional construction on the new roadway.

Crews are installing a sign bridge over First Avenue S. and the SR 99 on- and off-ramps. This will be a temporary sign to advise people of the slow speed curves and the new ramp locations. Once improvements in this area are finished, the sign bridge will be removed.

South End in 2013

The S. Atlantic Street overcrossing will open to traffic in late 2013. It will be built under a separate contract that has not gone out to bid yet. This will be the main bypass route for freight and other drivers to get around the railroad track that is often blocked.

From a contract perspective, the S. Holgate to S. King Street project has gone very well. Some of the riskiest work is building foundations, and half of that work is already done. For schedule and budget this project is doing very well at this point.

Jan Drago: I'm not really clear where the sign bridge will go. Will it be on First Avenue S.?
Answer: Yes, it will span eight lanes by the Coastal Environmental Systems building.

Jan Drago: I don't think this sign addresses one of my concerns. For cars driving north on First Avenue S., it is not clear whether they will go onto First Avenue S. or onto Alaskan Way S.

Answer: This new sign bridge will address that.

Alaskan Way S. Closure

Southbound Alaskan Way S. is now closed south of S. King Street. This is where the BNSF railroad track is being relocated. The new bicycle/pedestrian path is taking shape on the west side of Alaskan Way S. next to the roadbed for the new railroad track. A new barrier will separate the bike/pedestrian path and the railroad tracks. A traffic signal is being installed at the corner of S. King Street and Alaskan Way S. and should be operational on June 7.

Bill Weise: So you're saying that the roadway will be blocked off and the trains will blow their horns?

Answer: There should be no reason why the trains should blow their horns north of S. Atlantic Street.

Safety near Terminal 46

The area where the new bike/pedestrian path and the entrance to Terminal 46 will intersect was discussed. John Odland brought this issue to the group from the freight community during a previous working group meeting. In the future, as freight traffic comes down the new S. Atlantic Street overcrossing and approaches Terminal 46, there will be a sight visibility issue. One strategy to help mitigate the conflict between bicyclists / pedestrians and freight is to move the trail further west to improve lines of sight. Another improvement is to incorporate material changes in the pavement such as warning strips in the path that would alert bicyclists to slow down and be aware of conflicts near this intersection. We will also install warning signage to alert both bicyclists and trucks to be cautious of each other when entering this intersection. Lastly, another mitigation technique being considered for this intersection is a pedestrian/bicycle signal.

Feedback from Working Group Members

Do you have any feedback regarding the way traffic has been managed during construction?

At the last Maintenance of Traffic Team meeting, WSDOT asked for some preliminary feedback regarding the question posed above. WSDOT received positive responses from the representatives of the sports stadiums.

Pete Spalding: When you're coming southbound on SR 99, the traffic which is exiting to the left onto First Avenue S. near the stadiums would be better served if that lane was made into an exit-only lane. Since you have reduced the southbound traffic to two lanes south of the stadiums, cars are using that third lane north of the stadiums to pass other cars, thereby creating another bottleneck just past the exit.

Answer: We looked at that as an option. The conflict with such a configuration is the Columbia Street southbound on-ramp. Most vehicles entering at that point don't want to exit right away and instead continue south on SR 99. There isn't enough distance to get the Columbia Street on-ramp traffic merged to the right and still have room for an exit-only lane.

Pete Spalding: I noticed that a lot of cars entering at Columbia Street move over immediately to the right lanes. The cars in the right two lanes are coming into the left lane to jog ahead of other cars, which is creating a second bottleneck. I understand what you're saying, but the current configuration is creating a second bottleneck.

Answer: We appreciate the feedback. We can have somebody take a look at how the traffic flow is actually operating to see what the patterns are and if there are opportunities to improve the configuration.

Jan Drago: I have a comment about the intersection of S. Royal Brougham Way, Occidental Avenue S. and First Avenue S., specifically the westbound lanes. The way that the lanes are marked now, the right-hand lane turns north onto First Avenue S., and anybody who wants to go straight onto the viaduct has to get into the left lane. This causes congestion because you have to wait for the light to turn left, and there is only room for four to five vehicles to get through on one light. I don't see the traffic volume in that right-hand lane to merit it being a right-turn-only lane. I think there is big a problem there, between the striping and the lights.

Answer: That was identified as an issue during the SR 519 project. We wanted to prevent vehicles from crossing into each other, because of the bike lane between S. Royal Brougham Way and Occidental Avenue S. The original intersection was laid out as part of the SR 519 project when the SR 99 ramp was still on First Avenue S. With the change to northbound on-ramp, SDOT operations is looking at making this change and are looking for funding to complete this.

Susan Ranf: The problem at that intersection may be contributing to why the majority of people will not use S. Royal Brougham Way. The vast majority of people, particularly in the morning, go up Edgar Martinez Drive S. instead of using S. Royal Brougham Way, and that leads to some backups.

Answer: Getting people to use E. Frontage Road is actually better. We can make the improvements along Occidental Avenue S., and that is something we are already looking to do.

Bill Weise: It is bottlenecking when people do a diagonal turn to avoid that intersection. Many people are not even using the bypass you created to get back on the viaduct from this point. Improvements here would take the stress off of three different intersections nearby.

Answer: Hopefully, at our next meeting we can report on the progress of this issue.

Agenda Item #4 – Mercer West Update

Eric Tweit, SDOT Project Manager, provided an update on the Mercer West Project and the analysis that was conducted for West Mercer Place improvements.

Mercer West Project Update

The Mercer West project will create a direct connection from I-5 and SR 99 to the Seattle Center, Uptown, Queen Anne and Interbay. Mercer Street will become three lanes in each direction from I-5 to Fifth Avenue N., including the Aurora Avenue underpass, then two lanes in each direction up to Second Avenue W., and then one lane in each direction through West Mercer Place. Roy Street will also become a two-way street, with one lane in each direction. SDOT has completed 30 percent design for the Mercer West Project, which is estimated to cost \$100 million. All of

the current funding is for the Mercer underpass and the two-way conversion between Dexter Avenue N. and Fifth Avenue N. Any work on West Mercer Place would require additional funds.

West Mercer Place Alternatives

SDOT completed an analysis for West Mercer Place regarding whether a second eastbound lane from Elliott Avenue W. is justified in terms of cost and benefit. The analysis looked at how traffic on Elliott Avenue W. and Mercer Street will change with the Alaskan Way Viaduct replacement. Elliott Avenue W. will connect to Alaskan Way instead of SR 99, and Mercer Street will become a main connector to SR 99 as well as I-5.

SDOT's analysis looked at current conditions along West Mercer Place. Two left-turn lanes from Elliott Avenue W. often experience backups. West Mercer Place also has high grades, up to 8 percent, with a dense residential neighborhood that includes some senior housing. SDOT has plenty of right of way on both sides of this street, so that would not be an issue if any street widening were needed; however, it would mean building walls or moving sidewalks closer to housing.

SDOT looked at five alternatives for West Mercer Place: installing a new sidewalk; installing a sidewalk and uphill bike lane; extending the second lane halfway up the hill; extending the second lane to the top of the hill; and extending the southbound left-turn lanes on Elliott Avenue W. SDOT ran traffic models to see if any of these improvements would save traffic times. Eric noted that his team used more conservative estimates of future traffic needs than the Alaskan Way Viaduct Replacement Project EIS assumed.

The findings showed that extending the left-turn lane on Elliott Avenue W. created the greatest benefit with up to a 50-second reduction in delay. The analysis concluded that this improvement has the best value in traffic reduction and cost. Construction on this improvement will begin June 13 and will take three to five weeks to complete. SDOT will start construction of the Aurora Avenue underpass at the end of 2012 and convert Mercer Street to a two-way street in time to close a section of Broad Street in 2014, allowing WSDOT to begin construction of the proposed bored tunnel's north portal.

Herald Ugles: In regards to Nickerson Street and the road diet there, what have been the effects on traffic?

Answer: There was not a noticeable difference in the projected volumes on West Mercer Place as a result of that change. Comments from residents on West Mercer Place have noted an increase in truck traffic. We do not have good data comparing West Mercer Place before and after the changes to Nickerson Street. SDOT is monitoring traffic volumes and operations on Nickerson Street through the rest of the year.

Herald Ugles: How are the changes on Nickerson Street going?

Answer: We have seen some decreases in speed, as desired. Volumes have also decreased slightly, and we continue to monitor this.

Agenda Item #5 – Bored Tunnel Alternative Update

Ron Paananen provided an update on the Final EIS and Linea Laird, WSDOT Director of Central and North End Projects, outlined construction activities related to the proposed bored tunnel.

Environmental Process

The Final EIS will include responses to 2004, 2006 and 2010 draft EIS comments; an updated bored tunnel design to reflect Seattle Tunnel Partners' design-build proposal; construction and operational effects for all build alternatives; an integrated tolling analysis for the bored tunnel, cut-and-cover tunnel and elevated structure alternatives; and proposed mitigation measures. We anticipate publishing the Final EIS in July.

WSDOT signed a contract with Seattle Tunnel Partners in January to do bored tunnel preliminary design work during the environmental process. After the Final EIS is published, the Federal Highway Administration will prepare a Record of Decision (ROD), a public document that describes the project's course of action and mitigation commitments. We expect the ROD will be issued 30 days after the Final EIS is published. The ROD means the environmental review process is complete. We will then issue a second notice to proceed and direct Seattle Tunnel Partners to begin final design and construction.

Proposed Construction Timeline

For a couple of buildings, particularly near the south portal, we would need to do some mitigation work in advance of tunnel boring to protect the buildings from settlement. The design and procurement of the tunnel boring machine would take approximately 1.5 years. Some utility relocation work at the north and south portals would happen intermittently and last through 2013. The north and south portals would be constructed using a cut-and-cover method. We would build tunnel operations buildings at each portal.

Tunnel boring, including assembly and disassembly of the boring machine, would occur from the middle of 2013 through early 2015. Interior tunnel construction would occur from 2014 to late 2015. We would construct on- and off- ramps at both portals beginning in mid-2014. The bored tunnel is proposed to open to drivers at the end of 2015. In 2016, we would work with the City of Seattle to demolish the viaduct and decommission the Battery Street Tunnel. Additional work to improve the surface streets and provide pedestrian amenities at both tunnel portals would continue under separate contracts.

Ron Paananen explained how the referendum and initiative could affect this timeline. The biggest risk on this project is delay. Any delay to the second design-build notice to proceed has cost implications. WSDOT's focus is not to introduce any of those delays.

Feedback from Working Group Members

Do you have any unresolved questions about the environmental process or construction schedule?

John Odland: What could cause a delay after the ROD that would prevent you from issuing the second notice to proceed?

Answer: Once the ROD is issued, the environmental process is concluded. At that point we can be sued on the environmental process itself. We have recognized that this project could be

subject to litigation, and we have done our best to ensure that the Final EIS meets all legal requirements. We know there will probably be a challenge, but we feel that a court is unlikely to order an injunction.

In terms of the initiative and referendum, the outcomes of those are more unpredictable. When the Legislature adjourned, they did not give us different direction for the project, so we are continuing with our schedule. We rely heavily on our relationship with the city, so if we can't utilize our agreements with them we will have to rethink how to proceed, but that will not stop the project. If we get a ROD, we will quickly issue the second notice to proceed and deal with the other issues as they come up. It's a very complicated situation but it has not changed our day-to-day working relationship with the city. The three agreements are effective currently and will remain so until construction, so WSDOT and the City of Seattle are working together closely to complete this project.

Agenda Item #6 – Action Items and Adjourn

Ron Paananen thanked everyone for coming and noted that there were no action items.