EASTLAKE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

117 E. Louisa St. #1
Seattle, WA 98102-3278

January 7, 2016

Alison Townsend, Strategic Advisor
Seattle Department of Transportation
P.O. Box 34996
Seattle, WA 98124-4996

Dear Ms. Townsend:

The Eastlake Community Council (ECC) appreciates very much that the Roosevelt-to-Downtown High-Capacity Transit (RDHCT) study team will be in Eastlake on January 12 for our public meeting about this project. In preparation for this meeting, the ECC board of directors has been reviewing the Existing Conditions Report as well as the display materials from the December open houses. Based on this review, we have a number of questions and concerns about the proposed Targeted Investment options for Eastlake Avenue E, some of which are addressed below, along with ECC's request that SDOT and its consultants devote more study to an option that retains the current center turn lane.

Value of the Center Turn Lane

Both of SDOT's options for Targeted Investment involve the removal of the center turn lane and median planters on Eastlake. SDOT instituted this center turn lane because of serious problems from its absence. The center turn lane provides a number of important functions, as follows:

1. Improves traffic flow

a. The center turn lane removes left-turning vehicles from the traffic lanes. Vehicles turning left would otherwise block thru-traffic, especially when needing to wait for a break in oncoming traffic, oncoming cyclists, or pedestrians crossing either Eastlake Avenue or the side street.

b. In segments where it is not needed for turns, the center turn lane is used extensively as a loading zone for delivery vehicles and less frequently for emergency parking. It is unclear from the information presented thus far how the proposed Targeted Investment options would accommodate loading zones and emergency parking. Vehicles that are loading or are there for emergencies are more likely to block traffic lanes without the center turn lane.

c. The center turn lanes allow motor vehicles and bicycles, especially those turning left onto Eastlake Avenue from side streets, to choose when to merge into the oncoming traffic, thus allowing the Eastlake Avenue traffic to move more freely and averting slowdowns. Without the center turn lane, traffic already on Eastlake Avenue must immediately slow down to accommodate them.

2. Improves safety for motorists, cyclists, and pedestrians

a. Lanes of traffic moving in opposite directions that have no appreciable buffer between them pose a well-known risk of head-on collision. It was in part to reduce this danger that SDOT introduced the center turn lane on Eastlake Avenue, providing a lane-wide buffer and in some places also a median island.

b. The center turn lane also reduces the risk of back-end collisions that occur when a vehicle or bicycle slows in the traffic lane to turn left. Vehicles and bicycles that leave the traffic lane for the turn lane are less likely to be hit from behind.

c. The center turn lane provides a refuge for pedestrians (especially seniors, the disabled, or others who cross slowly) and bicyclists halfway across the street; this refuge is doubly safe where the lane is occupied by a median island. Note that the proposed cycle track does nothing to ensure the safety of bicyclists as they cross Eastlake Avenue. Removing the center turn lane creates as dangerous a situation for bicyclists as it does for pedestrians.

d. As mentioned above, the center turn lanes enhance traffic flow by accommodating motor vehicles and bicycles that are turning left onto Eastlake Avenue from side streets. This is also a major safety advantage, reducing the chances of side collisions and back-end collisions. Without the center turn lane, there is increased risk of traffic collisions from cars entering Eastlake Ave.

3. Increases neighborhood access and quality of life

a. By facilitating left turns off of Eastlake, the center turn lane provides an important means of access to Eastlake residences and businesses.

b. Removing the landscaped median islands would reduce greenery and tree canopy in the neighborhood. This may also be a costly element of re-engineering the street.

c. The center turn lane provides loading vehicles a space (explained above) that can be important for businesses and residences alike.

4. Reflects significant prior neighborhood and SDOT planning

a. Both the *Eastlake Neighborhood Plan* (1998) and the *Eastlake Transportation Plan and Related Design Issues* (1994) identify the importance of the center turn lane and call for landscaped median islands. Both of these plans were achieved with significant neighborhood outreach and collaboration with SDOT. Neither is listed among the previous planning studies reviewed in Appendix A of the Existing Conditions Report.

b. SDOT has long advocated center turn lanes and introduced them on Eastlake Avenue for many of the above reasons. We did not find any reference to these SDOT

and consultant studies that led to this decision referenced in Appendix A of the Existing Conditions Report.

5. Significant left-turning traffic is identified in the Existing Conditions report's Appendix E.

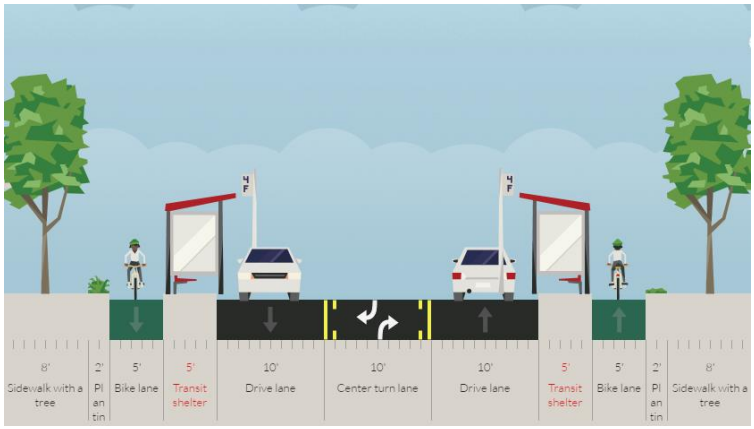
a. During one hour in the AM Peak period, 82 identified left-turns were made by vehicles traveling northbound, and 249 left-turns were made by vehicles traveling southbound. The total: 331 left-turns per peak hour (Appendix E, Table 4) whose safety and flow for themselves as well as other vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians are greatly facilitated by the center turn lane.

b. During one hour in the PM Peak period, 106 identified left-turns were made by vehicles traveling northbound, and 349 left-turns were made by vehicles traveling southbound. The total: 455 total left-turns per peak hour (Appendix E, Table 5) whose safety and flow for themselves as well as other vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians are greatly facilitated by the center turn lane.

c. This analysis includes intersections at Garfield, Boston, Lynn, Louisa, Roanoke, and Hamlin streets. Thus it does not include the positive contributions of the center turn lane at Allison, Edgar, Blaine, Howe, Shelby, and Newton streets. The analysis also does not include traffic making left turns into private parking lots, of which there are many on both sides of Eastlake Avenue that currently benefit from the center turn lane.

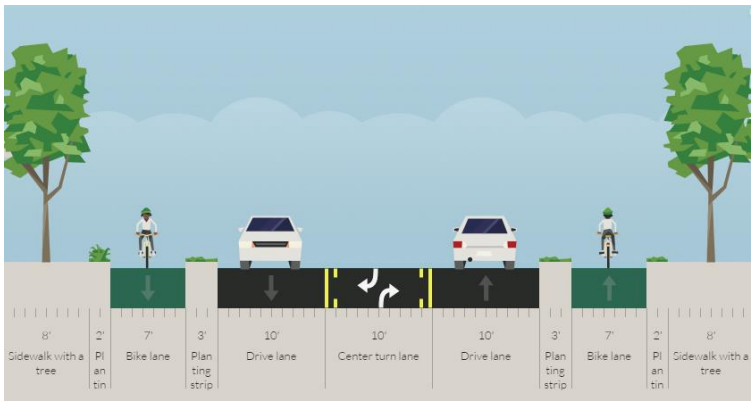
Request: In view of the above considerations, ECC requests that SDOT and its consultants analyze as a full public alternative an option that retains the current center turn lane and median islands. We are confident that there has been some discussion of such an option within your team, but given its many strengths, we think it important for this option be addressed publicly. Figures 1 and 2 below provide one potential cross-section.

Figure 1: Potential cross-section at intersections with a bus stop



[Note: this cross-section envisions a long and narrow bus island and a bike lane that narrows at the intersection to slow bike traffic as it approaches interactions with other modes.]

Figure 2: Potential cross-section for areas outside of intersections/bus stops



[Note: bike lanes are slightly widened to account for more traffic and differential speeds on the hill. Also, in places where a median island exists instead of the center turn lane, the median island would be kept.

We look forward to the RDHCT study team presentation and the discussion on Jan. 12, and would deeply appreciate whatever background you can develop by then on the center turn lane option as outlined above

Sincerely,

Eric Suni, Vice President
eric.a.suni@gmail.com

Chris Leman, President
cleman@u.oo.net