EASTLAKE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

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Seattle, WA 98102-3278

January 11, 2016

Alison Townsend, Strategic Advisor
Seattle Department of Transportation
P.O. Box 34996
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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. This letter serves as a follow-up to our letter from January 7 and submits additional questions and concerns about the street design for Eastlake Ave.

Turning Traffic

Our previous letter focused largely on the center turn lane and traffic turning left off of and onto Eastlake Avenue. Attention must also be paid to right-turning traffic. Right-turns off of Eastlake Avenue provide neighborhood and business access. However, right-turns also pose challenges as turning cars will, as they do now, cross the path of bicyclists. In the proposed Targeted Investment options, cars making right-turns would cross the path of a protected bicycle lane. As is also the case at present, right-turns will require a car to slow down, increasing rear-end collision risk and slowing overall traffic flow. As turning cars must wait for bicycles and pedestrians to exit the intersection, delays in turning would, as they do now, slow thru-traffic, including transit buses.

In light of these issues, ECC would like to know if the current proposed Targeted Investment cross-sections, or the center turn lane option that ECC has asked SDOT to study publicly, would include any provisions restricting right turns.

a. If not, how does the project team anticipate that any negative impacts of right turns – in terms of both safety and traffic flow – would be avoided?
b. If yes, what are those provisions?
    1. How would those provisions be enforced?

2. How would those provisions affect access to neighborhood residences and businesses?

Expanding Curb-to-Curb Width of Eastlake

Targeted Investment Option 1 for Eastlake Ave assumes a 54' curb-to-curb width. Because the current street includes only 50' curb-to-curb, widening it by four feet would apparently require removing planting spaces between the roadway and the sidewalk and/or reducing sidewalk width.

ECC has very strong concerns about any removal of the planting spaces or reduction of sidewalk width. To do so would seem to reduce walkability and pedestrian safety by eliminating an important barrier between pedestrians and the roadway. Because the project reduces transit stop spacing in Eastlake (requiring commuters to walk further to reach bus stops), it would seem vital to keep existing sidewalk space.

The 1998 Eastlake Neighborhood Plan designates Eastlake Avenue as our neighborhood's "main street." Its 1999 approval and adoption and matrix (under which the Mayor and City Council unanimously adopted the Eastlake Neighborhood Plan) states (p. 13): "This strategy accepts Eastlake Avenue's arterial status, but works to make it safer and more pleasant for pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and local traffic." On this same page, the integrated executive response to the Eastlake Neighborhood Plan states: "Eastlake Avenue is the main street for the neighborhood. It defines the character of the neighborhood. This strategy is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. It is designed to improve the quality of the environment for pedestrians and the local business district and to guide future development to more clearly delineate residential and commercial areas."

ECC will try to remain open-minded about proposals to reduce the width of planting areas and/or sidewalks on Eastlake Avenue. However, without more information on the design and financial investment contemplated, it is difficult for us to believe that the widened roadway in Option 1 will not detract from the convenience and safety of pedestrians and the vitality of the business district. We request that you please provide specific details about any conceived change to existing street infrastructure envisioned by either Targeted Investment option.

Peak Traffic/Parking Lane

Targeted Investment Option 2 includes the maintenance of one Peak Traffic/Parking lane. It is unclear from the diagram alone exactly how this lane would function, and we have some questions and points of clarification:

1. Would the Parking/Peak Traffic lane maintain the current hours of existing Parking/Peak Traffic lanes?

2. Would the lane be on the northbound or southbound side?
3. Could one of the lanes be reversible in the direction of peak flow?
4. Do SDOT's models indicate whether traffic flows in the alternate direction would be different enough to support such a format?

Safe Bus Loading

Both of the Targeted Investment options involve potential risks to safe bus loading, especially in that a bicycle lane would be in place between the sidewalk and the bus/traffic lane on at least one side of the street. We have several questions about this design:

1. How would the bus safely cross the bicycle lane(s) in order to load passengers?
2. If the bus leaves the general purpose traffic lane to load passengers, what would be the impact on bus travel time?
3. If a bus island or other loading site is used, what steps would be taken to help ensure that bus riders can safely cross the bike lane?
4. How would a bus island or loading site fit within the 50' curb-to-curb space?

Protected Bicycle Lanes

A primary difference between the two options SDOT has presented is whether the northbound and southbound bike lanes are adjacent (two-way) or separate (one-way).

On its page regarding protected bicycle lanes, SDOT refers to design guidance from National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) Urban Bikeway Design Guide. NACTO's Guide indicates that both one-way and two-way cycle tracks can offer numerous benefits; however, they also indicate that two-way cycle tracks are typically applied "on streets with few conflicts such as driveways or cross-streets on one side of the street" and "on streets where more destinations are on one side thereby reducing the need to cross the street." (http://nacto.org/publication/urban-bikeway-design-guide/cycle-tracks/two-way-cycle-tracks/). The ECC is concerned that Eastlake Avenue does not meet this description. There are numerous street intersections and driveways on both sides of Eastlake Avenue that could pose significant safety challenges with a two-way cycle track on either side of the street. While driveways and intersections are also a potential hazard for one-way cycle tracks, when bicycle lanes flow in the same direction as vehicle traffic, cyclists are generally more visible and their presence is more predictable.

In addition, ECC worries that a two-way cycle track could pose risk to cyclists and probably to pedestrians as well because of the immediate proximity (within arm's length) of riders traveling in opposite directions. This concern is magnified on a street like Eastlake Avenue with sloped portions in which the bike lanes that operate in opposite directions are likely to have very different speeds.

We are also puzzled about the chosen amount of space allocated to the bike lanes in the two Targeted Investment options. In Option 1, a total of 14' of right-of-way is dedicated to the one-way bike lanes (two 5' lanes plus two 2' buffers). In Option 2, a total of 16' of right-of-way is dedicated to the two-way bike lanes (two 6' lanes plus one 4' buffer).

In light of these issues, we have several questions:

1. Our understanding is that a primary benefit of the two-way bike lanes is reduced use of right-of-way. If this is the case, why does the two-way bike lane option take up 2 additional feet of ROW in comparison to the option with one-way cycle tracks?
2. Does SDOT agree that in general separated bicycle lanes are preferable from a safety perspective on a street with the large number of intersections and driveways such as Eastlake? If not, why not?
3. If a two-way cycle track were to be implemented, what steps would be taken to increase safety at intersections and driveways?
4. Would these measures to increase safety at intersections and driveways also be used with a one-way cycle track?
5. How does the project team envision that the proposed bicycle lanes would connect with the Fairview Ave N bridge (which will be reconstructed in 2017-2018)?
6. How does the project team envision that the proposed bicycle lanes would connect with bicycle lanes on the University Bridge?
7. Should the preferred width of the bicycle lane be larger when it is on sloped parts of Eastlake Avenue? It would appear that whether going uphill or downhill, there would be a wider range of speeds among cyclists on these sloped parts than on the flatter parts of Eastlake Avenue.

Project Budget

At the December open houses, it was stated that the proposed budget for this project is approximately $30 million. By contrast, the Madison BRT project has been allocated approximately $120 million. We have two questions and a concern with regard to this budgeting:

1. Is there any specific policy document or guideline outlining these funding proposals and why they are so divergent?
2. What are the provisions for reallocation of funds among HCT projects if it can be documented that investments in one corridor would have a larger proportional benefit in terms of achieving SDOT's goal of achieving a rapid transit network?
3. Given that the BRT plans are part of creating a city-wide network of rapid, high-capacity transit, we are concerned about this imbalance in funding. The levels of transit and bicycle usage and the difficulty of squeezing in a workable multi-modal cross-section seem at least as great for Eastlake Avenue (and for much of the rest of the Roosevelt-to-Downtown corridor) as for Madison Avenue. We request that the two projects receive more comparable funding levels than the current funding proposals suggest.

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 issues outline above.

Sincerely,

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