City of Seattle
Edward B. Murray, Mayor

Department of Transportation
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Eastlake Community Council
117 E Louisa St. #1
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January 28, 2016

RE: Roosevelt to Downtown High Capacity Transit Study

The following is in response to an Eastlake Community Council (ECC) letter dated January 11 and received via email. The project team addressed several of the comments and questions included in the letter during an ECC meeting held on January 12, 2016.

The project team would like to thank the ECC for providing a detailed letter that presents important issues to consider during the development of this project. Please find responses below in red.

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.

There is no evidence, based on the current roadway design in this section of the corridor or many other roadways in the City that right-turns are inherently dangerous or cause excessive delay to the point that they should be removed as part of this project. Drivers in the City are accustomed to interacting with all types of traffic – pedestrian, bicycle, automobile, transit – while making right-turns. Furthermore, elimination of right-turns would affect residential and business access, which is a specific concern expressed in the previous ECC letter.

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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?

Some intersections may see modifications to the right-turn treatment. For instance, right-turns on red could be restricted or completely eliminated in locations where there is a proposed dedicated transit lane along the sidewalk or very high pedestrian crossing volumes. Where right turns cross protected bicycle lanes, the bicycle lanes may be painted green per SDOT standards (similar to the intersection of Eastlake Ave E and Fuhrman Ave E). Specific right-turn treatments will be designed at an intersection-by-intersection basis as other components of the proposed design progress.

1. How would those provisions be enforced?

   Any right-turn restrictions would be enforced in the same manner that the Seattle Police Department currently enforces traffic violations.

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

   Changes in right-turn treatments at intersections along this portion of the corridor may require the use of different access points to neighborhood residences and business by means of turning up- or downstream from a specific intersection and/or using roadways parallel to Eastlake.

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.

Design option 1 would reduce sidewalks on both sides of the road by 2' but includes 7' of new bicycle lane and bike buffer, greatly increasing the width of the barrier between pedestrians and vehicles that exists today. SDOT agrees a healthy sidewalk environment is important to the Eastlake neighborhood and will continue to consider cross sections which support such an environment.

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."

Many additional studies and projects have occurred since 1999 which reflect land use and travel pattern changes that have occurred along this portion of the corridor. Recent developments, general shifts toward alternative modes of travel, and evolving City transportation priorities have redefined the use of city roadways and often require changes to existing roadway configurations. The proposed design options are consistent with the above referenced strategy to make this section of the corridor safer and more pleasant for users of all transportation modes.

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.

Design option 1 was developed to maintain parking lanes on both sides of the street. Removal of one of the parking lanes would eliminate the need to reduce the sidewalk width. SDOT will continue to review viable cross sections keeping in mind the desire to provide a pleasant sidewalk environment.

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?

Modifying the current hours of the parking/peak traffic lane has not been discussed during this stage of the project. While the parking/peak traffic lane hours would be subject to change based on the final design of the project, there are no current planning or design issues that would require changes in the existing hours.

2. Would the lane be on the northbound or southbound side?

Specific location of the parking lane is currently undetermined and would be decided in concert with design of the other roadway elements.

3. Could one of the lanes be reversible in the direction of peak flow?

SDOT is not currently considering reversible lanes along this section of the corridor for general traffic. A reversible, dedicated transit lane was considered during earlier stages of the project but was not advanced.

4. Do SDOT's models indicate whether traffic flows in the alternate direction would be different enough to support such a format?

The directional split of the existing and forecast traffic volumes are not sufficient to warrant reversible general traffic lanes.

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?

The bus stops on Eastlake would operate in the same manner as existing bus islands with protected bicycle lanes between the island and sidewalk such as those on Dexter Ave North. Pedestrians can cross the bicycle lane at painted crosswalks. Bicycles are required to yield to pedestrians. This is the same design that is going to be constructed along Roosevelt this year.

2. If the bus leaves the general purpose traffic lane to load passengers, what would be the impact on bus travel time?

Bus stop locations and designs that do not require lane changes for access and egress are preferred and provide faster travel time than those that require a lane change. The proposed bus stops would be designed to minimize or fully eliminate lane change maneuvers at stops along the corridor. Designs such as the bus islands or sidewalk bump outs do not require buses to change lanes and eliminate the associated delay. All buses would stop in-lane.

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?

See previous response to question 1.

4. How would a bus island or loading site fit within the 50' curb-to-curb space?

Use of bus islands or any other bus stop design will be based on many different factors including available curb-to-curb space and proposed operational location of the bus. For example, the project would not propose a bus island in a location where the bus is operating in a dedicated lane next to a sidewalk where no lane change is required to access a bus stop located on the sidewalk. SDOT will continue to revise cross sections (including consideration for center turn lanes as requested by ECC in its prior letter) to determine which cross sections are feasible within the current curb-to-curb space and understand where variations may be needed.

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.

The project team is focusing on designs that incorporate bicycle lanes on each side of the street, based on input from the December public open houses and information included in the previous ECC letter.

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?

The two-way protected bike lane is being dropped from consideration given safety and other concerns.

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?

There are a number of factors in addition to the above referenced NACTO guidelines that are considered during the planning of a bicycle facility. Some of these include available roadway width, roadway grades, surrounding land use, surrounding bicycle network, cyclist level of experience, etc. As such, there is no hard and fast general preference for design of these facilities.

3. If a two-way cycle track were to be implemented, what steps would be taken to increase safety at intersections and driveways?

Similar to all City bicycle projects, appropriate design treatments would be implemented as part of any bicycle facility design to address roadway safety. Any treatments would consider both general and location-specific issues along this portion of the corridor.

4. Would these measures to increase safety at intersections and driveways also be used with a one-way cycle track?

See previous response.

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)?

The project team is coordinating with the Fairview Ave N Bridge team as the bridge team enters the final phases of design. Additional details will be determined as we further examine viable cross sections.

6. How does the project team envision that the proposed bicycle lanes would connect with bicycle lanes on the University Bridge?

The proposed design will include bicycle lanes on each side of the street south of the University Bridge. Any design with a two-way cycle track would include a transition location to bicycle lanes on each side of the street around the Eastlake/Harvard intersection.

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.

The roadway width along this portion of the corridor will limit the width of any bicycle facility. There are no current plans to develop designs that vary the bicycle lane widths.

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?

These are the planning level budgets as identified in Move Seattle, the City's 10-year strategic vision for transportation. A full copy of the document can be found online at http://www.seattle.gov/transportation/docs/MoveSeatte-FinalDraft-2-25-Online.pdf.

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?

SDOT is currently evaluating all proposed BRT projects to determine the best way to move forward. Some reallocation of funding may occur as we move forward. It is important to note that only a small portion of the total planning level budget identified in Move Seattle comes from the Levy to Move Seattle. Budget numbers also reflect the ability of the project to leverage other sources of funding.

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.

See previous response. The BRT network is only one layer or component of the public transportation infrastructure in Seattle. The Roosevelt to Downtown Corridor is located in a part of Seattle that is experiencing tremendous transportation investment in the form of Link light rail infrastructure, more than will ever be invested in the area surrounding the Madison BRT corridor.

SDOT staff appreciates the time and thought put into these questions. The consultant team is in the process of analyzing turn movements and we are also looking at commercial vehicle loading in the corridor as well as parking. These issues will require additional data collection efforts as we move forward. We appreciate your patience as we consider all input received from ECC as well as other residents and stakeholders along the corridor.

Sincerely,

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