



Seattle Light Rail Review Panel

Mary Johnston
Design Commission
LRRP Chair

Julie Bassuk
Design Commission

Graham Black
Design Commission

Catherine Benotto
Planning Commission

Brendan Connolly
Design Commission

David Cutler
Planning Commission

Kurt Kiefer
Public Art Advisory Committee

Malika Kirkling
Design Commission

Laurel Kunkler
Design Commission

Kevin McDonald
Planning Commission

Julie Parrett
Design Commission/
Public Art Advisory Committee

Norie Sato
Design Commission/
Public Art Advisory Committee

Donald Vehige
Design Commission

Valerie Kinast
LRRP Coordinator

Tom Iurino
Senior Staff

December 16, 2010

Convened 8:30 am
Adjourned 12:30 pm

Project Reviewed

University of Washington Light Rail Station - Skybridges

Panel Members Present

Mary Johnston
Julie Bassuk
Catherine Benotto
David Cutler
Kurt Kiefer
Malika Kirkling
Kevin McDonald
Julie Parrett
Norie Sato
Donald Vehige

Excused Panel Members

Brendan Connolly
Graham Black

Recused Panel Members

Lolly Kunkler

Incoming Design Commissioners Present

Tom Nelson
Osama Quotah

Staff Present

Valerie Kinast
Tom Iurino
Tera Hatfield

December 16, 2010

Project:

**Sound Transit University Link Light Rail –
Pedestrian Skybridges**

Phase:

Preliminary Design of skybridges

Last Reviews:

2-19-2009, 9-4-2008, 12-6-2007, 8-16-2007

Presenters:

Tracy Reed, Sound Transit
Mark Reddington, LMN
Jennifer Guthrie, GGN
Bernie Alonzo, GGN

Attendees:

Bernie Alonzo, GGN
Deborah Ashland, Sound Transit
Gary Baldasari, Sound Transit
Rebecca Barnes, UW
Andy Casillas, UW
Molly Chapman, Sound Transit
Howard Fitzpatrick, LMN
Erin Fletcher, WSDOT
Ketil Freeman, Legislative
Kristine Kenney UW
Candida Lorenzana, King County
Gareth Loveridge, Swift Company
John Petterson, LMN
Brad Phillips, WSDOT
Dick Sandaas, UW
Barbara Swift, Swift Company
Jennifer Wieland, SDOT
Kym Williams, Sound Transit
Ruri Yampolsky, Arts & Cultural Affairs

Time: 9am – 11:45am

SUMMARY

Introduction

Valerie Kinast provided an overview of the Light Rail Review Panel (LRRP). She explained the LRRP will look at changes to the skybridge proposal approved by this panel in 2008. Instead of one long bridge from the station up to the campus, the new proposal is for two smaller bridges. The first, the “Montlake overcrossing,” would cross from the station over Montlake Boulevard to the Montlake Triangle. The other, “the Rainier Vista land bridge,” would cross NE Pacific Place from the Montlake Triangle north to the upper part of the campus. Sound Transit will own and maintain the Montlake Boulevard overcrossing and the University of Washington will own the Rainier Vista land bridge over NE Pacific Place.

LRRP DISCLOSURES

- Julie Parrett is a lecturer at the University of Washington
- Mary Johnston is occasionally employed by the University of Washington

- Osama Quotah [non-voting member] is currently working on an unrelated project in the northern part of the University of Washington main campus
- Norie Sato was lead artist for the Sound Transit Central Link line. She is no longer officially under contract with Sound Transit, and was not involved in the art selection panel or any other art aspect for the University Link stations

Presentation

- Tracy Reed emphasized the significant formation effort between five parties to realize the Sound Transit University Link Light Rail project. Reed reviewed the history and background of the project:
 - 2006, finished final station design
 - 2008, Seattle Design Commission was briefed on Rainier Vista plans and made recommendations
 - November 2008, University of Washington (UW) regents approved station design with pedestrian bridges at Montlake Triangle
 - September 2008, LRRP recommended approval of 60% station design, including a pedestrian bridge and not a pedestrian tunnel
 - February 2009, LRRP recommended approval of the 90% station design
 - April 2009, City Council approved the earlier UW station pedestrian bridge design
- Rainier Vista Concept Plan proposed, including lowering of NE Pacific Place roadway, construction of land bridge, and expansion of the Burke-Gilman trail with underpass below. Concept plan accommodates more bus layover space, however there is no construction funding for this aspect of the plan yet.
- 2009, UW Station Access Study completed
 - Spring 2010, FTA rejected idea of at grade mid-block pedestrian crossings of Montlake Boulevard for the station
 - Spring 2010, Rainier Vista plan completed, but sufficient funds not yet secured for construction
 - May 2010, WSDOT hosted a charrette to evaluate options for the configuration and design of the Montlake Triangle. The multi-agency effort resulted in a preferred alternative concept, which included pedestrian bridges over Montlake Boulevard and NE Pacific Place. This preferred alternative was refined somewhat into the preliminary design presented today to the LRRP.

Tracy Reed described the current project's scope elements that will help improve regional trail connections (station bridge, trail improvements, and bike ramps provide ability for cyclists coming from SR-520 to cross Montlake without having to dismount). The pedestrian bridges have a 54 inch railing on both sides because of this bike use.

Mark Reddington presented the design for the station and pedestrian bridge over Montlake Boulevard, referring to presentation slides and a large, scaled model. He first noted the coordination of multiple teams working on different aspects of the design before describing the approach to the design, in sequence:

1. Overview of station [below grade]. Middle space is chamber space that unfolds as you move through it (artful underground planetarium)
2. Crossing station plaza

Mark Reddington explained that the pedestrian bridge and the bicycle bridge converge to a single bridge over Montlake Boulevard and then separates as it approaches the Montlake Triangle to add lightness to the structure as well as break up and direct movement patterns of pedestrians and bicyclists for increased safety and orientation.

Jennifer Guthrie of Gustafson Guthrie Nichol (GGN) presented the Rainier Vista design, including the Montlake Triangle landscape design. She presented the project boundaries of the University of Washington Rainier Vista plan (Montlake Triangle all the way up to Stevens Way). The current Triangle design is separated from the University of Washington campus and the surrounding area. Guthrie discussed design methods employed to create a cohesive landscape that connects people and places. These included simplification of grades, an organizational planting strategy, improved walkways, and framed vistas building on the existing woodland character. Guthrie noted studies anticipate the number of pedestrians will be greater than the number of bicycles on the paths (peak mix shows 200-300 pedestrians and 3-4 bikes moving from the Vista across the land bridge per hour). Guthrie explained two mixing points and circulation options. The scale of the design anticipates movement through the crossing and supports monumentality of the vista. The design employs ideas similar to a woonerf in that cyclists and pedestrians mix freely. GGN investigated specific dimensions to create broad, generous spaces that act as meeting places, to sit, view and to connect with Mt. Rainier while obscuring views of traffic and the roadway. The land bridge's simple form draws from, but does not mimic, the collegiate gothic language on campus.

Guthrie noted specific challenges:

- Lowered NE Pacific Place—below ground utilities in this area
- Clearance to accommodate metro transit buses and overhead wires
- Maximum 5% grade of land bridge to avoid railings and stairs

ACTION

The Light Rail Review Panel thanked and applauded the UW light rail station and Rainier Vista teams for their cohesive and comprehensive design presentation. The Panel commended all responsible agencies for coordinating, and recognized the exemplary process that the agencies have gone through, especially in light of funding and technical challenges. Panel members are enthusiastic about the elegant transportation and design solutions that were found in this complex area of the city where diverse travel modes come together. This project's successful coordination and design should serve as a model for the city and the region in the future. The move to two smaller bridges and the integration of the station plans into the Rainier Vista design is seen as a strong gesture toward activating what could become a rich public space, in addition to a well functioning multi-modal transportation hub. The Commission is anxious to see the refinements that are made to the Rainier Vista plans.

The Light Rail Review Panel unanimously approved the changes made to the 60% design of the University of Washington light rail station that were presented in 2008, and recommends conceptual approval of the preliminary design of the Montlake over crossing and the Rainier Vista land bridge as presented today, with the following recommendations:

- As the design for the overpass and land bridge move further into design, provide in a presentation to the LRRP information on how the circulation systems were developed, and a diagram of the networks, to illustrate the overall strategies. Continue to explore how the different routes and modes of travel come together in the Montlake Triangle and how a shared space approach works here specifically
- Provide cues in the landscape to make wayfinding more intuitive, especially as the bridge from the station intersects the Vista.

- Create a more legible pedestrian transition from the station, over the bridge to the UW Medical Center perhaps through signage and/or plants.
- Explore secondary pedestrian circulation route possibilities (i.e. creating a counter-oval connecting the arc of the east-west paths north of NE Pacific Place with paths in the Montlake Triangle.)
- Reconsider the design of the Montlake Boulevard over crossing as the pedestrian and bicycle bridges split on their approach to the Montlake Triangle. Continue to think about possible conflicts between pedestrians and bicyclists as they converge at the terminus/landings of the bridges and better address the empty space created by the separated landings. Consider providing a greater separation of the landings. A solution may be to provide a wider gap between the bridges by designing a sinuous loop for the southern (bicycle) bridge with a landing further south of the pedestrian bridge
- Allow for clear sightlines into the landscape, the Montlake Triangle, and across the Vista by carefully considering how edges, such as railings and vegetation on the bridges, are treated.
- The panel encourages the University of Washington to follow a staggered planting strategy as presented by the design team, planting deciduous trees before coniferous trees in order to review and strengthen sightlines to and from Rainier Vista and the surrounding transportation connections (the light rail station, bus stop for the UW Medical Center, Montlake intersection, etc.)
- In our next meeting, outline in more detail the planting strategy, plant palette and how to achieve a successional quality in order to maintain sight lines and safety while creating opportunities for visual cues through the space
- The Panel appreciates the elegance and simplicity of the railing and lighting treatments, but the renderings lacked inspiration. Articulation of the land bridge through lighting could be a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the place. Carefully think through the fencing and railing decisions in order to avoid a “caged” experience for users. In the next meeting, fully describe all railings including those crossing the land bridge
- Think about whether the two bridges will receive similar or different treatments, including railing, lighting, and material choices. An option might be to consider how the ST bridge might use the railing to exaggerate the curve of the bridge
- Consider the use/reference to structure (already referred to in the Rainier Vista form of paths and landscaped areas) associated with collegiate-gothic architecture into the overall design without referencing it blatantly
- Explore how the elevator and stairway access point structure proposed on the west side of Montlake Boulevard could relate to and draw more from the station building design and details rather than the vent structures
- Think about how the stair and elevator structures might perform as an important gathering space, a place for pausing. Might the design accentuate and facilitate such a gathering place with a small plaza at grade, or in some other way?
- Draw on aspects of the rich and fascinating station art (without actually bringing the art out of the station) and integrate it into the ST bridge design (i.e. lighting under bridge and along railings)

- **The LRRP commends the design team for the bold move of visually terminating the Rainier Vista through the use of select plantings that obscure the distraction of the vehicular traffic and intersection while allowing pedestrian and bicycle movement. Consider though, how to strengthen this terminus as a secondary space that is occupied through the use of materials and the ground plane. Specifically, reconsider the use of a “rustic” palette. At the next review, please provide a more detailed study of the ground plane character for this area and the important views into campus**
- **The Panel questioned the use of gabion walls below the Rainier Vista land bridge on NE Pacific Place because of its “rustic character,” and because gabions sometimes do not retain their quality over time. In our next meeting, provide more detail about the choice of gabions and explain how they will age**
- **Consider how the at-grade crossing of Montlake occurs on the north end of the triangle. Explore how access to the university campus might prioritize the Rainier Vista access. Perhaps the University could highlight the pedestrian bridge near HEC Edmundsen as well, and consider closing or minimizing the old stairway up to campus across Montlake in order to minimize crossing Montlake in that area**