Seamless Seattle

Building a wayfinding system for walking in the Emerald City
What is wayfinding?

Everyone has been lost at one time so we all know how stressful it can be not to know your way. Cities can be particularly challenging places to navigate and we use a lot of tools to understand them including our previous knowledge, our understanding of the arrangement of buildings, streets and landmarks, and various information. Together these tools help make a complex place easy to understand or more ‘legible’.

Cities that are not very legible create a number of problems. First, they increase the chances that people will get lost. Second, they reduce awareness of opportunities to use different modes of travel, such as transit. Third, they deter us from exploring, which means visitors stay in the tourist hotspots and new residents don’t build a knowledge of their city.

Many world-class cities have developed wayfinding systems. The best provide information that connects different transportation modes, make walking a real and more attractive option, encourage visitors to explore more, and support local businesses by opening up hidden or out-of-mind routes and neighborhoods.

While it is difficult to change the arrangement of cities to make them more physically legible, it is possible to solve many of the problems by intelligently designing information to help people navigate more easily and to walk as part of longer journeys with transit or other services. Wayfinding projects include traditional signs and maps, but also extend to digital systems, public art and landscaping.
Why does Seattle need a wayfinding project?

To meet its growth and transportation aims, the City of Seattle has committed to increasing the percentage of trips made by walking to 35% by 2035. To achieve this ambitious aim, the City prepared a Pedestrian Master Plan in June 2017 that included a strategy to develop a coordinated wayfinding system (Strategy 5.2).

Wayfinding would not only make walking a simpler choice for many journeys, it would also help connect other transportation services that rely on pedestrian access. By increasing the awareness of walking as an option and the confidence that a walking journey will be supported, a wayfinding project is expected to help improve the walkability and accessibility of Seattle.

More people choosing to walk is not only good for people’s health and the environment, it is an important option for managing transportation demands, especially during the current period of growth and change.

### MOTIVATIONS TO INCREASE WALKING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>2008 (%)</th>
<th>2007 (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If there were more facilities in my local area</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the pavements were cleaner</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I had better information on walks</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If there were more shops in my local area</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I had a better knowledge of London generally</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If there were more other people out walking</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I knew how many calories it would burn</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>12%</td>
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</tbody>
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In the UK, a 2008 study (Transport for London) revealed that 57% of Londoners said they would be motivated to walk more if provided with information on local walks. The study also found that 26% were worried about getting lost when walking.

Base: Londoners

2008 (n=1002)

2007 (n=1002)

Source: Q10

A study from Vancouver, BC in 2012 (City of Vancouver) found that 82% of people interviewed agreed or strongly agreed they were more likely to walk between places because of new street walking maps.

27% of visitors & 9% of New Yorkers admitted to having been lost in the previous week, in a study conducted in January 2011 (I Walk New York).
Isn’t there an app for that?

There are lots of digital maps and navigation apps that people use everyday for free. The growth of digital information raises the question why can’t Seattlrites simply rely on their smartphone for wayfinding? And indeed they can - many of these apps are great, but they do present some compromises.

For one, they are rarely consistent with other types of information that people rely on such as street signs and printed maps. This can create the increasingly common problem of people trying to relate the information on a small screen to the streets around them.

They are also often based on global platforms meaning individual authorities have little ability to influence how their city is shown or described. The automation of commercial apps mean they often miss important details that influence the decision to walk such as hills, the location of steps, crosswalks and traffic-free routes.

The City of Seattle wayfinding program will create a system of information that is all about Seattle, defined by its own priorities, owned by the city, and which can be shared by all the communities who can make use of it.
What is happening?

Over the next year to June 2019, the City of Seattle is working with a team of specialist wayfinding planners and designers to create a city-wide pedestrian wayfinding system. The outcome of the project will be a pilot project, a set of design standards and proposals for roll-out across the city.

This project is funded by a WSDOT Transit Coordination Grant, and has agency support from Seattle Department of Transportation, King County Metro, Sound Transit, Pierce Transit, Community Transit, and the Downtown Seattle Association.

How can I find out more?

For more information go to www.seattle.gov and search for ‘pedestrian wayfinding,’ or email wayfinding@seattle.gov

The project is being led by SDOT.