Changing Seattle's Transportation Template

Spring 2010

City of Seattle

Introduction

Here in Seattle we are in the process of retrofitting our transportation system. We must accommodate growth, but we can't build more streets. By 2024 the city will add 85,000 jobs and 47,000 people. It is a time of tough budgets, but we are preparing for a positive future and a walkable, livable city. We are committed to reducing our carbon footprint, offering more transit options, and keeping goods and services moving. We recognize that all streets are different, and in each case user needs must be balanced. Our efforts must work to support a vibrant economy, freight mobility, and easy access to businesses.

Three principles guide our work. First, we are building neighborhoods. We are paying more attention to creating great places for people, ensuring travelers' safety and security, making memorable places, fostering social interaction, and nurturing community identity.

Second, we are connecting public spaces and urban villages by making places where people choose to walk or bike when traveling to nearby destinations. These public spaces invite casual conversation, encourage connection with nature and provide spaces to play.

Third, we are giving people real alternatives to driving. If fewer people drive alone, then it's easier for transit, goods, and services to move. In Seattle, we're shifting away from the car being the sole transportation organizing principle by expanding light rail, building a streetcar network, and supporting bus rapid transit. We are encouraging people to rethink their transportation choices with expanded options and programs, such as our "Way to Go, Seattle" program.

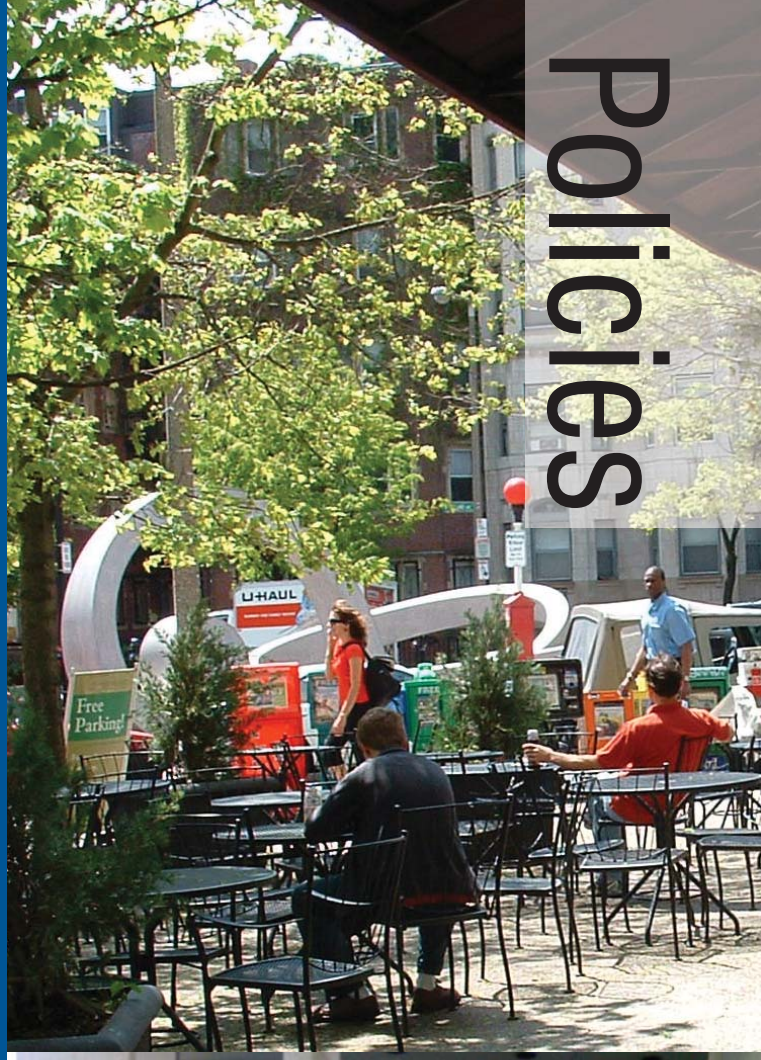
Thanks to Bridging the Gap, a transportation levy passed in November 2006, we are reducing our maintenance backlog, implementing safe routes to school, and planting trees to increase our urban canopy.

This brochure describes the actions being taken to make our vision a reality and to change Seattle's transportation template.

Sidewalk Cafés

SDOT recently streamlined our sidewalk café permit process to reduce review time and permit cost. With good design and management, sidewalk cafés encourage positive street activity and add 'eyes on the street' to enhance neighborhood safety while supporting the local economy.

We also created guidelines to make sure pedestrians can move easily around cafés and to maintain ADA access into and around the café.



Road Diets

Road diets adjust lane widths and reduce the number of lanes to promote safer driving and accommodate other modes of traffic in the right-of-way including bicycles, pedestrians, and transit. The number and width of travel lanes on the street affects pedestrian crossing times, parking, comfort of the street for pedestrians, bike lanes, and turning movements at intersections.

Because freight is important to the basic economy of the city and has unique right-of-way needs to support that role, freight is prioritized on streets classified as Major Truck Streets.

SDOT has implemented 24 road diets between 1972 and 2009. We continue to review every road being repaved for any needed striping changes.

Traffic Signal Control Box Artwork

Adding art to traffic signal control boxes showcases a neighborhood and business district's identity and can discourage graffiti. Signal boxes can be decorated with paint, decals, and vinyl wraps. Artists can be commissioned, photos added, or maps installed. SDOT's Street Use division processes permit applications within 10 business days of submittal. The permit fee is $101 for the first year and renews annually at $97.

Community Parking Program

Parking management is an important ingredient in creating a livable, walkable city. In 2008, SDOT started the Community Parking Program. It is a multi-year effort to engage over 30 communities to improve on-street parking management in Seattle business districts and adjacent residential areas. We are working to make improvements that balance competing parking needs and support transit, biking, walking, and other alternatives. Better management of existing parking plus transit investments equals better access for everyone and reduced greenhouse gas emissions.

SDOT is spending one year in each neighborhood working with community members to identify on-street parking challenges and opportunities, develop parking recommendations, and implement changes. To date, we have developed and implemented plans in eight neighborhoods and are currently engaged in three new communities.

Recommendations are made by:

- Conducting parking studies to find out how often spaces are open for arriving customers and how long cars stay
- Working with the community to learn about specific challenges and to collaborate on solutions

SDOT engages neighborhoods in many ways:

- Organizing walking tours
- Attending community meetings
- Hosting open houses
- Taking comments by mail, email, and phone

Outcomes may include:

- Installing new time-limit signs
- Adding load zones
- Installing pay stations or adjusting parking durations
- Converting on-street car parking to bicycle parking
- Creating restricted parking zones in residential areas

Goals:

- Provide access for customers and loading
- Support residential parking access
- Support a sustainable transportation system

Web Site: www.seattle.gov/transportation/parking/communityparking.htm
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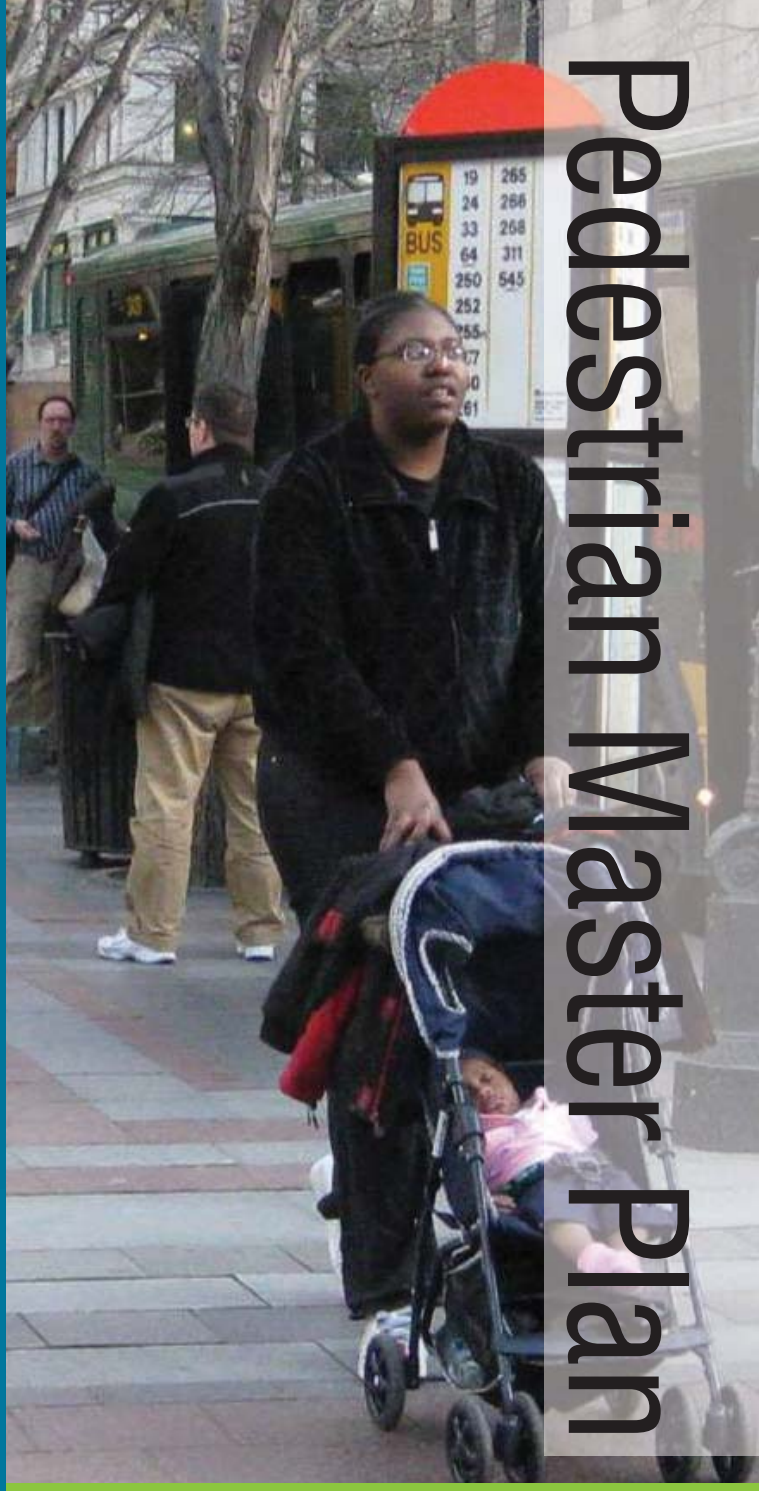
Pedestrian Master Plan



In 2009, Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) completed a Pedestrian Master Plan. It focuses our efforts where they are needed most. One of the first steps in developing the plan was to identify where people walk. For example, colleges and transit stations attract large numbers of pedestrians, elementary schools and grocery stores are medium attractors, and local bus stops have lower pedestrian demand.

Second, we developed criteria to help ensure that SDOT is providing equitable service to all Seattle residents, especially those who most need to walk for transportation or for their health. The criteria include high numbers of people with lower incomes and lower auto ownership, high numbers of people with disabilities, high rates of obesity and diabetes, and low rates of physical activity.

Third, based on a combination of street classifications and land use, we looked at how corridors function. It's great to be able to walk, but if walking doesn't get you where you need to go, you're less likely to do it. We weighted three categories of streets, with the greatest values given to regional and commercial streets that have traditionally prioritized autos and that have high transit use. These streets need more pedestrian improvements to help walkers get to transit and major destinations. Residential and industrial streets were assigned lower values.

In the end, we evaluated every street and ever intersection in the city and prioritized project areas based on the criteria above. We have project lists for all types of infrastructure improvements—sidewalks, curb ramps, crosswalks, and signals. But that's not all: the plan also includes a list of policy and program implementation actions, such as exploring changes to the Land Use Code that require developers to repair the sidewalk past their frontage to the nearest intersection.

Web Site: www.seattle.gov/transportation/pedestrian_masterplan.htm
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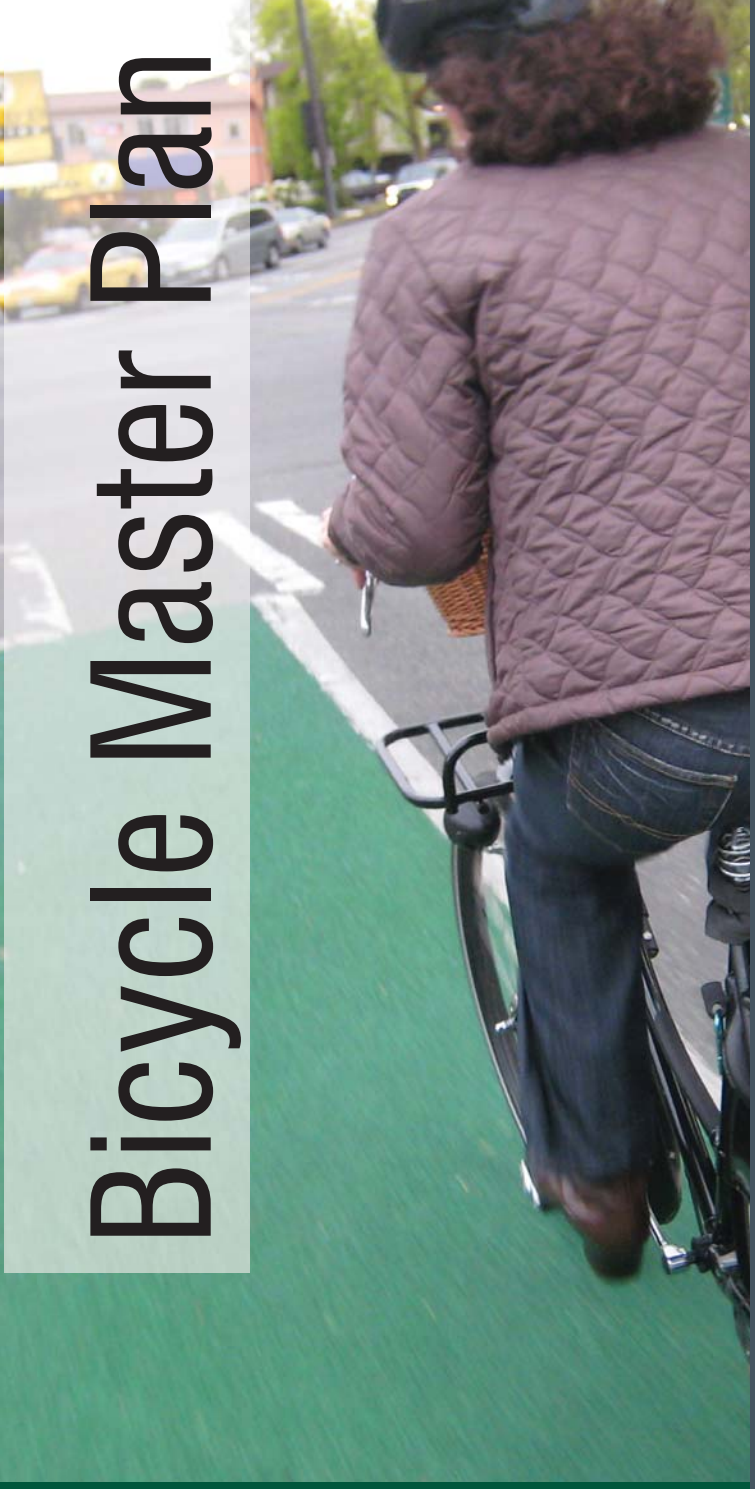
Goals:

- Reduce the number and severity of crashes involving pedestrians
- Make Seattle more walkable for all
- Develop a pedestrian environment that sustains healthy communities and supports a vibrant economy
- Raise awareness of the important role of walking in promoting health and preventing disease

Bicycle Master Plan



The Seattle Bicycle Master Plan defines 38 specific actions, to be completed within 10 years, to make Seattle the best community for bicycling in the United States. The plan recommends a 450-mile network of bicycle facilities that, when implemented, puts more than 95 percent of Seattle's residents within one-quarter mile of a bicycle facility. The network will serve all types of bicyclists—from new to experienced riders. Components include bicycle lanes, climbing lanes, new traffic signals, a citywide signed bicycle route system, and a completed urban trails system.

The plan also includes the following innovations:

- Shared lane markings (sharrows) to indicate the proper direction of bicycle travel, to encourage bicyclists to ride away from parked car doors, and to increase drivers' expectations to see bicyclists on streets
- Climbing lanes on hills to provide designated space for bicyclists
- Signs that show distances to major destinations
- On-street bike corrals for parking

The Bicycle Master Plan has been in place for three years and we are seeing the results. We are on target to complete installation of 92 miles of bike lanes and sharrows by the end of 2009, and our last bicycle count shows that between 2207 and 2009 there was a 15 percent increase in bicycling.

Goals:

- Increase use of bicycling in Seattle for all trip purposes
- Triple the amount of bicycling in Seattle between 2007 and 2017
- Improve safety of bicyclists throughout Seattle
- Reduce the rate of bicycle crashes by one third between 2007 and 2017

Web Site: www.seattle.gov/transportation/bikemaster.htm
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Transit Master Plan

Multiple agencies operate transit in Seattle using buses, electric trolley buses, light rail, streetcars, and a water taxi. In 2005, SDOT published Seattle's first Transit Plan, which established a goal to provide convenient, reliable transit service running every 15 minutes or better, 18 hours per day, every day.

The plan is being updated to exapnd this goal and will:

- Outline service and capital investment priorities for Seattle
- More explicitly define the links between transit, growth, and land use
- Assign the most appropriate type of transit service—bus, electric bus, streetcar, light rail—to high ridership corridors
- Recognize the demand for light rail to Ballard and West Seattle
- Identify electric transit expansion and improvement opportunities to fight global warming and increase ridership

Bridging the Gap

Thanks to Bridging the Gap, Seattle's transportation funding levy, we are now implementing many of the recommendations in the Transit Plan. The levy provides funding for street improvements to increase the reliability and speed of bus travel on several high ridership transit routes. Bridging the Gap is also funding 15-minute or better frequency on many routes. These Bridging the Gap investments benefit thousands of riders per day on the busiest routes in the system, connect Seattle's most populous neighborhoods, and support sustainable growth.

Web Site: www.seattle.gov/transportation/transitnetwork.htm
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Building Transportation Hubs

A hub is a place where different transportation modes are knitted together for easy transfer. There are three hubs in Center City Seattle: King Street Station, Washington State Ferries' Colman Dock, and Westlake Hub. In 2010, SDOT is making improvements to the Westlake Hub by closing a one-block street segment to vehicles for the creation of a pedestrian-friendly plaza at the existing streetcar terminus on Westlake. Doing so will make walking and biking through north downtown safer and more comfortable and will improve transfer opportunities between the Seattle Streetcar, Monorail, light rail, and major bus routes. The project includes pedestrian scaled lighting, covered bike parking, green stormwater infrastructure, and food vending opportunities. This area is expected to grow by 300,000 square feet of retail and 4,000 new housing units by 2030, with transit ridership doubling to 25,000 people in the evening peak hour.

Web Site: www.seattle.gov/transportation/westlakehub_streetcarplaza.htm
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celebrate Seattle Summer Streets

Walk. Bike. Shop. Play. Breathe. In 2009, the city opened up streets in five locations for people to have fun, celebrate the spirit and personality of their community, and support local businesses. Each event was hosted with the help of a local organization. Celebrate Summer Streets promoted healthy activities and illustrated what neighborhoods can be like when people drive less. They were an opportunity to ride a bike, skateboard, walk the dog, play music, and more.

Celebrate Seattle Summer Streets was inspired by Seattleites traveling to Bogotá, Columbia. They enjoyed the regular Sunday Ciclovia (bike path) where the city's avenues close to traffic and open to bikes and play. They also appreciated Curitiba, Brazil, where streets are often closed to vehicles and opened to pedestrians. There's nothing wrong with borrowing a great idea.

Web Site: http://seattlecan.org/summerstreets/
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Northgate Transit Oriented Development: A Success Story

One of Seattle's success stories is the transformation of a mall built in the 1950s that was dependent on the auto. In 2000, Seattle, King County, and Sound Transit coordinated a public process to shape investments near a proposed light rail station. As a result, revitalization is taking place, and this major bus hub is quickly morphing into an urban center. SDOT drafted a Coordinated Transportation Investment Plan; the city built a new library and community center; the mall added more stores and pedestrian amenities; Thorton Creek was daylighted; and 109 condos, 278 apartments, and 125 senior housing units have been built next to the bus center. Since 2004, the city has invested $35 million, encouraging $300 million in private investments. Our light rail line is expanding to this urban center as early as 2018.

Web Site: www.seattle.gov/mayor/issues/northgate/
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