



# REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

OFFICE OF CITY AUDITOR – SEATTLE

August 13, 2008

## City Should Take Steps to Enhance Pedestrian and Cyclist Mobility Through and Around Construction Sites

### Why We Did This Study

Seattle City Councilmembers, in response to citizen complaints and their own observations, asked the Office of City Auditor to assess whether the City of Seattle was doing everything it could to minimize the duration and impact of street and sidewalk closures on pedestrians and cyclists. They were particularly interested in alternative solutions for better pedestrian access, given the current volume of construction activity in the City’s downtown core.

### Background

In the City of Seattle, a street use permit is required for any work or occupation in the public right-of-way. In 2007, the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) issued approximately 19,000 street use permits. In 2007, SDOT’s Street Use Division had a budget of \$12,012,943 and 64.5 FTEs (full-time equivalent positions). Its staff included supervisors, plan reviewers, permit issuers, inspectors, and data managers.

### What We Found

We found that several factors were critical to SDOT’s ability to effectively manage construction activity in the City’s right-of-way: the use of a traffic control plan for construction sites which impact arterial streets, the coordination of multiple construction sites in the same area, and inspection and enforcement. In addition, clear and current communication with the public about planned and ongoing sidewalk, lane and street closures can help ease pedestrian, driver and cyclist frustration.

### Recommendations

We identified four main recommendation areas:

1. Making Pedestrian and Cyclist Mobility a Priority,
2. Coordinating Multiple Projects Located in the Same Area,
3. Improving Inspection and Enforcement, and
4. Communicating with the Public.

The Office of City Auditor and SDOT agreed to six action items covering the four recommendation areas.

Summary of Action Plan Items	
1.	Develop a set of preferred and alternative methods for pedestrian protection based on the Washington D.C. model.
2.	Enforce Americans with Disabilities (ADA) accessibility standards for pedestrians.
3.	Dedicate a street use inspector to coordinate multiple construction projects located in the same area.
4.	Develop a policy for waiving inspections.
5.	Require applicants for street use permits to submit a notification plan.
6.	Make information on sidewalk closures and alternative routes available on SDOT’s website.

### How We Did Our Work

Our field work consisted of interviews with SDOT officials, field observations and meetings with stakeholder organizations. We also gathered information from seven municipalities: Denver, New York (Manhattan), San Jose, Toronto, Tucson, Vancouver, B.C., and Washington, D.C.

A copy of the Office of City Auditor’s full report can be obtained at the office Web site at <http://seattle.gov/audit> or by calling (206) 233-3801. Please direct any questions or comments regarding this report, or suggestions for future audits, to Susan Cohen, Seattle City Auditor, at (206) 233-3801 or [susan.cohen@seattle.gov](mailto:susan.cohen@seattle.gov).

## Best Practices

Our review of best practices indicated that other cities including New York, Washington D.C., Toronto, and Vancouver B.C. prioritize maintaining pedestrian sidewalk access during construction whenever safely possible. These cities make extensive use of covered pedestrian walkways. If the sidewalk cannot remain open, pedestrian traffic may be safely routed into a traffic lane to maintain pedestrian access on the same side of the street. Closing the sidewalk is considered only if these alternatives cannot be accomplished safely.

Washington D.C.'s Department of Transportation spent almost one year meeting biweekly with members of the development and construction

community to develop a set of preferred and alternative methods for pedestrian protection for each phase of construction. For details of Washington D.C.'s approach, go to [www.ddot.dc.gov/ddot](http://www.ddot.dc.gov/ddot) and search for "Pedestrian Protection by Phase of Construction." These procedures were based on a policy directive to "minimize disruption to the normal pedestrian pathways while providing adequate protection for citizens."

Currently, SDOT discusses with contractors the option of using covered pedestrian walkways to maintain pedestrian sidewalk access. However, there is currently no documentation of the City's preferred methods of pedestrian protection.



New York City pedestrian walkway at 1330 Avenue of the Americas, between 53rd and 54th Streets. Photo: David W. Dunlap/The New York Times



Two current covered pedestrian walkways in Seattle.