Transit-Friendly Design Guidelines

Cities are defined by the everyday experience we have on the street. This coordinated approach calls for a street-level urbanity, where sidewalks, trees, landscaping, benches, building entries – and bus shelters – all come together to make a civil, coherent and pleasant pedestrian experience.

The Transit-Friendly Design project is a coordinated approach between the City of Seattle, Metro and other entities to create an urban environment that welcomes and encourages transit riders. The immediate focus of this effort is "Center City," including all downtown (from Belltown to the International District) and the surrounding ring of neighborhoods: South Lake Union, Queen Anne, Capitol Hill and First Hill, but many of these ideas can be incorporated throughout the City.

How to Use This Document:

The Transit-Friendly Design Guidelines demonstrate the key design elements that help create a transit friendly urban environment. The document is divided into three sections: transit facilities, streetscapes, and buildings. Each section contains design ideas and tools to assist you as you renovate your existing building or build a new structure. The guidelines are designed to be flexible, to allow your project to respond to the distinctive character of its surroundings.

Transit Facilities

Clean, Well-Lighted Transit Waiting Areas

Seattle Streetcar Station

IDX Building, 3rd and Madison, Northbound

Denny and Stewart Triangle, Eastbound

The design for transit areas, the adjacent streetscape and building fronts should accommodate a variety of users and make the transit environment a pleasant and interesting experience. These guidelines suggest tools and considerations to this end.

Well-designed transit facilities and amenities will attract transit patrons and enhance their movement between destinations in the area and will complement the adjacent streetscape and buildings.

Visibility and Accessibility

People must be able to see the bus coming. Poorly designed shelters that obstruct views of approaching buses will force people to leave the shelters to watch for oncoming buses. Information kiosks or vendors that can obstruct the view of oncoming buses should be located “down-stream” from the shelter.

People must be able to board the bus conveniently. To many riders this is the most important aspect of a bus shelter’s design, because people like to be close to the point where the bus door will open so they will be sure of getting on. The shelter should not obstruct this process of boarding.

Safe and Well-Lighted Shelters

Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles should be considered in the shelter and adjacent streetscape and buildings. Where feasible and funding is available, Metro will endeavor to light bus shelters; many shelters can be installed with internal lighting.

Clean, Comfortable and Convenient

Shelters should provide a place to sit, protection from weather, and a feeling of safety and security. Benches and leaning rails should be provided. Exit and entry openings should be oriented so that people are protected from the wind. However, it is important to keep open the side of the shelter facing the street to allow passengers to board or exit the bus easily.

Well-designed and Interesting

King County Metro has an outstanding bus shelter mural program. One of the nation’s largest, ongoing community-based public art programs, it is truly a unique folk art collection with a wide variety of styles and themes. Adjacent properties interested in commissioning artwork for a Metro shelter can also contact Metro for additional ideas and assistance.

Information Systems

Schedule, route information and maps are typically installed at the head (front) of bus stops and should not block the view of the bus.

Appropriately Located

Good locations for bus shelters are near retail stores that have products related to bus riders' needs (e.g. bakery, flower shop, newsstand, etc.) and are open late at night; near office building entrances within view of a security guard; near street vendors; and in conjunction with other amenities such as telephones, benches, and bicycle racks.

Typical Features of a Metro Transit Facility

- Bus stops should be approximately 150' long and accommodate three coaches simultaneously.
- Bus stop sign
- Shelters and litter receptacles at stops where bus shelter is provided by Metro.
- Shelter includes bench and/or leaning rail, litter receptacle and possibly lighting.
- Awnings may be utilized instead of shelters.
- Wheel chair accessibility: a 10' x 12' clear and unobstructed area with access to the bus' front door
- Metro provides custodial maintenance, shelter cleaning and litter pickup at stops where bus shelter is provided by Metro.

The accompanying photos of some typical Metro facilities show important amenities and advantages:

- Dedicated waiting area, away from store front entrances, clear separation of public and private spaces.
- Leaning rails and/or benches provided in shelters.
- "Ocean wave" windows that deter graffiti and vandalism.
- Close to bus doors for easy boarding

Metro's Standard Bus Stop Design

Most bus stops serve a combination of 40' and 60' buses and must accommodate up to three buses simultaneously. Typically, the location and design is dependent on physical characteristics of the surrounding area. Applicants and designers should contact Jay Vavra Transit Facilities Planner (206-684-1520, Jay.Vavra@KingCounty.gov)

Nearby retail conveniently serves transit riders' needs

Washington Mutual, 3rd and Seneca, Southbound

Transit signage, 4th Avenue S and S Jackson

Streetscapes

The heart of urban experience

IDX Building, 3rd and Madison

Washington Mutual, Second and Seneca, Southbound

Washington Mutual, Second and Seneca, Southbound

The streetscape is the essence of the pedestrian's urban experience. The streetscape is made up of streets and sidewalks, which become both open space and pedestrian terrain. The streetscape runs like a river between buildings and transit stops, enhancing the pedestrian experience and creating an engaging and rich transition between public and private realms.

Transit Zones

The City's Right-of-Way Improvement Manual (ROWIM) identifies specific design considerations for transit zones. Transit zones include both the sidewalk and the street. Pedestrian uses on the sidewalk include passenger waiting, queuing and boarding. Buses need to layover or provide staging in the street. Transit zones should be easily identifiable, safe, accessible, secure and provide a comfortable waiting area for transit passengers, while providing for pedestrian sidewalk circulation and through-block connections for pedestrian travel.

Signage and Wayfinding

Good wayfinding helps people find their way to your building. Where there is an adopted wayfinding plan, as in some areas of downtown, signage should conform to that plan.

Develop and Follow a Street Concept Plan

Street concept plans are a way for community groups, developers and property owners to collaborate on a design concept for a street. The street concept complements the adjacent land use and the street's operational characteristics, and can integrated a palette of street furniture, landscaping and public amenities. These plans articulate a vision for the street and can stimulate discussion between the proponent and the City about appropriate streetscape elements. Typically, the concept plan is implemented over time by multiple property owners as re-development occurs.

Make the Sidewalk Safe, Welcoming, and Open to the General Public

Certain elements in the sidewalk and in open spaces around the building will help create a welcoming feeling. These include:

- appropriate hardscape treatments
- pedestrian-scale sidewalk lighting
- accent paving (especially at corners, entries and passageways)
- creative landscape treatments (planting, planters, trellises, arbors)
- gathering spaces — benches and tables
- water features
- inclusion of art elements

—where the building meets the street

Provide Overhead Weather Protection, Landscaping and other Pedestrian Amenities

Comfort and convenience are important elements in the streetscape, just as they are in transit facilities. Overhead weather protection – like awnings and canopies – helps provide human-scale proportions and pedestrian comfort, and encourages people to enjoy a stroll on the sidewalk or sit down at a sidewalk cafe. Awnings can be integrated into the streetscape or adjacent development through overhangs, canopies and building arcades, ideally with appropriate lighting.

Typical street furniture includes benches, litter and recycling receptacles, bike racks, multiple publication news racks, water fountains, pedestrian scaled lighting and planters. Sidewalks and walkways should be generous and well-maintained, possibly using special paving as a wayfinding device.

Landscaping should be carefully chosen to match any existing landscape on the street and follow the City's drought-tolerant planting list to reduce maintenance costs. Public art can also help create a comfortable, safe and attractive public realm. Public art includes art installations that have a functional component and art that is purely aesthetic.

The accompanying photos of well-designed streetscapes illustrate appropriate design details:

- Open, unobstructed sidewalk areas create good lines of sight and optimal pedestrian movement.
- Windowed areas on the ground floor provide "natural surveillance," helping to deter loitering.
- Lit, covered areas offer weather protection to transit users and pedestrians.
- Store fronts and ground floor uses are visible from the street.
- Benches/leaning rails offer transit users and others a place to sit/lean.
- Landscaping is used to define the walking path, pockets for benches and passive activities, outdoor retail uses, and to provide a unique planting palette that enhances the neighborhood identity.

Contacts

Generally, new development must coordinate with SDOT and King County Metro Transit for the installation, relocation and/or removal of transit zones and or/facilities, including bus layover or staging areas. For assistance in interpreting and applying the ROWIM, contact Barbara Gray, SDOT, (206) 615-0872, barbara.gray@seattle.gov. SDOT's Street Use Team issues permits for improvements in the right-of-way and may be contacted at the 37th floor of the Seattle Municipal Tower, 700 5th Avenue, (206) 684-5283.


Bench


Railing


Awning


Lighting

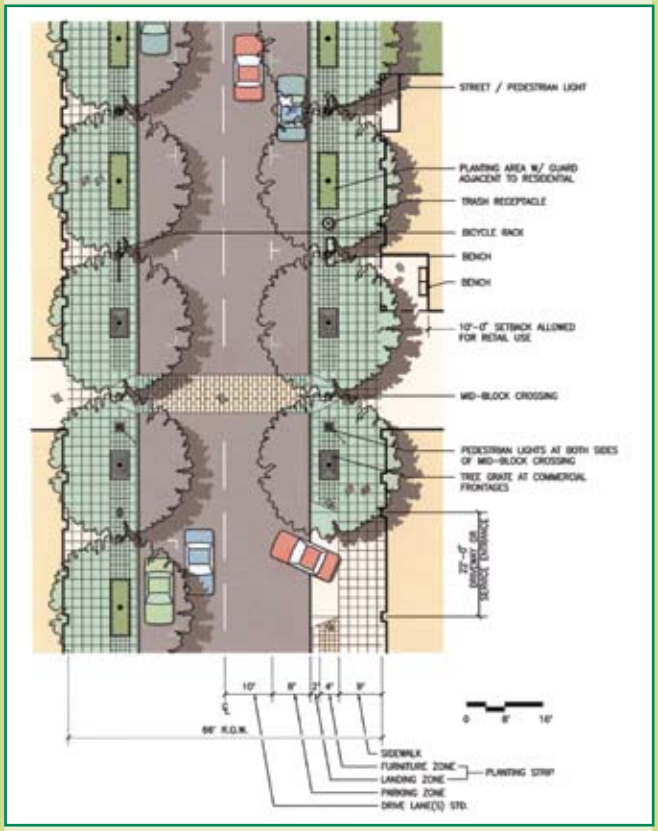

Bench


Special paving


Bike rack


Awning


Litter receptacle

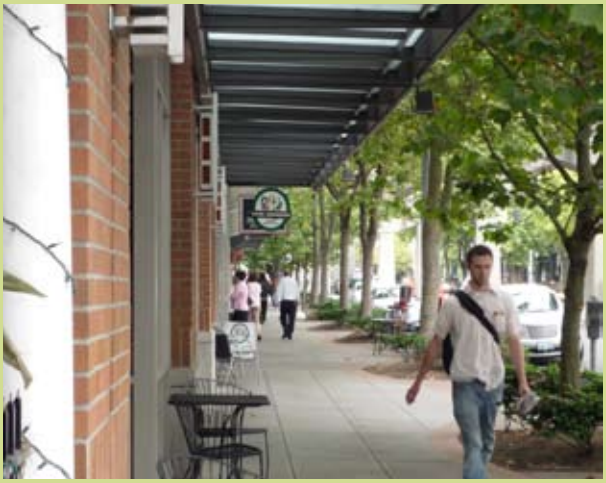


Street Concept Plan Template

Buildings

A welcoming and attractive edge

In Belltown



IDX Tower, Fourth and Madison

Concord Building, First and Eagle

Scale the Building to Speak to Human Activities

At the street level, the building's scale should encourage pedestrian interaction, comfort and safety. This can be done through architectural features, fenestration patterns, rooflines, materials and color. Modulations and bays can articulate the facade and break up the building's bulk at the street edge. This articulation shows a finer grain that encourages pedestrian activity.

The Front Door – the Most Important Part of the Building

Make front door entries clearly identifiable and visible from the street. This encourages and invites pedestrian interaction, especially if there is ample space around the entry. Avoid isolated areas around the entry and maintain lines of sight into and out of the space.

Some typical design treatments for the front door and lobby are: transparency, extra height, lighting, distinctive architectural details or landscaping, integrated artwork, water features, and railings and seating.

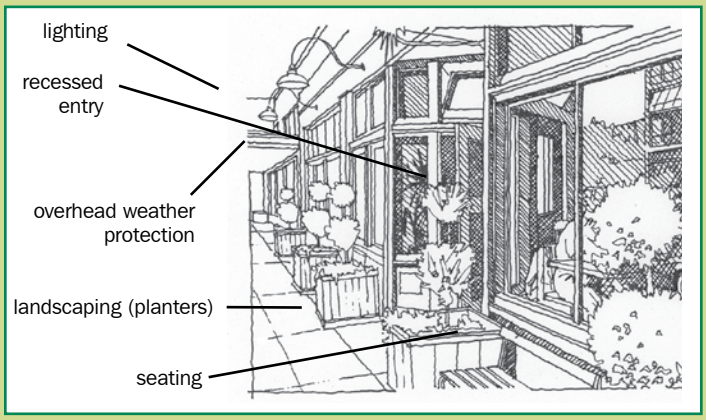
Provide Appropriate Building Corner Treatments

Building corners are places of convergence. The following design strategies can help create a welcoming sense of place for pedestrians and bus riders, and serve as wayfinders to draw people to your building.

- setbacks, open space
- street furniture (benches, chairs, tables and leaning rails)
- iconic corner building features

Provide Adequate Lighting.

Lighting makes people feel safe and secure. Specific strategies include Illumination of distinctive building features (entries, signage, awnings, display windows, landscaping and associated street furniture). Lighting should spill onto and illuminate the sidewalk. Minimize glare on the street.



A street level use that integrates pedestrian amenities into the siting and design of the building.

Activate the Facade and Avoid Blank Walls

Blank facades limit pedestrian interaction with the building and "deaden" the street environment, encouraging graffiti and other undesirable activities.

Transparent facades enliven the street environment, and provide interest and activity along the sidewalk, especially if they provide visibility into store fronts. At night they can provide a secondary, more intimate source of lighting. Design treatments that are alternatives to blank facades include small retail spaces (as small as 50 square feet) for food bars, newsstands, and other specialized retail tenants or merchandising display windows, limiting blank wall dimensions; screening the wall through vertical landscaping on a trellis; integrated art (such as mosaics, murals, decorative masonry pattern, sculpture, relief); different textures, materials or setbacks and indentations to create visual interest, seating ledges or perches, especially on sunny facades and near bus stops.

Benaroya Hall, Third and Union, Southbound

Enhance the Building with Landscaping

The building entry and façade can be enhanced with generous landscaping features, including water features, trellises, plants and raised planter beds. Landscaping welcomes the pedestrian and bus rider to ground level uses and entrances facing the street.

IDX Tower, Third and Madison, bus "perch" and passenger

Provide Appropriate Signage that Conforms to the Wayfinding System in Place

Effective wayfinding on your building identifies your building as an integral part of the streetscape experience. Where there is an adopted wayfinding plan, as in some areas of downtown, signage should conform to that plan.

Design for Pedestrian-Friendly Uses

People are attracted by inviting, interesting street-level spaces. Attractive uses are easily accessible, open during regular shopping hours, and generate walk-in pedestrian clientele. Retail space can be configured to attract tenants whose products or services will "spill-out" onto the sidewalk. Sidewalk widths should be generous to accommodate design features and pedestrian through traffic. Other design principles to consider are reinforcing any existing retail concentrations, and varying the size, width and depth of commercial spaces, to create interest and variety and accommodate smaller "niche" businesses.

Seattle Public Library, Fourth Ave. entrance

Contacts

Contact Kristian Kofoed, Senior Urban Planner, (206) 233-7191, kristian.kofoed@seattle.gov, or Lyle Bicknell, Senior Urban Design Planner, (206) 684-0763, lyle.bicknell@seattle.gov, with the City of Seattle's Department of Planning and Development.

Contacts

Transit Facilities

- Richard Garcia, Metro Construction Coordinator, (206) 684-2785 or (206) 684-2732
- Jay Vavra, Transit Facilities Planner (206) 684-1520, jay.vavra@kingcounty.gov

Streetscapes

- Barbara Gray, Strategic Advisor, Seattle Department of Transportation, (206) 615-0872 barbara.gray@seattle.gov

Buildings

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For more information about the Transit Friendly Design project or to schedule training for your organization, please contact Kristian Kofoed, Senior Urban Planner, DPD, (206) 233-7191, kristian.kofoed@seattle.gov.