



APPROVED MINUTES OF THE MEETING

Mike McGinn
Mayor

Diane Sugimura
Director, DPD

Raymond Gastil
Planning Director, DPD

Mary Johnston
Chair

Andrew Barash

Julie Bassuk

Graham Black

Brendan Connolly

Lauren Hauck

John Hoffmann

Julie Parrett

Dennis Ryan

Norie Sato

Guillermo Romano
Executive Director

Valerie Kinast
Coordinator

Tom Iurino
Senior Staff

January 21, 2010

Convened 1:30 pm
Adjourned 4:38 pm

Projects Reviewed

Alaskan Way Viaduct Seawall Replacement
Fire Station 9 - Fremont

Commissioners Present

Mary Johnston, Chair
Andrew Barash
Brendan Connolly
Julie Bassuk
Graham Black
Lauren Hauck
Julie Parrett
Norie Sato

Incoming Commissioners Present

Laurel Kunkler
Donald Vehige

Staff Present

Guillermo Romano
Valerie Kinast
Tom Iurino
Tim Trujillo



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January 21, 2010

Project: Alaskan Way Viaduct Seawall Replacement

Phase: Design Update

Last Reviewed: June 18, 2009; May 21, 2009; January 15, 2009

Presenters: Diane Hilmo, WSDOT
Susan Everett, WSDOT
Steve Pearce, SDOT
John Savo, NBBJ
Boris Dramov, ROMA Design
Bonnie Fisher, ROMA Design

Attendees:

Vaughn Bell, SDOT	Mike Johnson, SDOT
Eric Tweit, SDOT	Diane Hilmo, WSDOT
Steve Leach, WSDOT	Emily Mannetti, WSDOT
Jeffrey Bailey, NBBJ	David Yuan, NBBJ
AJ Yang, SCIDPDA	Bob Corwin, community member

Time: 1:30pm – 3:00 pm

(000/RS0000)

SUMMARY

The Design Commission thanked the Alaska Way Viaduct Seawall Replacement team for their presentation. The Commission thinks the new alignment of the tunnel is a positive change and the affect it will have on reknitting the street grid at the north portal. The new alignment results in parcels at the south portal that are much more conducive to redevelopment and creating positive urban spaces. Commissioners understand the choices that must be made regarding the maintenance buildings and the opportunities and challenges associated with those structures. The Commission asked the design team to consider the following:

- There is concern about the quality of the pedestrian promenade proposed to be located in the footprint of the viaduct ramps along Railroad Way (running diagonally between Alaskan Way and 1st Ave S) because it is pinched at First and S. Dearborn St. Considering the volumes of pedestrians and the potential for views between the stadiums and the waterfront, please consider how this pinch point might be remedied. Addressing this problem will also help maximize the open space potential by better linking the plazas proposed on both sides of S. Dearborn St.
- The Commission is glad to see that the current design gives more attention to First Ave S. Explore how the proposal to develop First Ave S into a boulevard could create a grand entrance to Pioneer Square. With increased permeability this could become an important link between the stadiums and Pioneer Square. Avoid raising the elevation of the bridge over Mercer St. more than absolutely necessary, to limit the size of the wall next to the sidewalk along Mercer St.
- Consider how clarity in design of the highway and ramps can reduce the need for signage. At the north portal there are some counterintuitive elements in the access that need to be addressed.
- The stairway on the “little H” overpass that links pedestrians to the rest of the south portal is considered essential by the Commission. This element provides a unique design opportunity for a larger gesture.
- The Commission recognized the lack of 1% for the art in the project but recommends exploring options for integration of an artist into the design team early on the process

Project Presentation

The design team presented three bored tunnel alignment alternatives. The design team was here to present initial thoughts on urban design and changes in the tunnel portals as well as tunnel support buildings. The City of Seattle, WSDOT, Port of Seattle and King County all continue to work on this project. WSDOT has put together a team which includes NBBJ, Parsons Brinckerhoff, and ROMA Design Group.

The tunnel contract will be design build. The project is currently in the environmental process and the team hopes to select a preferred alternative in the coming year. The design team plans to meet with the Design Commission in February, March, and April in an effort to involve the Design Commission in the design process. The design team hopes to complete the visual concepts and design guidelines by May. Initial contracting will then begin upon their completion. The contract will require the design builder to come back to the Commission while they develop their design.

In October 2010 the Commission saw the SR99 Bored Tunnel Alignment presentation. The design team used the Commission’s comments from that and other previous meetings in developing design goals for the two portal areas. The alignment geometry changed and, therefore, the team modified some design characteristics. The old alignment followed 1st Ave and exited at the Battery Street tunnel entrance/exit. The new alignment is further to the west.

The team feels that this alignment allows for increased development along 1st Avenue near the south portal and improves pedestrian and bike access, as well as lessens the impact on historic structures. The new route would also provide an exit for stadium traffic originating from West Seattle. This option did not exist in previous alternatives.

The newly proposed north portal would lessen impacts on existing businesses near the tunnel entrance, particularly during construction, according to the design team. They feel this would be a more effective use of nearby land.

Boris Dramov, from ROMA Design Group, then presented more information about the changes made



Figure 1: North Portal Options 1 and 2

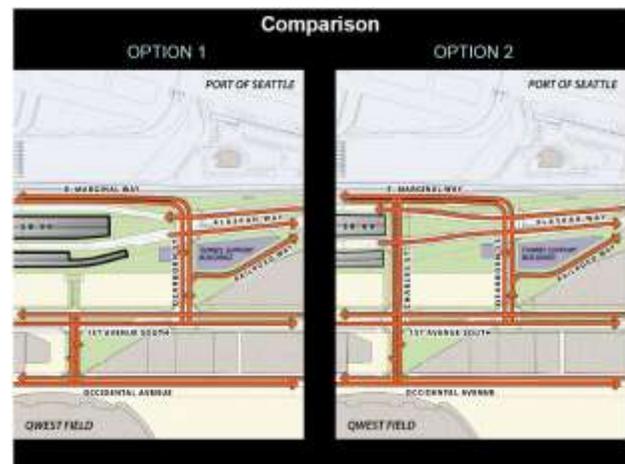


Figure 2: South Portal Options 1 and 2

in the design. The design team's goal is to address the city's objectives by achieving broader goals of safety and comfort for pedestrians and bikers, improving the urban experience, and contributing positively to the urban fabric of the area.

The existing north area is dissected by transit infrastructure. The constraints negatively influence the vitality of the area as it currently exists. The new scenario calls for new east-west connections across Aurora Ave while providing access to the tunnel and Aurora Ave for north bound traffic. This option is designed to provide a pedestrian friendly Aurora Ave as well as contain transit priority treatments. Additionally, this would provide for landscape opportunities as well as development. (See North Portal: option 2 image)

John Savo, of NBBJ, stated that the tunnel support buildings have a number of functions to support the tunnel construction. These are programmatic functions which include:

- emergency ventilation
- electrical systems and equipment
- maintenance facilities with parking
- operation backup and systems monitoring

The ventilation fans will be the tallest elements of the project while the tunnel maintenance and operations will need to exist above grade for access.

Near the north portal, the building will follow the street grid to the east of 6th Ave and lie between Harrison St. and Thomas St. The fans will be located over the cut-and-cover portion of the site. The north of the building will be up to the edge of the tunnel, thus becoming a part of the entrance expression. There will be pedestrian access around the site with a main entrance along 6th Ave N.

Next, Boris explained how the existing south portal area, near the stadiums, contains barriers that impact the urban fabric. He stated that the design team is continuing to look at options for how to improve this. Two options are currently under study. The elements include an elevated portion of SR99, the tunnel portals, a bypass bridge, tunnel support buildings, the Port of Seattle and 1st Ave. This option, "Option 2" includes a larger system of roadway connections that run east to west. However, Option 2 provides shorter ramps, which provides the opportunity to connect Charles St. Boris explained how Railroad Way is an important connection that contains opportunities for pedestrians. Option 2, as currently designed, includes a major pedestrian promenade along Occidental Ave, pedestrian enhancements along 1st Ave as well as a city side pedestrian bike trail to the east and west of SR99.

The design team is considering how to create the proper signal for vehicles approaching the city and its associated mix and intensity of uses and frame it appropriately. The design team's goal is to create an appropriate pedestrian environment throughout the area.

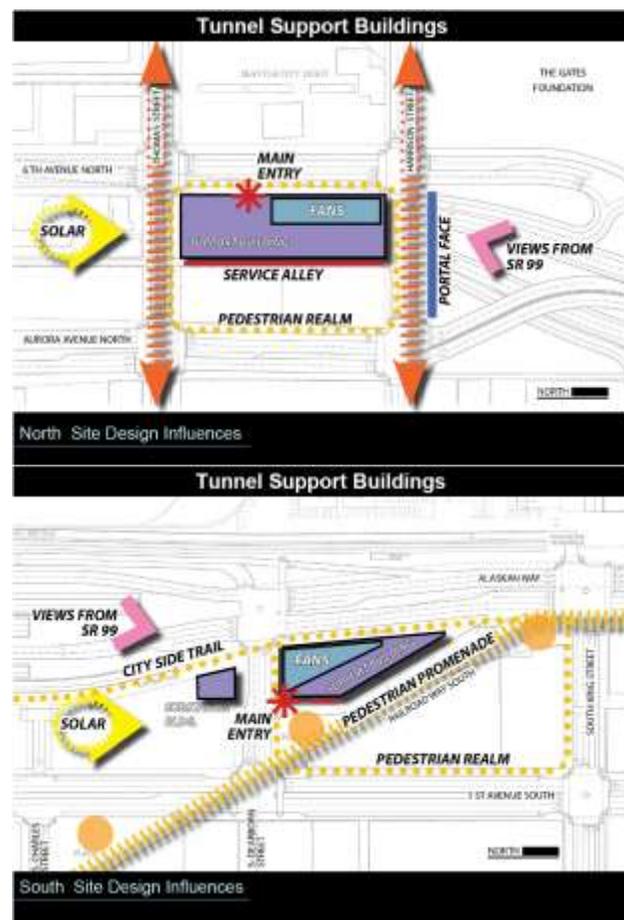


Figure 3: North and South Tunnel Support Buildings

A northbound transit lane and transit priority access for Alaska Way is designed into the plan in Option 1 would create opportunities for development along 1st Ave that would help to knit an improved urban environment. Green and plaza opportunities would exist with this option. The previous plan has a similar amount of developable area but it was arguably less desirable.

According to John, WSDOT challenged the design team to improve the area around the support building. The challenge was to design this building with the existing portion of the Alaskan Way Viaduct that would remain during construction. This building will be a prominent building due to its location. The main entrance is currently planned for the southeast corner. A pedestrian promenade will be created along Railroad Way S., creating new opportunities for plazas. The next meeting will include a presentation of further developed concepts.

Some of the design issues that the team is considering include the sense of arrival for motorists entering the city on SR99. There is a phenomenal processional quality. There is an opportunity due to the condition of entering south downtown from the south and South Lake Union from the north. "How can we create a language in which those that are using the area is very clear," asked John. The design team feels that 1st Ave has the ability to be enhanced in terms of streetscape and enhanced urban fabric. John then explained how Alaskan Way must also be considered in broad terms at this state as it is the "symbolic meeting point of land and water, it's both going to function in terms of a variety of a recreational activities but it's also a movement corridor." But, it's also of citywide significance, therefore its scale and continuity need to be considered. Reviewing the pedestrian movement on both sides of Alaskan Way, the design team aims to improve those linkages.

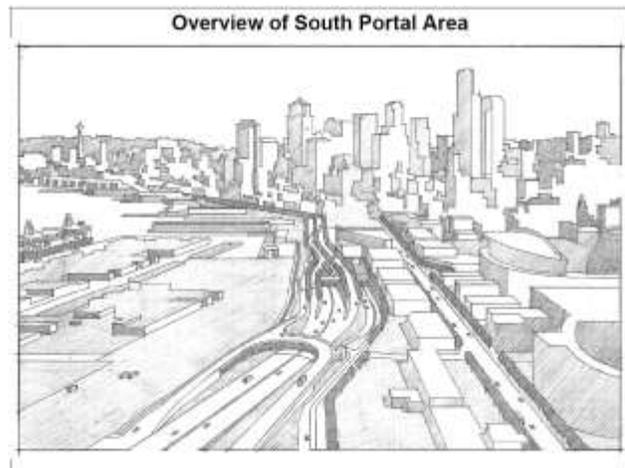


Figure 4: South Portal Area Overview Sketch

He also asked, "How do we make the ramps that are leading to Alaskan Way really signal that you are entering the city" and its associated environment? He also stated that the design team is looking at how to use the overpass as an element that may be a special gateway piece, as how it is treated is an important consideration. The overpass is actually taller than typically required as a result of the railway underneath. The design team is considering using signage to as a way to enhance this dramatic welcoming gesture.

Commissioners' Questions/Comments:

This portion is part of the access, not the portal part, right? You're developing visual guidelines for this contract as well?

It's part of a different contract. The design guidelines will cover the entire program except for the waterfront.

The reason for having a sidewalk that goes along the overpass, is this to allow pedestrian traffic when the tail track is occupied?

Yes, this is to provide access for the when tail track access is blocked. In many ways pedestrian access might become more desirable due to the views. Stairs are intended for the corner of the overpass near S. Royal Brougham Way. How to turn this functional element into something that becomes more of a gateway is something for which we'll be seeking input.

It's a new city street and we have a complete streets ordinance and we want to pursue designs that accommodate all modes of travel.

I appreciate the attitude trying to take this element as a gateway but I am curious about the informational signage and other elements that may be competing with this piece. Is there consideration for how to create clarity of wayfinding while achieving that presence?

We have that same concern. We need to look at the requirements. We'll be looking at the entire corridor and hope to have a better idea by the next meeting date.

I expect nearly all signage along SR99 to be placed a thousand feet away.

Is the U-overpass always open? Are you looking at this overpass as an integral part of the portal expression?

It is always open. It serves two purposes. The bypass and tail track as well as its use as an alternative route.

The nature of the edge of the overpass will need to be addressed. I think the way the stair is created, the columns and how they're organized, will all be important aspects. We have three principle elements this corridor, the ramps and entrance, the overpass, and this element. The team has not gotten that far to speak to it.

There should be a tying of the pieces to create an overall experience. The building will be a fourth element that will be a part of the composition.

In the north portal area, how will pedestrians go north across Aurora?

Can you explain the dimensional elements as well?

Pedestrian connections will be on both sides of 6th Ave to the north of the entry ramp only. Pedestrians looking to cross over Aurora will have to cross at one of the streets south of the tunnel entrance. The entrance and exits in the vicinity will not allow for pedestrian crossings due to the elevation changes. Aurora width is 92-feet wide and becomes wider. We have not finalized this design. We would like to maintain 14-foot sidewalk widths throughout.

On Harrison, when you stand at the tunnel, will that be a horrible place to stand?

There are some potentially interesting views, though noisy. There would be an opportunity to create viewpoints. This access point is similar to entering a hill as opposed to dropping down.

There seems to be a plaza opportunity near the south portal between Dearborn St. and Charles St.

We believe there may be utility issues. Transmission lines run through this area and limit our options. We don't know the programming yet for some of these sites. We will be looking at this. This design is evolving. We are also looking to possibly move Dearborn St. slightly to the south which would change our options at this site.

I'm trying to get a sense of the scale of the portal face. What is the height from grade to the top of the portal?

There is an approximately 30-foot difference between the driving surface and the top of the portal face. We're looking to provide enough cover for vegetation. We are looking to introduce street trees along the edges. The portal entrances also enter at different heights due to the complexity of the street configurations.

Both the north and south entrances have a portion of cut and cover?

Yes. At the north end, most of the cut and cover portion will be covered by the maintenance building. The south end will include a full block of exposed cut and cover.

I had a reaction to intersection of 1st and Dearborn and question whether the corner could be expanded to create a clearer path along Railroad Way S.

We can look at the view corridor along the Railroad Way. It is all a part of the ongoing discussion. Meaningful open space is critical.

Moving the whole auto experience out of the idea of the city is helpful from an urban design aspect. The idea for the new blocks on top of the whole was uncomfortable. The opportunity to develop 1st Avenue is great. The north is also going to improve, especially Aurora.

There is going to be a BRT station in that area along Aurora.

The ramp having to be functional is an issue. What happens when construction is complete?

We're working hard to make it work.

At this stage, I appreciate how the images are simplified. Keeping the design elegant and simple in a subdued way is the right direction.

Can you explain the larger RFQ/RFP process and where we are? Part of the opportunity will be in the Commissions' ability to impact what happens in terms of urban design in both the writing of the RFP and the selection of the consultant. What will be the commission's role in refining the guidelines?

Our plan is to have the final RFP to go out in May with changes in July. September to December will be spent reviewing submissions. We have contracts at both ends. The design builder can only create preliminary designs until a record of decision is developed and accepted. The design builder will likely spend most of 2011 in design.

Lots of our comments pertain to details that go beyond today's presentation. Concerning the north portal, one of the tools that can be used to slow traffic is a circuitous approach. Look for opportunities at the south portal to decompress people in a geometric fashion. More acknowledgement and awareness of signage will be helpful in the future.

On the Little H, (overpass) concerning the stairway, I think this is important to keep.

In this process, there should be some provision for the design teams to integrate artists into the design from the beginning.

Artists are good thinkers regarding these design elements and can be helpful. It would be helpful to take advantage of that opportunity. I am not sure who is going to be watching for continuity within the different project stages and teams.