

Seattle Pedestrian Advisory Board Meeting Minutes, October 10, 2007

Meeting called to order at 6:00 P.M.

SPAB Members Present: Celeste Gilman, Chair; Ben Smith, Vice-Chair; Paul Niebanck, Mark Bandy, Howard Wu, Petaki Cobell, T. Frick-McNamara, Mary Lou Siebert, Tom Williams, members.

Also present: Jim Curtin, SDOT liaison to SPAB, and Brian Lee (liaison from the City's Bike Board).

Presenters: For the Viaduct "Moving Forward" Project: Ali Amiri & John Benedict, WSDOT; Rose Evonuk, a contractor working for WSDOT. Mike Johnson, City of Seattle.

For Washington State's Pedestrian and Bike Plan: Paula Reaves, WSDOT, and Jim Zimmerman, a contractor working for WSDOT.

September's minutes: Approved by voice vote.

Public comment: Jacob from Feet First spoke about the barriers to pedestrian mobility caused by the sidewalk closures on 5th Avenue. The sidewalk is closed for one block on one side of the street, then reopens, only for the sidewalk to be closed on the other side of the street in the following block. That requires pedestrians to hopscotch from one side of the street to the other while motorized vehicles go through unimpeded. Celeste said that SPAB's former chair Jodie Vice, now with Jan Drago's office, will be working on this issue and we'll have a chance to comment as this initiative moves ahead.

Betty Reed talked about the conflict between cyclists and elderly residents at the assisted living facility Blakeley Manor (25th and Ravenna Blvd. NE), which is right next to the Burke-Gilman trail. Ms. Reed, who's on Blakeley Manor's Resident's Council, was concerned that elderly residents, disabled or otherwise, are at risk by cyclists, many of whom don't bother to inform pedestrians that they're present. She added that several collisions have occurred and termed the situation "very serious." Finally, she stated that she didn't want this area to be governed by the Bicycle Master Plan, saying that the environment there was unique. Celeste asked for her contact information to forward to Casey Hildreth, who presented the U-District Transportation Plan Update during our September meeting, adding that engineering and enforcement may be able to mitigate the problem. Brian Lee invited Ms. Reed to bring her concerns to the bike board.

Viaduct "Moving Forward" Project Update, presented by Ali Amiri and John Benedict, WSDOT; and Mike Johnson, SDOT; assisted by Rose Evonuk, Enviro Issues.

The presentation focused on the various "Moving forward" projects as the decision on the central waterfront portion has been deferred until December 2008. If that timeline is followed, demolition of the central waterfront portion would occur in 2012.

Columbia to Yesler. Main impact is that the ped/bike path will be moved to the trolley tracks, which will temporarily be paved over.

Holgate to King. Preliminary engineering is complete, project is at the 10% design stage and is scheduled to be at 30% design by the end of this year. A portion of this will still be elevated to go over existing railroad tracks.

SR 519. There will be a bridge over the railroad tracks at Royal Brougham with a stairwell and elevator provided at the northeast corner of Safeco Field.

Ali said that a number of pedestrian facilities were planned for the project.

T asked why so much of the project was elevated. Ali said that ideally the entire project would be done all at once, but given the political turmoil over the central waterfront, they had to create a design that would accommodate all of the known alternatives in order to get going on the “Moving Forward” projects.

T also wondered if the “U-tube” in the design could be lidded and green space incorporated. WSDOT’s John Benedict replied, saying that WSDOT would be adding an “urban design team” as the project got closer to the 30% design stage. He added that there was a serious space shortage problem west of SR99 that requires stacking some facilities very close to each other.

John went on to discuss some of the project’s features associated with non-motorized transport.

Mixed-use paths. An east-west mixed use path on the north side of Atlantic as part of the 519 and Mountains to Sound Greenway projects. There would be a second mixed-use path along the western edge of the WSDOT project that would connect to an existing path on Marginal Way.

Sidewalks. Widened sidewalks along Atlantic and 1st Ave. (to 12 feet).

Sidewalk and bike lanes on Royal Brougham between 1st Ave and Alaskan Way.

Sidewalks along Alaskan Way between Atlantic and King streets.

John added that there was a “lot of conceptualizing” going on at the moment, particularly in the area around the “U-tube.” A sidewalk is planned for that area, but WSDOT won’t commit to that yet. It’s unclear how much it will cost to get this area finished as it’s located on geologically unstable ground and excavation costs are, as a consequence, a “best guess” at this point. In addition, this area used extensively to move freight.

Howard had concerns that the path in the area didn’t go straight through and would thus be a problem for those who may be visually or physically impaired. Mike Johnson of SDOT replied that the urban design team will be looking at that problem but cautioned that space is tight. Ben pointed out that the lack of a direct route through this area coupled with adverse signal timing could make crossing here very difficult for pedestrians.

The WSDOT representatives were asked why there had to be an elevated structure over the BNSF “tail track.” Ali replied that there is very little room on the BNSF property and that if there was a tunnel the trains would not be able to negotiate the resultant grades. Mike (SDOT) added that BNSF has a “permanent” right to franchise for this track.

Celeste asked Ali, John, and Mike to visit us again when the urban design team is on board. In the meantime, they suggested that to find out more, go to wsdot.gov/projects/viaduct or email viaduct@wsdot.wa.gov.

Update to WSDOT’s Pedestrian and Bike Plan. Paula Reaves, WSDOT; Jim Zimmerman, consultant.

Paula said that all of the necessary data on city, county, and state roads had been gathered and that the process to organize it had begun. One thing that was already clear was that pedestrian and bike collisions were predominantly an urban problem. In response to a query from Paul, she said that 40% of cities are addressing non-motorized transportation in their comprehensive plans.

The next step is to use the data to put together a policy and a program. They asked for our help, particularly in identifying issues that they may have missed.

Paul wanted to know which state legislators might be good to contact about this. Mark suggested Sen. Ed Murray.

Round robin. Celeste began by talking about the board’s future direction. She wants to compile a list of projects, both current and future, as well as assemble a list of contacts. We’ll use those as a basis for discussion at the next meeting. She asked that people find things that they are passionate about and to which they can commit the needed effort.

T suggested that we might have a special meeting to discuss pressing issues. Celeste agreed that we needed to “re-focus”, adding that she’ll schedule some ad hoc meetings in the future.

Ben talked about the Capital Hill and UW light rail stations and will send a web link. Celeste said that former board member Peg Staehli said this is a good time to weigh in with comments.

Jim discussed SPAB recruitment. Public outreach efforts were to begin the week of October 15. These will include a press release to local media. Applications are due the week of November 16. Interviews will be in early December. Petaki volunteered to help with recruitment in her area. After they have been confirmed by the City Council, new board members will begin their terms in March 2008.

T talked about her trip to Ireland and said she witnessed a slip-and-fall caused by one of her favorite *bête noires*, the utility lid on the ped right-of-way.

May Lou got a letter from King County that said that while in recent years car traffic had roughly rise at the same rate as population (21%), over the same period truck traffic had increased 69%.

Jim said that SDOT wanted final comments on the criteria for sidewalk prioritization by October 12. They are in the final stages of setting criteria for selecting the Safe Routes to School recipients. He added that SDOT is eager to work with us in many areas and he wants department representatives to attend our meetings and give presentations as much as possible.

Howard mentioned in-pavement flashers on Lake City Way. T said that the speed of the flash is critical; if it's too slow, drivers will focus on the flash rather than what's in front of them. Faster is better.

Howard talked about collaboration with the Bike Board on the state's bike/pedestrian plan.

Ben talked about sending a letter concerning sidewalk development to the city council. He added that he had recently met someone who had been involved with the Oakland pedestrian plan.

Brian visited Montreal and spoke approvingly of the island portion of the metro area forbidding right turns on red and providing pedestrian lead signals.

Paul spoke of how he felt "empowered" after meeting with both Nick Licata and with Petaki, our "Get Engaged" member whom he is mentoring. He went on to say that while he sees some progress with the Pedestrian Master Plan Advisory Group, he still has several concerns: 1) That there may not be enough oversight and follow-up in the plan; 2) the clock is ticking; one-third of the time has passed but only 10% of the work is done; 3) the use of the word "collision" in the document as well as literature related to the subject and how that affected both the presentation and interpretation of the data. How, he wondered, can there possibly be a "collision" between a pedestrian and a car?

Celeste gave a very positive review to the presentation given by John Moffat, former head of traffic enforcement at SPD, now working at the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. In an apparent nod to the limitations of enforcement, he strongly supported "self-policing" streets, where engineering is used to solve problems such as excessive speed and disregard for pedestrians. For a safer pedestrian environment, the infrastructure should be designed so that it's obvious to drivers that pedestrians are in the area and are crossing.

Celeste added that she would try to meet with Mr. Moffat again as well as with SPD representatives. She felt that the personal connection would work better than merely sending an advisory letter.

Petaki said she was "very happy" to join our group and looked forward to other board members sharing knowledge with her. She has been involved with the Race and Justice Initiative as it affects the City's boards and commissions.

Mark said that the 24th Ave. NW road diet was done. He reported no problems, contrary to the fears of those who felt it would increase traffic congestion.

Next meeting: November 14.