

Business Interview Summary – DRAFT

Introduction

Individual stakeholder outreach was conducted for the South Lake Union Transportation Study to reach out to businesses and property owners who would be potentially affected by proposed transportation improvements. Individual outreach was conducted as one component of a comprehensive public involvement program that sought input on the study from a wide variety of stakeholders. Twelve business interviews were conducted between December 2003 and February 2004.

The purpose of the individual business interviews was to identify concerns, gather information, answer questions and provide information about the South Lake Union Transportation Study. Businesses were chosen to represent a wide variety of business types and to ensure that businesses that were most likely to be affected (i.e. businesses on Westlake Ave N, 9th Ave N, and Fairview Ave N) had an opportunity to provide input. Businesses and property owners along Mercer and Valley Streets will be interviewed as part of the Mercer Corridor Project, which is beginning its environmental review. Interviews took place at each interviewee's office or place of business and focused on how business and property owners use and envision transportation in South Lake Union. Businesses interviewed included:

- Athletic Supply
- Chefshop.com
- Duke's Chowderhouse
- Jones Soda
- Morningside Academy
- NBBJ
- Northwest Wholesale Florists
- REI
- Seattle Biomedical Research Institute (SBRI)
- Seattle Times
- Shurgard Storage
- Tommy Bahama

At each interview Seattle Department of Transportation representatives asked questions about the business's operations and asked for input on specific improvements being considered in the South Lake Union Transportation Study. Although each interview was different, general interview questions included:

1. Size of property
2. Description of business
3. Business hours
4. How do people access the business or property?
5. How many customers or clients visit the business on a daily basis?

6. How many employees work at the business? How do they get to work? In general, where are they coming from?
7. How important is on-street parking to the business?
8. What types of deliveries are necessary for the business? Are there any special issues related to delivery and access?
9. What transportation challenges does the business face?
10. Are there transportation issues around the business?
11. Suggestions for improving transportation in and through South Lake Union
12. Is there anything missing from the study goals and objectives?
13. Feedback on:
 - a. Turning Westlake and 9th Avenues into two-way streets
 - b. Making Mercer Street a two-way street or improve Valley or Roy Streets and providing a new westbound crossing of Aurora Avenue

Several of these questions allowed SDOT to collect basic information about each business's operations in South Lake Union and their transportation needs. The following matrix summarizes some of the general business information collected in the business interviews:

Business Name	Location	Description of Business Operations in South Lake Union	Business Hours	Access to Business	Employee Commute Modes	Types of Deliveries Necessary for Business
Athletic Supply	Westlake Ave N.	Professional sports equipment retail store	9:30 AM-6:00 PM	Customer access on Westlake Ave N	Car and bus. Employees can park in lot next door	2 UPS pick-ups/deliveries per day
Chefshop.com	Ninth Ave N	Online gourmet food retailer and retail store	9:00 AM-7:00 PM	Access on Ninth Ave N and alley in back for deliveries	Bus (40%), car (can park in adjacent lot), bike	UPS and FedEx 1-2 times per day. Semi-truck delivery once every 1-2 weeks.
Duke's Chowderhouse	Fairview Ave N (on Lake Union)	Waterfront restaurant serving lunch and dinner 7 days/week	11:00 AM - 11:00 PM	Fairview Ave N and Valley Street	No parking available for employees. Many take transit, walk, bike or taxi	Semi-trucks deliver food 5 times/week (Monday-Friday)
Jones Soda	Ninth Ave N	Business operations for soda company (bottling facility is off-site).	5:30 AM -11:00 PM	Ninth Ave N	Most employees drive to work, and a few take the bus	A 48' delivery truck comes 1 time/week to fill the on-site warehouse with soda
Morningside Academy	Westlake Ave N.	School for children with learning disabilities. Approximately 65 students in grades 1-9.	9:00 AM- 3:00 PM	Primary pick-up/drop-off for students is on Westlake Ave N. The John St. entrance is used for older children.	Drive (50%), walk and take the bus	Office supplies, UPS, and bottled water
NBBJ	Yale Ave N (future – moving in 12/05)	Architecture and design firm	7:30 AM – 5:30 PM	N/A	Most employees take the bus, but this may change when the company moves to SLU	UPS (2-3 times/week), 30-40 messengers per day, general office supplies
Northwest Wholesale Florists	Fairview Ave N	Wholesale flower sales and distribution	2:30 AM – 5:00 PM	Main entrance on Republican Street	Most employees drive	Fresh flower deliveries arrive between 8:00 PM and 5:00 AM in 55' extended bed semi-trucks
REI	Yale Ave N	Outdoor equipment retail	10:00 AM – 9:00 PM weekdays, 10:00 AM – 7:00 PM weekends	Yale Ave N – most customers park in the parking garage	Employees are encouraged to bike or walk to work. Some drive or take the bus	1-2 Oak Harbor semi-trucks deliver on Tuesday and Thursday around 6:00 AM. All other deliveries come between 5:00 AM and 2:00 PM
Seattle Biomedical Research Institute (SBRI)	Westlake Ave N	Non-profit biomedical research organization	Administration staff works from 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM. Research and science schedule varies	Westlake Ave N	Many employees drive or take the bus from the north.	UPS, scientific supplies, gas tanks for lab gas, hazardous materials loading and unloading
Seattle Times	John Street	Newsroom, newspaper advertising sales and business offices	24 hours/day	John Street	Carpool, bike, bus. Newsroom and ad sales employees are most likely to drive	General business deliveries and food vendors for cafeteria
Shurgard Storage	Valley Street	Corporate offices and business and residential storage space	5:00 AM – 11:00 PM storage units, 8:00 AM – 5:30 PM, corporate offices and retail store	Fairview Avenue N	Transit (approx. 20), car, carpool, bike (1)	Moving trucks for customers accessing storage units
Tommy Bahama	Westlake Ave N (future)	Operations and design for Tommy Bahama clothing, home furnishings and accessories	8:00 AM – 5:00 PM	Westlake Ave N	Bus or car (will use on-site parking)	FedEx, UPS and mail

Business Input Summary

The following comments are sorted into broad categories to align with the general questions asked at each interview. This summary is a compilation of feedback heard from different businesses and is meant to show the range of feedback gathered for the South Lake Union Transportation Study. Some of the comments contradict each other, as businesses interviewed often had conflicting opinions on how transportation in South Lake Union should be improved.

Comments about on-street parking

- Parking is difficult to find.
- Employees rely on on-street parking.
- On-street parking is inconvenient for loading/unloading and deliveries.
- On-street parking is very important for visitors and customers accessing businesses, especially for short trips.
- On-street parking is important to make customers feel like businesses are easy to access, even if free off-street parking is available.
- Meters help ensure parking turnover.
- Non-metered parking is very important for employees who must park on the street all day.
- Short-term parking and pick-up/drop-off zones are very important.
- Increase parking enforcement to ensure parking turnover.

Transportation challenges for businesses interviewed

- Lack of transit service, especially for employee commuting.
- Finding safe locations for loading and unloading children.
- Travel between South Lake Union and the University District for scientific collaboration and meetings is difficult. There should be some sort of shuttle or circulator bus.
- Lack of connections to downtown Seattle.
- The signal timing where the I-5 exit meets Fairview Ave N is not timed to make the wait shorter at off-peak times. In the early morning, drivers often run the light since the wait is so long.
- Access to Ballard from South Lake Union is difficult.
- Lack of connections between Colman Dock and South Lake Union for employees who take the ferry to work.
- Pedestrian safety at crossings and on sidewalks at night.
- Lack of short-term and non-metered parking.
- Parking lot rates are increasing, making it difficult for small businesses to afford parking for their employees.
- Difficult access from I-5.
- Maintaining easy access during construction of Mercer Corridor, the Alaskan Way Viaduct and Seawall Project, and other projects.
- Lack of parking because construction workers park on the street all day.

Transportation issues in South Lake Union identified by businesses interviewed

- Traffic congestion.
- Lack of bus service to South Lake Union and the fact that you have to transfer downtown to get to the neighborhood.
- Maintaining the perception that South Lake Union is easy to access, especially as the neighborhood becomes more congested and is under construction.
- Lack of connections to Space Needle, Queen Anne and Uptown and the difficulty of crossing SR 99.
- Narrowing the streets because of construction projects, or when projects shut down one lane or a sidewalk.
- Getting off I-5 and dispersing traffic is getting more and more difficult.

Suggestions for transportation improvements

- Make South Lake Union a destination transit stop.
- Increase east/west transit.
- Add four-way stops at intersections in Cascade, especially near Cascade Park.
- Add more two hour metered parking and monitor on-street parking so construction workers, and others who use it all day, do not monopolize it.
- Improve access to South Lake Union Park.
- Add a bus load/unload zone on the north side of Thomas Street at Westlake Ave N.
- Add three-minute load/unload areas in front of businesses.
- Extend the shuttle that currently runs from the University of Washington to Fred Hutchinson to the rest of South Lake Union.
- Improve the flow between downtown and South Lake Union. Draw shoppers and tourists from downtown.
- Build the streetcar to add connections to downtown.
- Remove the tracks on Terry Ave N to make the street more bicycle-friendly.
- Add a designated bicycle lane or bicycle facility on Eastlake Ave E.
- Add a crosswalk at the intersection of John Street and Westlake Ave N.
- Improve the signalization on Westlake Ave N – it is very slow to drive between Denny Way and downtown.
- Improve current transit service and increase service to South Lake Union.
- Add and improve street lighting to improve safety for employees at night.
- Build more parking lots in South Lake Union.
- Divert traffic to Eastlake to improve access to I-5.
- Improve traffic flow on north/south streets and make it easier to get across Valley Street.
- Improve signal timing on Fairview Ave N. The cross streets have to wait a long time to get across.
- Maintain easy access to South Lake Union so it remains easy to direct customers and suppliers to businesses.

Comments on turning Westlake and Ninth Avenues into two-way streets

- Build a planted median to create a boulevard feel.
- Add trees and sidewalks to make the street more pedestrian-friendly and reduce the scale of the streetscape.

- Provide connections across Thomas Street.
- This plan may impede access to some businesses.
- How will two-way traffic, parking and a streetcar all fit into the current street width without becoming too crowded?
- Make the streets more pedestrian-friendly and support retail.

Comments on making Mercer Street two-ways, improving Valley Street, and providing a new westbound crossing of Aurora Avenue N.

- Support making Mercer Street two-ways, but have concerns about narrowing Valley Street. Concerns include:
 - General concerns about traffic modeling
 - Mistrust of initial traffic counts
 - Whether people will use Mercer Street over Valley, even if it is two-ways
 - Whether a narrow Valley Street provides enough capacity for users heading north of Mercer Street
- It will be difficult for some businesses to stay in the neighborhood if the “Mercer Mess” is not fixed.
- The “Mercer Mess” makes it difficult for commuters coming from Ballard and Queen Anne.
- A two-way Mercer Street will help business.
- A tunnel from Seattle Center to I-5 would ease traffic congestion on surface streets.
- Make it easy for pedestrians to cross Valley and access Lake Union.
- Do not impede access to I-5.

General comments/questions

- The financial impact of the streetcar on South Lake Union businesses is a concern, as well as the streetcar’s impact on traffic and congestion in South Lake Union.
- Do not allow the streetcar to block traffic.
- Will the I-5 on/off ramps be able to handle the numbers of residents and employees moving to the neighborhood?
- The safety of South Lake Union is a big concern.
- The streetcar will be a good connection to the bus tunnel.
- How will the streetcar affect traffic flow on Westlake Ave N?
- Appreciate how South Lake Union is developing more of a neighborhood feel.
- Preserve the character of the neighborhood. Maintain the mixed-use aspect and do not let the neighborhood get too gentrified and lose its charm and interest.
- Maintain the Dexter Ave N bicycle route. Employees use it to commute to work

Business Interview Outcomes

The technical team used feedback heard during the business interviews to help them develop a recommendations package for the South Lake Union Transportation Study. Interview comments were combined with input heard from other stakeholders throughout the comprehensive public involvement process. The following table illustrates how input

from the business interviews has been incorporated into the Study’s recommended draft improvement package:

<i>What We Heard</i>	<i>What We’re Recommending</i>
Increase connections between I-5 and Queen Anne	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn Mercer Street into two-way street, improving westbound route • Add Thomas or Harrison Street crossing of SR 99/Aurora Avenue
Improve access to South Lake Union Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make Valley Street a narrower, two-lane street • Improve pedestrian crossings of Valley and Mercer Street
Connect South Lake Union and downtown Seattle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add streetcar between downtown and South Lake Union • Improve transit bus frequencies and travel times along Fairview Avenue • Add directional signs to downtown bicycle routes • Improve pedestrian crossings on Denny Way
Improve and maintain freight mobility in and through South Lake Union	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase travel route options by eliminating one-way streets on Mercer, Westlake, and 9th Avenue • Accommodate trucks in the design of a two-way Mercer Street
Enhance the pedestrian experience and improve connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve pedestrian crossings of Mercer, Valley, and Denny, and across SR 99/Aurora Avenue • Provide ample sidewalks along Mercer, Valley and Terry Avenue (where deficiencies currently exist) • Construct the Lake-to-Bay multi-use trail: SLU Park to Elliot Bay
Increase transit options, reliability, and convenience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give transit priority on Fairview Avenue and increase service frequency • New east-west transit service • Add regional transit service to South Lake Union • Add streetcar between downtown and South Lake Union
Maintain customer parking and existing on-street parking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage on-street parking to facilitate short-term customer and visitor parking • Add on-street parking where appropriate
Implement programs to reduce auto trips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop program with employers and developers to reduce auto trips to SLU