

# TRANSPORTATION ISSUES

## Public Process to identify Issues

Many meetings were held during the course of the SBTCS to allow stakeholders and members of the public to discuss transportation issues that affect the area. A workshop was held on June 19, 2001 to which representatives from key community organizations were invited. Groups invited to this workshop included:

- Ballard District Council
- Ballard Neighborhood Planning Committee
- Central Ballard Community Council
- East Ballard Community Association
- Sunset Hill Community Association
- BINMIC
- Ballard Chamber of Commerce
- Groundswell NW
- Ballard Terminal Railroad
- Friends of the Burke-Gilman Trail
- North Seattle Industrial Association
- Ballard Avenue Merchants
- Merchant from East Ballard
- Port of Seattle
- City of Seattle
  - Strategic Planning Office
  - Seattle Transportation
  - Department of Neighborhoods
- King County Metro –Transit Division

The workshop first sought input related to issues for all land modes of transportation. The second half of the workshop was spent brainstorming potential solutions to the issues. Notes from this workshop are presented in Appendix A.

In addition to this workshop, the City's project manager and the consultant attended many informal sessions with community groups and businesses, and organized two public meetings for the project to gather input about transportation issues in the area.

## Major Issues

Throughout the study, many issues related to transportation were raised. Some of the issues were raised repeatedly and are the major focus of this study. The major issues are briefly summarized below. A full listing of issues raised during the study are presented in Appendix A.

### Commuter Traffic

**Shilshole Avenue/45th Avenue/46th Avenue.** This corridor is perceived to be over-utilized today and accommodates more traffic than it should. Intersections at Shilshole Avenue/17th Avenue and on 46th Street/9th Avenue have become more congested, which can create safety issues. The intersection at the

Shilshole Avenue/24th Avenue/54th Street is awkward and potentially dangerous and is too close to the intersection at Market Street.

**Leary Way.** This corridor is underutilized between 15th Avenue and Market Street. The four-lane configuration creates a barrier to pedestrians and bicyclists because there are no controlled crossing locations between 15th Avenue and Market Street. There are several five-legged intersections—at 17th Avenue/48th Street/Leary Way and at 22nd Avenue/Vernon Street/Leary Way—that need better definition to assist vehicular and non-motorized traffic maneuvers. Parking along Leary Way south of 47th Street can create congestion and confusion during off-peak times. The on-street parking reduces the street from five travel lanes to three.

**Market Street.** Market Street is required to handle many functions—local circulation, through commuter street, transit street—it is often the last choice for many motorists due to delays. Problems with signals, buses and signage may start far away from this corridor. Motorists are using other streets in the area (Shilshole, 65th Street, etc.) to avoid the congestion on Market Street. Synchronization of traffic signals on Market Street is needed (the City and Metro are currently working on a signal interconnect project for the section of Market Street between 24th Avenue and 12th Avenue.) In-lane transit stop on Market Street west of Leary Way causes delays to non-bus traffic.

**Ballard Avenue.** The past change of Ballard Avenue (between Market Street and 22nd Avenue) from a two-way street to a one-way street caused traffic volumes on Shilshole Avenue to increase. One-way traffic on Ballard Avenue allowed for a small increase in parking along this street; however, one merchant expressed a preference for the higher visibility that higher traffic volumes create instead of the additional parking. Ballard Avenue/17th Avenue intersection is confusing and difficult for pedestrians to cross (west approach).

## Freight Issues

**Truck Traffic.** Truck movement to the Ship Canal is critical to the maritime industries. Most commodities serving the maritime industry (including fuel) are trucked to the area. Many of the industries have awkward loading configurations that require backing maneuvers, especially along Shilshole Avenue and 45th and 46th Streets. For example, several trucks + trailers per day have to back down the ramp to Barnacle Point and/or Ballard Oil. Turning radii, grade, and routes to connect to the regional arterials (SR 99, I-5, and I-90) are critical.

**Railroad Issues.** The Ballard Terminal Railroad Company's (BTRC) tracks extend from the Burlington Northern Railroad mainline at about 70th Street to about 40th Street just east of 6th Avenue. Within the study corridor it runs along 45th Street and Shilshole Avenue. For much of this length, it is a single track; however, a second parallel track (double track) has been added where the railroad has loading/unloading or car storage needs. This allows the train to bypass cars that are stored or are loading/unloading on the adjacent track. The double track sections exist along Shilshole Avenue between about 22nd Avenue and 15th Avenue, and between about 9th Avenue and 8th Avenue. Loading often occurs on both sides of the cars. Continued operation of BTRC and potential addition of new sidings present a significant challenge to efforts to fit a bicycle and pedestrian trail along this corridor, particularly in the section between 15th and 30th Avenues (where parking, truck loading/unloading, etc. are also issues.)

## Bicycle and Pedestrian Issues

**Bicycle Issues.** Completing the Burke-Gilman Trail to Golden Gardens is the top priority for the bike community. The route should be safe and convenient for bicyclists. Routes that provide direct connections without hills are preferred. The Burke-Gilman Trail east of the study corridor is used by commuters and recreational bicyclists who now travel through the corridor via a number of on-street routes. The Crown Hill/Ballard Neighborhood Planning Committee identified completion of the Burke-Gilman Trail along the railroad corridor as one of their top priorities. However, the BINMIC Planning Committee supports "locating recreational and commuter through trails away from industrial areas."

Elements that are particularly difficult for bicyclists include: on-street parking (car door openings), cross streets (potential of not being seen by motorists turning onto street), railroad tracks (particularly if they cross street at less than 90-degree angle), and uneven road surface (gravel or potholes). Specific issues raised during the study include:

- Bicyclists avoid Leary Way because of speed and volume of traffic.
- The intersection at Leary Way/17th Avenue is difficult because of the wide crossing area and many cross streets.
- The poor condition of the shoulder on Shilshole Avenue requires bicyclists to ride in-lane.
- There is irregular parking along sections of Shilshole Avenue and 46th Street. Sometimes vehicles park closer to the street and leave a walkway available, other cars park across walkway. This causes bicycles to weave through parked vehicles.
- Narrow passageways across the Locks restrict bicycle movements. The Corps of Engineers is looking at the existing passageways. If they could be widened, a bicycle connection could be possible between the Burke-Gilman Trail and the Ship Canal and Elliott Bay Trails through Interbay.

**Pedestrian Issues.** As housing and employment grows in Ballard, pedestrian connections will become more and more important to encourage more walking and reduce automobile trips. Long segments of arterial streets with no traffic control (traffic lights or stop signs) are difficult for pedestrians to cross because of higher vehicular speeds. Crossings are difficult on Market Street west of 24th Avenue and Leary Way between 15th Avenue and Market Street. Both are four-lane roadways with no traffic signals. Safe pedestrian crossings are also needed along Shilshole Avenue. In addition, the sidewalk on Shilshole Avenue is intermittent, and cars often park on the walkway.

## Issues Not Addressed by Study

This study addresses most of the major issues that were raised during the public input process or determined from the background conditions analysis. These issues primarily relate to traffic congestion, pedestrian connections and safety, bicycle connections and safety, and property access. While this study considers the relationship of the proposed recommendations to the plans of non-City agencies such as King County Metro, Sound Transit, or the new Elevated Transportation Company (monorail), specific recommendations for transportation services provided by these agencies are not included. This includes issues related to transit service and schedules, future commuter rail service to Ballard, and construction of a potential monorail. Transit facilities that are affected by changes in the street design or circulation patterns were evaluated as part of this study as were improvements to traffic operations that may improve transit speed and reliability. Likewise, parking capacity improvements, such as new parking facilities to serve the retail core area or charging for parking, were not evaluated in this study. Changes in the on-street parking associated with other use of the streets were evaluated. Further detail about issues and solutions that were discussed in the public forums, but were excluded from consideration is presented in Appendix A.