First Open House Helps Identify Problems and Potential Solutions

More than 45 community leaders and interested residents attended an Open House for the University Area Transportation Study (UATS). The UATS is the City’s comprehensive study of transportation issues in the University District and surrounding areas. The Open House was an opportunity for the community to learn about transportation issues in the study area — transit services, pedestrian volumes, bike routes, travel patterns, problem areas, traffic growth trends, and projected household and employment growth. This newsletter is a report back to the community on what we heard at the June Open House.

Most participants felt traffic congestion in the area is getting worse and the data show that average vehicular travel speeds during the PM peak hour are 3 miles per hour on Montlake Blvd. and 6 miles per hour on NE 45th St. But the data also show that traffic volumes on those congested streets are not increasing. So what is the cause?

One major cause is that the I-5 and SR-520 freeways are congested much of the day due to regional growth, causing freeway-bound traffic to spillover onto city streets in the University area, clogging and reducing the capacity of the streets. This is one of the most serious problems the study team has identified. Other problems in the area include the lack of dedicated space for pedestrians and bicyclists and slow bus speeds.

A quick summary of what we learned from you is included in this newsletter. If you missed the Open House, the maps and figures presented can be viewed at the UATS web site, along with more study information.

Possible Improvements Identified, Now the Hard Part: What Can We Accomplish?

Based on previous studies, a new comprehensive examination of problems in the area, and public input, the project team has identified a wide range of possible transportation improvements. Potential strategies are aimed at improving conditions for bicyclists and pedestrians, transit and carpools, and general purpose traffic. They range from small and simple to big and expensive, and from short- to long-term. Most of the potential improvements are illustrated in this newsletter.

Beginning in September, the project team began the more difficult tasks of evaluating and prioritizing possible improvements and of identifying potential funding strategies. The team will use criteria developed specifically for the University Area to help sort out priorities, recognizing that potential improvements will need to be integrated into the City’s overall priorities. This part of the project is made even more challenging by the overall transportation funding shortfall, not just within the City, but regionwide and statewide. Even with major increases in local transportation spending over the last several years, the City has a large backlog of maintenance and safety needs, and only a fraction of the total transportation budget is available for the kinds of mobility improvements identified in this study.

Contact Information

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We Want Your Comments:

At the November Open House, the team will present the full range of potential improvements along with a first “cut” at prioritization and financial strategy. Please attend the Open House, review and comment on materials on the web site, or contact Jon Layzer, the City’s project manager, to help us incorporate your suggestions.
Transportation Improvement

Eastlake Ave./Campus Parkway/ NE 40th St. Corridors

Construct intersection with signal, redesign Campus Parkway with bike lanes

Install pedestrian actuated signal

Paint a blue bike lane

Improve bicycle safety

Major East/West Access Corridors
Major North/South Access Corridors

Coordinate traffic signals, shorten signal cycles

Provide bus rapid transit system between Ballard, U-District

Consider traffic calming (this segment)

Stripe with one lane in each direction with center left turn lane at intersections

Designate as bike way

Designate as bike way
Concepts to be Evaluated

- Consolidate two pedestrian crossings
- Extend SB HOV lane, reconstruct ped overpass
- Provide double left turn
- Widen sidewalks and other improvements
- Allow only buses and UW hospital-bound vehicles to use NB left turn lane, reroute other traffic via Pacific Pl.
- Add pedestrian overpass
- Remove impediments to bikes and ped.

Montlake Blvd/
Pacific Street Corridors

- Extend on-ramp. Create NB collector-distributor lane
- Extend, redesign on-ramp
- Extend NB U-turn lane
- Extend the EB ramp merge point with mainline, connect to unused ramps
- Construct new SB to EB off-ramp on right side, eliminate left side ramp

Ramp Storage Expansion (SR-520 and I-5)
Transportation Improvement

I-5 Crossing Improvements

Light Rail Station Area Improvements

- Reconstruct overpasses with adequate vehicle storage space, sidewalks
- Conduct pedestrian overpass, designate bike route
- Reduce blocking by exiting vehicles to reduce bus delays
- Reconstruct sidewalks to optimal width
- Improve pedestrian access from transit stops to stations
- Complete street and sidewalk improvements
- Provide walkway from University Way NE to LR transit station
- Improve sidewalks
- Street and sidewalk improvements, enhance ped connections
- Provide specialized at-grade crossing
- Provide adequate bicycle parking, facilities at LR transit stations
- Provide specialized at-grade crossing
- Not to Scale
Concepts to be Evaluated

University Village Area Access

- Add bike trail south edge of park connecting Ravenna Blvd trail to Burke-Gilman trail
- Improve Burke-Gilman trail crossing
- Consolidate driveway access
- Create connection from trail to U-Village entrance
- Add sidewalk on the west side
- Fill gaps in curbs, gutters, sidewalks on both sides
- Add pedestrian crossings and intersection improvements
- Reconfigure and signalize to consolidate driveways and improve trail crossing safety
- Restrict unregulated parking in city’s right-of-way near University Village

Transit Access, Spot Improvements and Traffic Signal Modification

- Add HOV queue bypass
- NE 45th St
- Construct new SB bus-only, and HOV lane
- Reconstruct to bike, ped and transit priority
- Construct new transit-only ramp
- Install scramble signals
- Add HOV queue bypass
- Allow pedestrians and bicycles to use unused ramp
- Improve intersection, add left turn pockets
- NE 59th St
- Add turn lane and remove parking spaces
- Provide 2 SB through lanes, remove on-street parking
- Provide elevated transit circulator system connecting LR to UW hospital, U-Village & Main Campus
- Install safe and convenient bike parking

Not to Scale
What we learned from you at the Open House
The City and consultant team will seriously consider the comment received and will try to develop a transportation plan that reflects and balances community desires.

Key points heard at the Open House include:

- Change the auto-dominated culture.
- Allow bicyclists to use the unused overpass that crosses SR 520.
- Consider a transit-only lane and BAT (Business Access/Transit) lane on NE 45th Street (but expressed concern about what would happen to traffic which is already heavily congested in the corridor).
- Improve the I-5/SR 520 interchange so southbound I-5 left lanes will not block through-traffic at the Ship Canal bridge.
- Construct a pedestrian/bicycle overpass over I-5 at NE 47th Street connecting the University area with the Wallingford area.
- Make traffic signals more pedestrian friendly – shorter signal cycle lengths would reduce pedestrian delays at intersections.
- Consider providing a “scramble walk” intersection where cars stop in all directions and all pedestrians cross at the same time.

Written suggestion highlights:

- Focus on the mobility of people rather than the mobility of cars.
- Concentrate on converting existing signals to transit-preemption operation.
- Promote the efficiency of dedicated HOV lanes to SOV drivers.
- Provide more open lanes for transit.
- Make the area easier and more convenient to walk, bicycle, or use the bus.
- Place an emphasis on making the signals move buses, bicyclists and pedestrians more efficiently.
- Eliminate pedestrian pushbuttons (where they no longer activate a walk signal during the day).
- Provide disincentives to SOV.
- Create bus-only lanes.
- Curb bulbs are needed on University Way NE, 15th Ave NE, NE 45th St, and NE Campus Parkway.
- Traffic lights are not needed as they make walking and riding a bike less convenient.

What is the University Area Transportation Study?
The City of Seattle is developing a transportation plan for the neighborhoods in and around the University District, including Montlake, University Heights, and Ravenna. The study area stretches from I-5 to 35th Avenue NE and from NE 65th Street to the Ship Canal including the Montlake interchange on SR-520. The City is identifying new improvements for pedestrians, bicyclists, transit and autos, as well as programs to reduce travel demand. The results will provide direction to the City, other public agencies, and private developers to improve the university area transportation system for the next 10 years and beyond. For more information contact the Project Manager Jon Layzer. (Contact information on page 1.)

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