

## **Introduction**

Southeast Seattle is a diverse area with a rich history and a strong sense of community, and it is experiencing rapid growth. In 2004, construction on Seattle's first light rail line began, marking a major milestone for Seattle and an unprecedented investment in public transportation. To maximize this investment and support growth and change in southeast neighborhoods, the City of Seattle is working with the community to implement Mayor Nickel's Southeast Action Agenda. This Agenda provides millions of dollars in city resources for local projects and programs. These efforts create a rare opportunity to help shape the future of this vibrant and diverse area.

## **Southeast Seattle Transportation Study (SETS) Goals**

As part of the Mayor's Action Agenda, the Southeast Seattle Transportation Study (SETS) is identifying and prioritizing transportation projects and developing a funding strategy to get Seattle moving. Building on prior work and collaborating with community leaders, the City of Seattle's Department of Transportation (SDOT) will evaluate transportation projects based on the following goals:

- Improve mobility and safety for Southeast Seattle's diverse needs;
- Focus on connections to the new light rail system;
- Support growth and enhancing neighborhood livability;
- Make smart investments, maintaining existing roads, and building on other efforts; and
- Complement the City of Seattle's Comprehensive Plan and Transportation Strategic Plan.

## **Study Area**

The study area boundary spans from I-5 to the west, Lake Washington to the east, the city boundary to the south, and I-90 to the north. It also includes the area bounded by S. Dearborn Street, Davis Place SE, and I-90.

## **Existing Conditions Report**

Over 20 plans and studies have been reviewed. The data included: recommended improvements, high accident locations, transit service levels, and the performance of major roadways. Much of this information has been mapped.

## Summary of Key Findings, Themes and Needs

In reviewing the past plans and studies as well as current transportation data, various findings, themes and needs emerged. By identifying associated needs and issues, this Existing Conditions Report supports themes that the community and SDOT staff developed. Examples of these needs and issues are outlined in this section. For convenience, the related report chapters are referenced.

### ***Demographics Findings***

- Southeast Seattle is diverse in culture, income and ethnicity with 35% of the population foreign-born.
- A higher percentage of children live in the study area compared to the entire City (24% vs. 15%) and the average household size is larger (2.86 vs. 2.08). There is also a higher percentage of single parent families (17%) living in Southeast Seattle compared to the rest of the City (12%).

### ***Mode Choice Findings***

- Over 50% of Southeast Seattle residents head north (downtown Seattle, Capitol Hill, Northgate, and beyond) for work. 40% of transit work trips from Southeast Seattle are to downtown Seattle.
- Carpool use is higher (17% vs. 11%) and walking (2% vs. 7%) is lower in Southeast Seattle than the citywide average.

### ***Travel Patterns Findings***

- 9% of Southeast Seattle community members both live and work in Southeast Seattle.
- The main transit corridors are Martin Luther King, Jr. Way, Rainier Avenue South and Beacon Avenue South. Few east/west transit routes exist in the study area and some service is infrequent, running every one-half hour.
- East-west streets are discontinuous and do not go very far due to topography, I-5 and Lake Washington.
- Martin Luther King, Jr. Way is the only City-designated Major Truck Street in the study area. A major industrial area for Seattle is just west of the study area and freight often uses Martin Luther King, Jr. Way S. when regional facilities (SR 99 and I-5) are congested.
- A direct north-south bicycle route does not exist. Cyclists want to use the major arterials but there are impediments such as high vehicular speed, and areas in need of pavement maintenance and traffic calming.
- High traffic speeds and volumes on east-west bicycle routes.

### ***Land Use Findings to support light rail and business districts***

- Current zoning supports density around future light rail stations, the core of urban villages and along Rainier Avenue South and Martin Luther King, Jr. Way.

### ***Safety Findings***

- Martin Luther King, Jr. Way and Rainier Avenue South have the highest number of vehicle, pedestrian and bicycle accidents.
- Many of the pedestrian and bicycle accidents occur at intersections that are not regulated (traffic signal or traffic circle) or do not have marked crosswalks.
- Many residents do not feel safe walking.
- Areas west of Martin Luther King, Jr. Way are without sidewalk infrastructure.

### ***Parking Findings***

- On-street parking is underutilized in the study area. North Beacon Hill uses on-street parking the most and Rainier Beach uses it the least.

### ***Themes/Needs for Pedestrian Access and Safety***

- Improve pedestrian corridors leading to bus stops and other destinations such as schools, public facilities and commercial hubs.
- Create pedestrian links to light rail stations from surrounding communities.
- Reduce pedestrian accidents.
- Improve pedestrian safety. Improving amenities such as lighting, will enhance areas and could increase safety and deter criminal activity.

### ***Themes/Needs for Bicycle Access and Safety***

- Reduce bicycle accidents.
- Maintain east-west bicycle routes. Bicycle access is critical to light rail stations.
- Develop north-south bicycle route.

### ***Themes/Needs for Parking***

- Manage parking near light rail stations in a way that balances nearby residential needs and encourages Transit-Oriented Development.

### ***Themes/Needs for Economic Growth and Vitality***

- Develop a vibrant town center that includes S. McClellan Street and S. Othello Street light rail stations by providing incentives for Transit-Oriented Development (TOD).

- Connect commercial areas not directly adjacent to light rail stations with transportation enhancements such as Beacon Avenue S., Columbia City, Rainier Beach Square, Hillman City, and Rainier Avenue S./S. Genesee Street.

### ***Themes/Needs for Traffic Operations***

- Balance the street capacity among competing street uses on Martin Luther King, Jr. Way and Rainier Avenue South, the north-south principal arterials.

### ***Themes/Needs for Transit***

- Provide local east-west transit service connecting neighborhoods to light rail stations. Consider neighborhood circulators or shuttle transit service that connects neighborhoods, town centers and light rail.
- Maximize pedestrian and bicycle access to transit stations and stops (light rail and bus).
- Support transit improvements. Nine transit corridors have been identified in Southeast by the City for improvements. In the future these corridors would support transit service that comes every 15 minutes, 18 hours a day, seven days a week.

### ***Themes/Needs for Freight Mobility***

- Maintain local freight access to support economic vitality in Southeast Seattle. This includes maintaining roads and directional signs.

## Conclusions

Because the study area is quite large, focus must be placed on specific themes and geographic areas. This Existing Conditions Report is intended to assist SDOT in identifying specific transportation needs and issues that are consistent with the Southeast Seattle Transportation Study (SETS)'s goals. Based on the report results, the study will concentrate on:

- Encouraging transportation investments that support light rail and Southeast Seattle's economic vitality.
- Improving use of and access to east-west corridors.
- Improving functionality of major north-south corridors and balancing different transportation mode needs. M.L. King Jr. Way S. will not be included in this study due to the light rail line improvements under way. However, access to M.L. King Jr. Way S. will be studied.
- Improving pedestrian and bicycle connections and accessibility.
- Encouraging increased transit service between neighborhoods and light rail stations.
- Improving safety for a diverse population including elderly and children.
- Addressing mode conflicts.

In general, the geographic focus of the study will be:

- Areas within a half mile of light rail stations, and east-west connectors such as S. Henderson Street, S. Othello Street, S. Graham Street, and S. Alaska Street.
- Major commercial/residential hubs such as Columbia City, Hillman City, Genesee, Rainier Beach, Holly Park, and Rainier Vista.
- Rainier Avenue S. and Beacon Avenue S.

## Prologue

This Existing Conditions Report, the first phase of the Southeast Seattle Transportation Study (SETS), includes a review of recent studies and recommendations for the area, existing data compilation, and determines needs that have been addressed, and identifies current needs. The next phase of the study will include developing project improvements based on the identified needs, filtering these improvements through a screening and evaluation process, ranking the improvements, and developing financing strategies. The public will be involved in the study throughout Phase 2.

This Existing Conditions Report is organized into the following chapters:

- Chapter 1: Background
- Chapter 2: Existing Data
- Chapter 3: Existing Programs
- Chapter 4: Existing Plans
- Chapter 5: Current Identified Needs

Five appendices are organized as follows:

- Appendix A: Project Matrix  
(A database listing projects and proposed improvements within the study area. The matrix was compiled from the plans and programs reviewed during Phase 1.)
- Appendix B: Data Collection Information
- Appendix C: Southeast Seattle Action Agenda  
(Note: Appendix C includes only non-transportation-related recommendations. Section 4.1.1 discusses transportation-related recommendations.)
- Appendix D: Public Involvement
- Appendix E: School Walk Routes