



# 1. Introduction

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### Study Background

## Southeast Seattle: A crossroads of the world, at the center of the region

The people of Southeast Seattle come from every corner of the globe, bringing their cultures, languages, food, and a shared determination to succeed in their new home.

In 2009, Sound Transit's Link light rail will help make this crossroads of the world one of the most accessible places in the Puget Sound region.

Looking even further ahead, by 2030 light rail will likely extend north to Capitol Hill, the University District, Northgate and into Snohomish County, east to Bellevue, Overlake and Redmond, and south to Federal Way and Tacoma. Southeast Seattle residents will have fast reliable connections to the region's employment — over a million jobs will be accessible by transit — as well as schools and colleges, health care, retail and recreation. At the same time, people throughout the region will have easy access to Southeast Seattle and all it has to offer.

### Change is already happening

Already, along Martin Luther King Jr. Way S, NewHolly and Rainier Vista have nearly finished replacing World War II era temporary housing with a mix of 2,400 new apartments, townhouses and single-family homes, adding density and connecting street grids.

In Columbia City and Hillman City old buildings are being refurbished, new entrepreneurs are trying their hands, and delighted customers are strolling up and down Rainier Ave. S. On Beacon Hill the new public library serves as a meeting place for longtime residents and neighborhood newcomers, young and old. In Rainier Beach homeowners and developers are refurbishing existing homes and building new housing near the light rail station.

### Building the future

While a great deal has happened already, the changes over the next twenty years may be even more dramatic. Transportation will both shape and serve these changes. This study, building on past efforts, offers a set of recommended projects, programs and policies designed to offer choices to the residents of Southeast Seattle, in places to go and ways to travel; to support and strengthen neighborhood business districts; to allow the area's freight-dependent commercial businesses to continue to thrive; and to meet the city's broader goals of livability and sustainability.



## Building on a firm foundation

Over a decade of political foresight, neighborhood activism and thoughtful planning have resulted in the changes taking place in Southeast Seattle today.

The Link light rail investment and the Mayor's Southeast Seattle Action Agenda create a rare opportunity to achieve the goals of the City's Comprehensive and Transportation Strategic Plans and to implement the visions captured in the Neighborhood and Station Area Plans.

### From Planning to Action

Seattle's *Comprehensive Plan, Toward a Sustainable Seattle*, has been updated regularly since its initial adoption in 1994, as has the *Transportation Strategic Plan* originally adopted in 1998. Southeast Seattle's Neighborhood Plans and Station Area Plans, however, were completed before final decisions had been made about the light rail alignment. Many of the changes in Southeast Seattle are the results of these plans, which have worked both as visions and as blueprints. Also, there are areas in Southeast Seattle that are not covered in the Neighborhood Plans and Station Area Plans that are now incorporated into the Southeast Transportation Study.

**With Link light rail scheduled to begin operating in 2009, now is a critical time to consolidate past work, determine what modifications are needed to reflect recent actions and changes, and to detail a set of projects to transform shared visions into reality.**

The Southeast Transportation Study is a set of project, program and policy recommendations designed to do just that.

### Goals

With the help of community leaders, the following goals were developed to guide the work of this study:

- Improve mobility and safety for the diverse needs of Southeast Seattle.
- Improve the transportation network with a particular focus on connections to the new light rail system.
- Support the growth to enhance neighborhood livability.
- Make cost-effective investments to maintain existing roads and build on other existing efforts.
- Prioritize transportation improvements that support the City's Comprehensive Plan as well as the strategies and actions defined in the Seattle Transportation Strategic Plan Update.

### Transportation Choices for Today and 2030

This study developed over 70 recommendations, which, taken together, have the potential to:

- Greatly improve safety for all travelers, reduce collisions and reduce the human toll of injuries and fatalities.
- Strengthen neighborhood business districts so that surrounding residents can meet more of their daily needs within walking distance of their homes.
- Make walking, bicycling and transit safe and convenient.
- Maintain current capacity to meet today's needs, and reduce delays at critical intersections, while meeting the challenges of growth primarily by strengthening opportunities to walk, bicycle and take transit.

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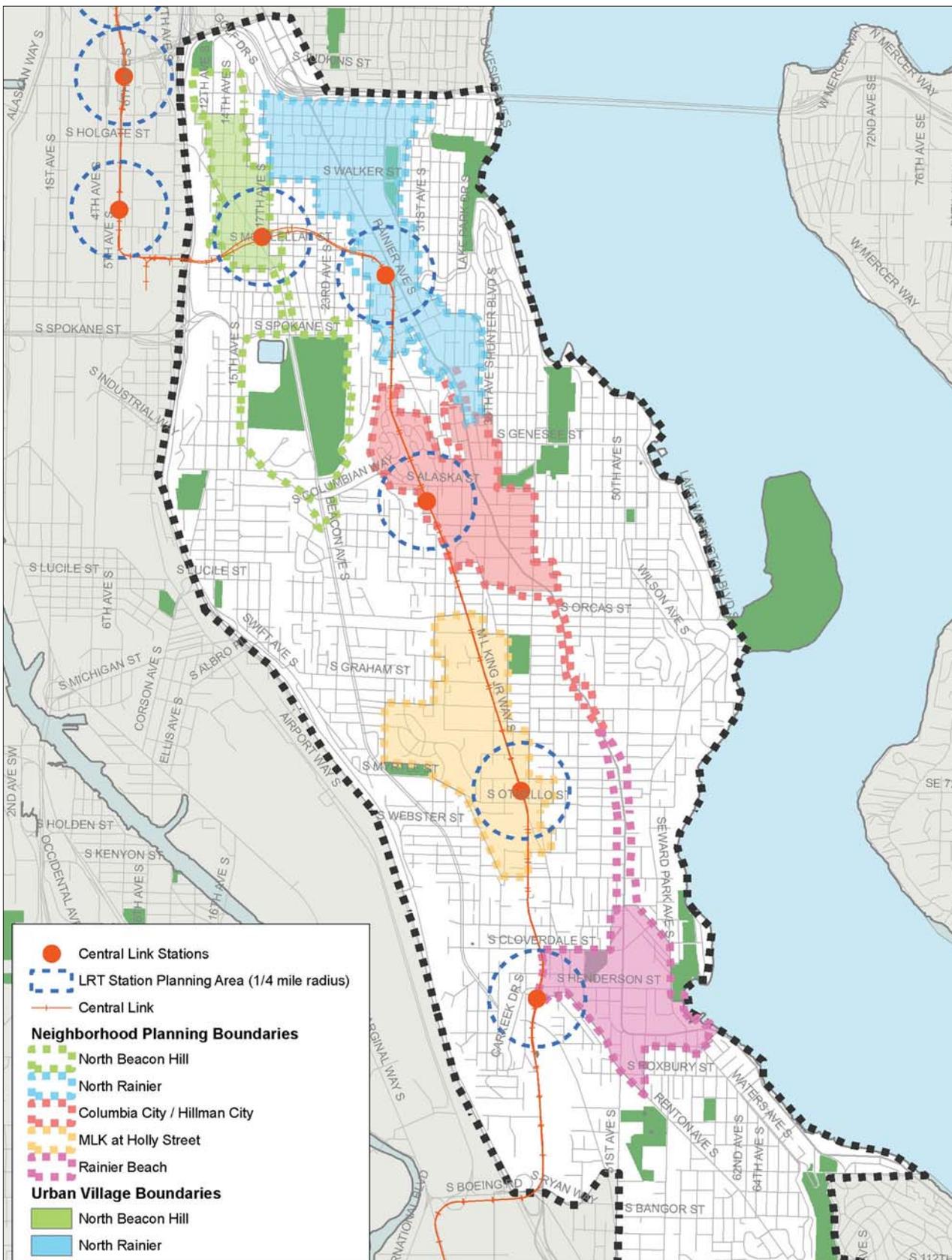


Figure 1: Urban Village and Neighborhood Planning Boundaries in Study Area  
Source: PB America

## Southeast Seattle

Southeast Seattle is a diverse area with a rich history and a strong sense of community. Change is now happening so fast that it is challenging to pin down facts and figures about the people who live here and the place they inhabit. However, in order to understand what kinds of actions are going to be most appropriate to serve the people and places of Southeast Seattle, it's important to understand who and what they are. Following is a brief summary of some of the demographic and development patterns that make this place unique.



Many newcomers to Seattle grow foods from home in the area's popular pea-patches.

### Southeast Seattle at a glance

- 14%** of Seattle's people live in the SETS area
- 17%** of Seattle's land area is in the area
- 11%** of Seattle's housing units are in the area

By 2030 projections are for:

- 4,250** more jobs
- 11,000** more housing units

## People

Data from the 2000 Census is now eight years old, but it creates a fairly accurate picture of the people of Southeast Seattle, which includes Beacon Hill and Rainier Valley:

- **Households are large**, 2.86 people on average compared with 2.08 city-wide.
- **Home ownership is high**, 62 percent versus a city-wide average of 48 percent.
- **Car ownership is low**. Within the urban villages about 23-30 percent of households have no vehicle, about twice the rate for the city as a whole.
- **The median income is average**, \$44,700, comparable to the city-wide median of \$45,700. Rainier Valley, however, is considerably lower with a median income of \$38,731. The overall poverty level, 13 percent, is about the same as the city-wide level but Rainier Valley's poverty level at 18 percent is 50 percent higher than the city-wide average of 12 percent.
- **People are young** with 24 percent of the population under 18 years old, compared to 15 percent city-wide. Areas zoned multi-family have even higher youth populations.
- **The whole world is represented**, with 35 percent of the population foreign-born, about twice as many as for the city as a whole.
- **Over 40 different languages are spoken**, among them: Chinese, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Spanish, Japanese, Monkhmer/Cambodian, Laotian, and a variety of African and Pacific Island languages.
- **Educational attainment is lower** than the city-wide average: nearly 25 percent of adult residents have not finished high school, compared to just over 10 percent city-wide.
- **The population over 65 is average**, at 13 percent, about the same as the city-wide average. Most of the elderly live in areas zoned single-family and along the Lake Washington waterfront.

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## Land use

Perched atop the crest of Beacon Hill and spread across the lowlands of Rainier Valley, Southeast Seattle is a predominantly residential area, with neighborhood commercial development along a former street car line, Rainier Ave. S, and commercial and industrial development along the former state highway, Martin Luther King Jr. Way S. The north end of Rainier is flanked by a fair-sized commercial/industrial area.

**Business districts** range from the larger Columbia City and North Rainier Town Center to single commercial sites tailored to specific markets such as the Polynesian Grocery at MLK and S. Henderson St. Some commercial nodes draw people from a broad geographic area. For example, King Plaza at MLK and S. Myrtle St. draws shoppers from throughout the region, and even as far away as Oregon and British Columbia, who come for hard-to-find specialty products.

**Residential development** is also diverse. Pockets of residential areas with large lots, no curbs, gutters, or sidewalks and often sub-standard road conditions, most likely reflect remnants of a once-strong, near-rural truck farming community. In other areas homes on large lots enjoy views of Lake Washington and Mt. Rainier. Some streets are built on a traditional grid, while other roads curve up and down hillsides.

**Multi-family zoning** is located predominantly along the north-south corridors; newly constructed multi-family units are increasing density in those areas.

In 2006, Southeast Seattle became the first area in Seattle to allow detached backyard cottages, which could create new rental housing, increase density and make home ownership affordable to more families.

## Transportation

**With topographic challenges similar** to the rest of the city, Southeast Seattle is less than three miles wide at its widest point, constrained by water, the I-5 freeway, and a series of large and small ridges that limit east-west travel. Only three streets run the length of the study area: Beacon Ave. S, MLK and Rainier. East-west travel is similarly constricted with no continuous arterial streets running from Lake Washington all the way to I-5.

These constraints naturally lead to an approach to transportation that calls for designing streets that work for all users, from people on foot to freight haulers. Without parallel streets that can be assigned to different users, everyone needs to share the road.

**Improving transportation safety** is also a major challenge in Southeast Seattle. Rainier averages 600 collisions a year in a seven-and-a-half mile stretch. Fifty-four locations in the study area were High Collision Locations (HCLs); 32 of these were on Rainier and 22 were elsewhere; eight of these locations were Pedestrian High Collision Locations. Solutions need to incorporate physical modifications – engineering – as well as changes in traveler behavior through education and enforcement.

**Transit** is what most strongly sets Southeast Seattle apart from anywhere else in Seattle with regards to transportation. At least for the next decade or so it is the only area with light rail. Southeast Seattle already has the highest ridership bus route in the region, and two of the top five routes. When Link light rail opens in 2009 it will provide tremendous opportunities for the residents and businesses of Southeast Seattle; being ready to take advantage of those opportunities is a major focus of this study.



This sign on a grocery on Beacon Hill directs shoppers to one store with three names, representing just a few of the languages spoken by its diverse customers. Inside are foods from around the world.

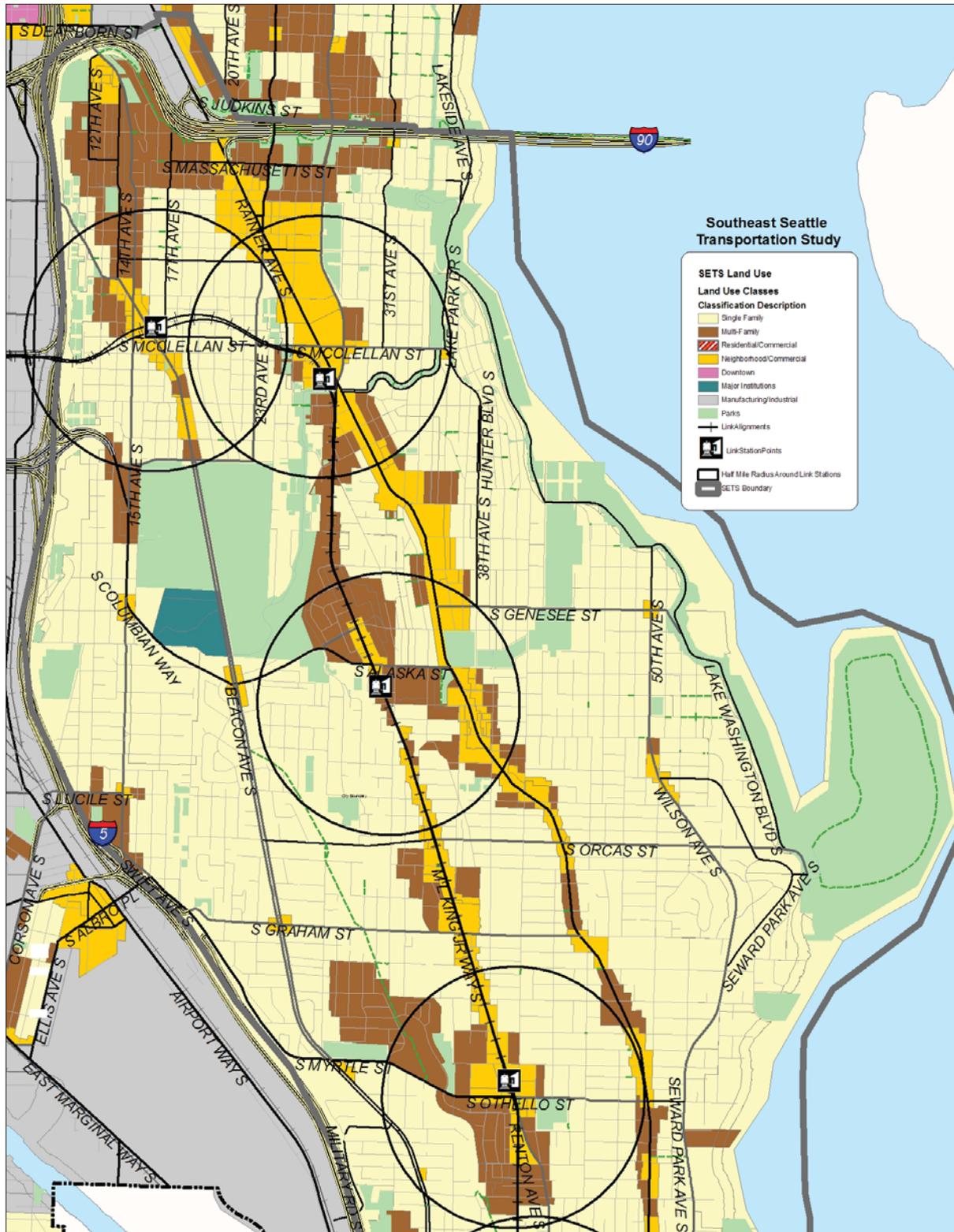


Figure 2: Southeast Seattle Land Use Map – North Study Area  
Source: City of Seattle

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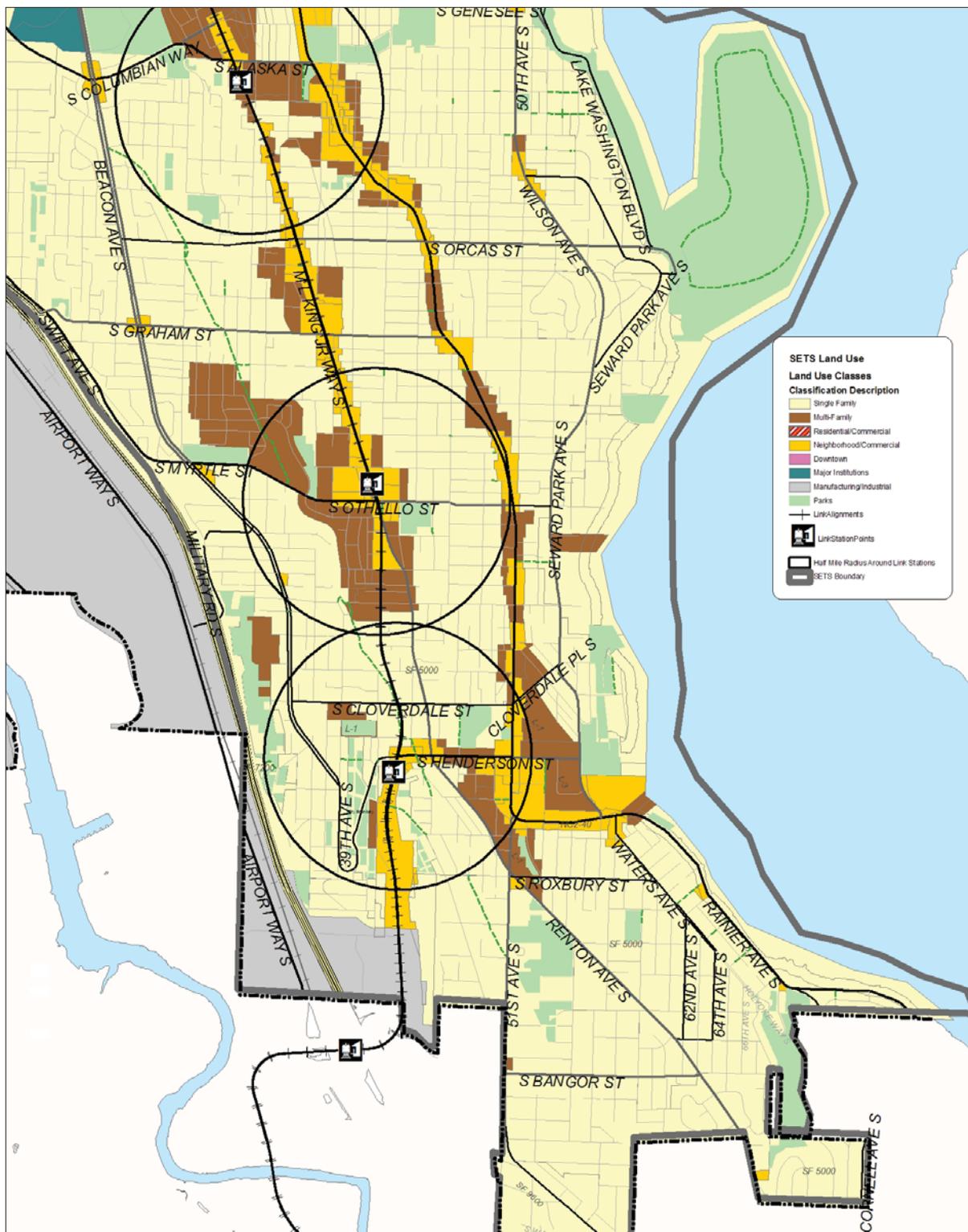


Figure 3: Southeast Seattle Land Use Map – South Study Area  
Source: City of Seattle

## How the Study was Done

Following is a brief summary of how the Southeast Transportation Study (SETS) was prepared, from assessing and documenting "Existing Conditions" through completion of the final recommendations.

### Establishing a starting point

To begin the study, the SETS project team:

- Reviewed over 20 past plans and studies.
- Collected existing transportation data.
- Analyzed census data on demographics and travel.
- Collected 2005 SDOT planned but unfunded maintenance and roadway improvements needs.
- Reviewed City policies, including the most recent updates of the *Comprehensive Plan* and *Transportation Strategic Plan*.

This data was collected in an *Existing Conditions Report*, and used to develop a summary of themes and needs to guide project development.

### Working with the Core Community Team

To guide the study, a Core Community Team (CCT) was established, with individuals representing 25 community, business, ethnic and transportation organizations and advocacy groups. The CCT has been involved in SETS from inception to completion, meeting regularly as a large group and taking project materials back to the groups they represent for additional review and comment. The work of the CCT is detailed in the Community Involvement section of this report.

### Geographic focus

In cooperation with the CCT, it was decided that the primary geographic focus of SETS would be:

- Areas within 1/2 mile of Link light rail stations
- Major east-west streets
- Major commercial/residential hubs
- Major north-south streets, with the exception of Martin Luther King Jr. Way S, which has already been improved as a part of the Link light rail project.

### Projecting traffic growth

Current (2005) traffic counts were collected and future (2030) projections were prepared for major streets and 47 intersections. Overall, traffic volumes are expected to grow moderately between now and 2030, but about 15 of the intersections studied are likely to be highly congested unless improvements are made. Congested intersections are discussed in the Modes section of this report.

### Developing projects

Based on past studies and current work, the project staff and community members identified over 500 potential actions in the SETS area. These have now been distilled to over 70 projects and actions detailed in this report.

### Measuring results

Ultimately, the results of the SETS actions will be reflected in the quality of life of Southeast Seattle's citizens. As a practical matter, SETS projects will be measured against established targets in the Transportation Strategic Plan and related plans and initiatives including the Seattle Transit Plan, the Seattle Bicycle Master Plan, the forthcoming Seattle Pedestrian Master Plan, the Seattle Climate Action Plan and other city initiatives.

### Report organization

This report is organized to work for readers with different levels of interests. Some readers may want only a broad overview of the study findings and recommendations for a certain geographic area or mode of travel (such as biking, walking, driving or freight). Others may want detailed information on a handful of recommended projects. After the introduction, the report summarizes study recommendations by mode, and then by location, followed by detailed project sheets for each recommendation. The remaining sections of the report detail the technical work and analysis, including project evaluation, funding, traffic modeling, land use and growth projections and cost methodology.

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**Adopted Plans and Policies**

## Implementing Plans and Policies

The Southeast Transportation Study builds on Seattle's adopted plans, policies and initiatives. Following is a brief summary of this prior work, which is available on the City's website.



### Seattle Comprehensive Plan

Seattle's Comprehensive Plan, *Toward a Sustainable Seattle*, articulates a vision for how Seattle will grow over the next 20 years, while promoting the values of its citizens, a vibrant economy and livable neighborhoods. The

Plan does this by encouraging most new growth to locate in places it designates as either urban centers or urban villages. It contains population and employment growth targets for each urban center and urban village to indicate the amount of growth the City is planning for between 1994 and 2024. The Plan also includes policies that describe how the City intends to serve this growth with transportation and other infrastructure.



### Transportation Strategic Plan (TSP)

Originally adopted in 1998 and substantially updated in 2005, the TSP describes the actions, projects and programs that SDOT will take to promote economic growth in Seattle and

the region, support livable neighborhoods, improve the environment, and address the many demands of the traveling public. Performance goals are included that track progress in the following areas:

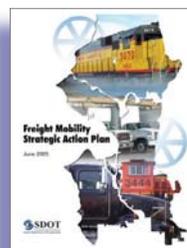
- improving safety
- preserving and maintaining infrastructure
- increasing mobility and access through transportation choices



### Seattle Transit Plan

The Seattle Transit Plan defines a city-wide Urban Village Transit Network (UVTN) that is intended to connect all of the city's urban villages with fast, frequent and reliable transit by 2030. This will be achieved in partnership with King County Metro and Sound

Transit, and means managing Seattle's streets so that in combination, buses, light rail, and streetcars provide service at least every 15 minutes, 18 hours a day, seven days a week. It is a goal of the Plan to have most of Seattle living, working and playing within a quarter mile of high quality transit service. In addition to street improvements to keep buses from getting caught in traffic, Seattle is partnering with King County Metro to buy additional service hours and to build street improvements to move buses more quickly and reliably.



### Freight Mobility Action Plan

The Freight Mobility Action Plan is a city-wide plan to implement the freight components of the Comprehensive Plan and the Transportation Strategic Plan. The Plan also designates the City's Major Truck Routes. In Southeast

Seattle there is one Major Truck Route, which begins at the north end of Rainier Avenue S. and then, at the intersection of Rainier and Martin Luther King Jr. Way S. transitions to MLK where it continues to the south city limits.



### Seattle Bicycle Master Plan

The Seattle Bicycle Master Plan defines a set of actions, to be completed within ten years, to make Seattle the best community for bicycling in the United States. The Plan was created to achieve two goals: 1) Increase use of

bicycling in Seattle for all trip purposes. Triple the amount of bicycling in Seattle between 2007 and 2017; and 2) Improve safety of bicyclists throughout Seattle and reduce the rate of bicycle collisions by one-third between 2007 and 2017.

### Seattle Pedestrian Master Plan

Work on the Seattle Pedestrian Master Plan is underway and is intended to define the actions needed to make Seattle the most walkable city in the nation. Working goals of the plan are: Get more people walking; reduce the number and severity of collisions involving pedestrians; and engage all of Seattle in a meaningful dialogue about what's needed to create and connect walkable urban villages and important destinations.



### Seattle Climate Action Plan

The Seattle Climate Action Plan is the way Seattle will meet international goals and reduce greenhouse gas emissions

as a city to seven percent below 1990 levels by 2012. Actions to reduce dependence on cars include investing \$1.5 million annually to increase transit service in Seattle; investing \$3 million for transit corridor and reliability improvements; doubling the existing 25 miles of marked and striped bicycle lanes; making walking more attractive by installing new pedestrian curb ramps and upgrading marked crosswalks; implementing a commercial parking tax; and working with regional partners to analyze and develop road pricing scenarios.



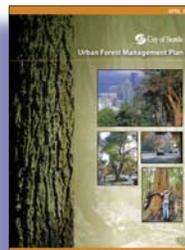
### Mayor's Southeast Seattle Action Agenda

The Mayor's Southeast Seattle Action Agenda is a plan to maximize new investment in the area, while at the same time avoiding the displacement that is a common result of revitalization.

The five goals of the Action Agenda are: 1) create jobs and encourage business; 2) build affordable places to live, work and play; 3) improve education, training and human services; 4) strengthen public safety and community relations and 5) promote arts, culture and parks.

### Complete Streets Policy

Seattle adopted the Complete Streets ordinance (122386) in 2007, joining a national movement to ensure that streets work for all users. The guiding principle of Seattle's policy is, "To design and maintain Seattle's streets to promote safe and convenient access and travel for all users: pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and disabled users, as well as cars and trucks." Complete Streets principles are applied to all street improvement projects, other than routine maintenance and repair and, unless the SDOT director issues an exception.

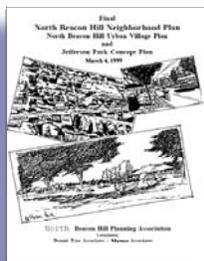


### Urban Forestry Management Plan

With the Urban Forestry Management (FMP) Plan, the City of Seattle embarked on its first ever comprehensive plan for the future of Seattle's urban forest. The vision is to create a thriving and sustainable mix of tree species and ages

that creates a contiguous and healthy ecosystem that is valued and cared for by the City and all of its citizens as an essential environmental, economic, and community asset. The Urban FMP is a 30-year plan intended to guide a broad range of short, mid- and long-term actions that will achieve this vision.

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**Adopted Plan and Policies**



**Neighborhood Plans**

After the Comprehensive Plan established the city's urban village boundaries, each of the 38 urban villages completed a Neighborhood Plan laying out strategies to accommodate future growth, including land use, transportation, parks, and economic development. The Plans are more than simply visions and ideas, they contain specific projects designed to help achieve the goals and objectives of the plan. The five urban villages in Southeast Seattle are: North Beacon Hill, Columbia City/Hillman City, MLK at Holly, and Rainier Beach, all of which are Residential Urban Villages, and North Rainier which is a Hub Urban Village. The Neighborhood Plans for these five urban villages provided key input to this study. While many of the projects have been completed, not everything has been accomplished and several of the SETS recommendations are projects from Neighborhood Planning that remain to be done. The City will be working with neighborhoods to be updating their plans in the next several years.



**Station Area Plans**

A year after the adoption of the Neighborhood Plans, Seattle and Sound Transit completed Station Area Plans for every light rail station area in Seattle. The hundreds of citizens who participated in this effort represented a considerable overlap from the neighborhood planning work, and the station area plans generally build on the earlier effort, refining it in many cases where the location of the station had not been nailed down in the earlier work. The Station Area Plans have also been a key input to the work of this study.

**Station Area Overlay Districts**

As an outcome of the Station Area Planning process, the City established Station Area Overlay Districts and rezoned the areas around each station in 2001. The Station Overlay District designation was added to the Land Use Code by Council Ordinance 120452, which defines its function as follows: "To preserve or encourage a diverse, mixed-use community with a pedestrian orientation around proposed light rail stations or access to other high capacity transit, where incompatible automobile-oriented uses are discouraged and transit-oriented use and development is encouraged."



The next generation enjoying basketball at Bradner Gardens park.

## Community Involvement

The study's community involvement strategy was based on several principles:

- To support broad-based and meaningful participation in the planning and decision making process.
- To conduct a community involvement process that was accessible, efficient and appropriate for the diverse communities of Southeast Seattle.
- To reach community groups that do not typically engage in public process, including non-English speaking groups and seniors, in a way and using methods that were appropriate to the unique needs of each group.
- To ensure that key stakeholders and others in the study area were well informed about the Southeast Transportation Study (SETS).
- To provide an opportunity for community dialogue and consensus-building around transportation issues.

Given the diversity of Southeast Seattle, a variety of community involvement strategies were used during this study. Deliberate decisions were made to determine what strategy or technique would best meet the study needs and best serve the community.

### Broad community outreach

Broad community outreach formed the first step of public involvement. Information provided at this level focused on highlighting key aspects of the study; distribution was primarily through SDOT's website. Using the web provides many advantages including the ability to provide up-to-date, consistent information and the ability of interested people to view the information at their leisure.

The project team also attended existing community meetings and provided project updates. The advantage of this approach is that community members get the information at their regularly scheduled meetings, instead of adding another event to peoples' schedules.

### Parallel targeted outreach

Parallel targeted outreach was the second community involvement step. It included activities such as cooperating with parallel efforts like the Rainier Traffic Safety Project, which worked to identify problems and develop solutions to safety issues along the Rainier corridor.

One-on-one meetings with key community leaders representing a variety of organizations were also conducted, providing depth and detail to the study. All information collected during these meetings was consolidated into the project team's work. Finally, the project team attended City-related organizational meetings such as the Seattle Freight Mobility Advisory Committee, the Seattle Pedestrian Advisory Board, the Seattle Bicycle Advisory Board, and the Seattle Planning Commission. Each group received a presentation at strategic times during the study process. Comments and recommendations were then brought back to the larger team and incorporated into the study.

### Core Community Team

The Core Community Team (CCT) formed the third step of the outreach process. This group was comprised of people from 25 organizations representing a cross-section of Southeast Seattle. The CCT served as the key community advisory body for the study providing critical ongoing feedback to the project team, as well as serving as a channel back to the groups they represented and communicating information between the project team and the broader community. The CCT was intensively engaged in the study and reviewed information provided at a high level of detail.



Core Community Team members devoted hundreds of hours of volunteer time to help shape project recommendations.

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### Community Involvement

The Core Community Team met periodically during the course of the study, beginning with a kickoff meeting on May 25, 2005. Each meeting was staffed by SDOT and project consultants who provided technical updates and study materials. CCT members assisted the team with developing needs and opportunities for the study area and then identifying and validating projects that met the goals of SETS. The CCT reviewed the study recommendations, provided comments, and ranked the recommendations. A summary of the Core Community Team's project evaluation is found in the Evaluation section of this report.

### CCT Representation

The following guidelines informed the selection of participants for the CCT:

**Group size:** The target group size was between 20 and 25 participants, an optimal group size for effective group discussion.

**Representation:** Participants were selected to represent a cross-section of geographic areas and interest groups within Southeast Seattle, including: southeast-wide stakeholders, businesses, residents, functional interests (such as pedestrians, bicyclists, schools) and ethnic communities.

**Broad vs. narrow focus:** SDOT aimed to match different levels of community interest with the most appropriate level of involvement. Because the CCT was intended to focus on area-wide issues and major neighborhood issues that link to other neighborhoods, emphasis was placed on groups that either 1) have a scope of interest that spans Southeast Seattle, or 2) have a more focused mission but can contribute insights about broader transportation issues. Organizations that have a very specific transportation issue or interest were involved through one-on-one and/or targeted outreach.

**Representative groups:** Where possible, SDOT consolidated representation in order to keep the CCT to a manageable size. For example, if one neighborhood had three overlapping resident councils, one organization was selected to participate in the CCT.

**Ethnic communities:** Participants invited to serve on the CCT included representatives of refugee and immigrant communities in Southeast Seattle. However, past experience has shown that often, rather than members of the communities participating in a community-wide committee such as the CCT, the most effective method is to offer targeted discussions within (and sometimes organized by) the communities themselves. The project team was mindful of this and worked with the communities to determine the most effective method for meaningful involvement.

### CCT Members

The following individuals were appointed to the Core Community Team, representing the organizations listed:

Pete Lamb, Columbia City Business Association  
 Joseph Ayele, Ethiopian Business Association  
 Mar Murillo, Filipino Community of Seattle  
 Pamela Wrenn, Hillman City Neighborhood Alliance  
 Sara Valenta, HomeSight  
 Richard Ranhofer, Lakewood Seward Park Neighborhood Association  
 Pat Murakami, Mt. Baker Community Club  
 Dick Burkhart, Othello Neighborhood Association  
 Gregory Davis, Rainier Beach Coalition for Community Empowerment  
 Dawn Tryborn, Rainier Beach Merchants Association  
 Seanna Jordon, Rainier Beach Neighborhood 2014  
 Jeremy Valenta, Rainier/Othello Safety Association  
 Rob Mohn, Rainier Valley Chamber of Commerce  
 Thao Tran, Rainier Valley Community Development Fund  
 Someireh Amirfaiz, Refugee Women's Alliance  
 Rodney Rutherford, Seattle Bicycle Advisory Board  
 Ed Rose, Seattle Housing Authority  
 Molly McCarthy, Seattle Pedestrian Advisory Board  
 Ahmed Jama, Somali Community Services Coalition  
 Warren Yee, South Beacon Hill Neighborhood Assoc.  
 Eric Steinwinder, South Lake Improvement Group  
 Leslie Miller, Southeast District Council  
 Scott Barkan, Southeast Effective Development  
 Cherie Sigris, Southeast Seattle Senior Center  
 Quang H. Nguyen, Vietnamese American Economic Development Association

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