

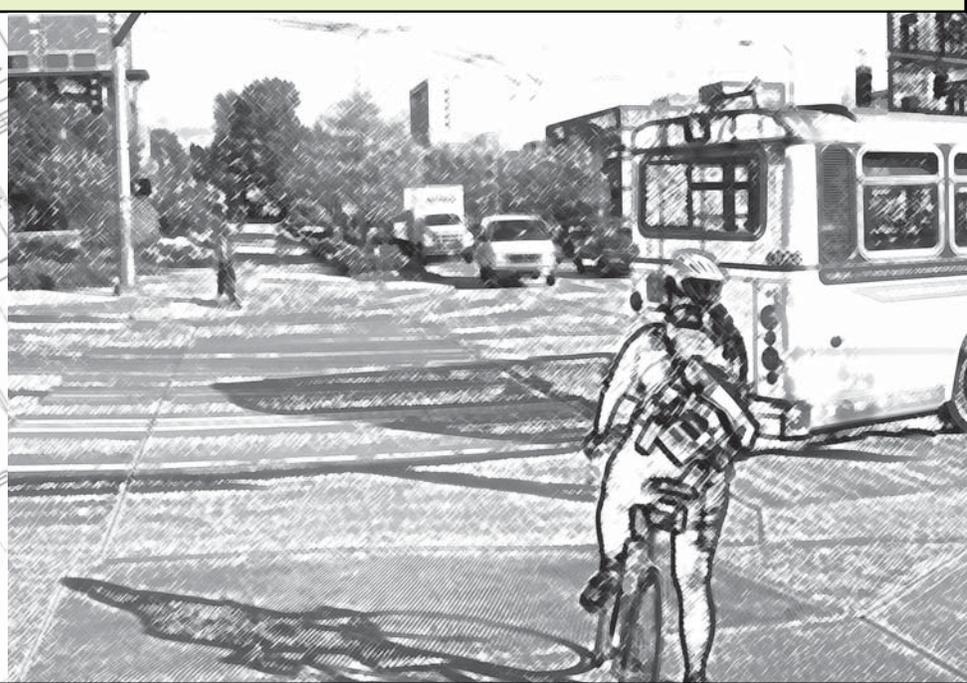


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## iversity Area Transportation Action Strategy

A long range plan  
for the  
University District  
transportation system

2007 - 2030







# University Area Transportation Action Strategy



Final Report  
August 2008

Prepared by:



with  
Mirai Associates  
&  
The Underhill Company



# University Area Transportation Action Strategy

NE 65th St

Interstate 5

35th Ave NE

Study Area

Ship Canal

0 0.25 0.5 Miles



Aerial imagery from summer 1999.  
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## Introduction



In the 1880's, the area bounded by Lake Union to the southwest, Portage Bay to the east, and Ravenna Creek to the north was primarily farmland and rugged forest. Douglas fir trees soared to almost 400 feet and wildlife such as the cougar and bear were visible neighbors. The 'transportation network' for the few who lived there consisted of horse paths, boat docks, and wherever one's own two legs could take them.

By 1891, however, the area was subdivided and annexed into the City of Seattle and the forces of transformation were set in motion. Within just a few short years, new railroad and streetcar connections brought in hundreds of new residents and jobs, and enabled the University of Washington to move its increasingly constrained campus out of downtown Seattle. By the time of the 1909 Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, the area first called Brooklyn Addition, then University Station, and now known as the University District was on its way to becoming a full-fledged city within a city.

Now more than a century later, these early development patterns and infrastructure decisions still fundamentally influence the way people and goods move about the greater University Area. From an inherited set of street alignments and widths, to a man-made ship canal that now physically separates neighborhoods to the south - most of today's transportation issues and constraints stem from a landscape established decades ago by a few key decisions.

Perhaps the most significant inheritance affecting transportation in the University Area are the Interstate 5 and State Route 520 highways. Built in the 1960's, these corridors provide the bulk of regional access and mobility for vehicles and transit, but also act as neighborhood boundaries and barriers to local circulation. In many ways, it is the physical and functional challenge of integrating these large highways with the small, relatively constrained local street environment that defines the areawide transportation system.

### Adapting for the future

In looking to improve 20th century transportation infrastructure to meet the growing needs of tomorrow, there is one issue that - unlike previous generations - is a fundamental consideration for decision-makers: *climate change*. With an increased understanding of

the seriousness of climate change and transportation's role as a principal source of greenhouse gas emissions, there is emerging consensus that rapid changes are needed to create more efficient and environmentally-friendly ways of getting around. Just as century-old decisions still influence us today, so too must our investments over the coming decades define a responsible transportation framework that can be inherited and sustained by future generations.

Key decisions that have shaped the University Area (from l to r): Platting of the "Brooklyn Addition" in 1891; building the Montlake Ship Canal in 1915; construction of I-5 in the 1950's.



The timing could not be more appropriate to begin re-imagining and adapting the University Area's transportation system to meet the needs of the 21st century. Together with the introduction of light rail to - and eventually through - the University Area over the coming decade, the SR 520 bridge replacement project offers a unique opportunity to enhance regional mobility and repair local connections - physical and otherwise - damaged in the 1960's. People are now asking 'What if a viable opportunity has been presented to dramatically improve not only the ways in which people and goods move around, but also the social and environmental quality of our communities?'

The questions and issues at the scale of a regional highway are indeed profound, which is why there is a large and focused planning effort between state, local, and neighborhood representatives to reach a preferred alternative on replacing SR 520. But what about other key decisions being looked at today that could potentially affect the University Area transportation system for the next 100 years? What about the kinds of gradual improvements needed to maintain livability and provide a viable transportation system for both now and in the future?

In order to answer these latter questions, and to identify a set of transportation improvements that adequately respond to the specific needs of the area, the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) has developed the *University Area Transportation Action Strategy*.