

mercercorridorproject

June 2004 Stakeholder Workshop Summary

Prepared for:

The Seattle Department of Transportation

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Introduction

The Mercer Corridor Project, led by the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT), is being conducted to determine transportation improvements along the Mercer Corridor from I-5 to Aurora Avenue and Seattle Center. The project's purpose is to better accommodate vehicular, transit, pedestrian and bicycle traffic, support development of the South Lake Union Urban Village and improve access to a greatly enhanced South Lake Union Park.

Three basic alternatives are under consideration. One component in the initial evaluation of the alternatives included ranking the alternatives against project objectives. The purpose of the Stakeholder Workshop that was held on Wednesday, July 23rd was to gather input on the scoring of the alternatives, the importance of project objectives, and how the alternatives could be improved or modified.

This report summarizes the small group discussions that generated comments on the project objectives, their priority rankings, and how the alternatives might be modified to reflect priority objectives. Twenty-five people, who represent the diverse range of interests within and outside the project area, were invited to attend. Seventeen people attended the workshop.

Participants

The following is a list of the interest groups and business representatives who attended the workshop:

Cascade Neighborhood Council
North Seattle Industrial Association
Denny Triangle/Cascade Neighborhood Council
Bicycle Advisory Board
Children's Hospital
Shurgard Storage
Trident Seafoods
Vulcan
Copiers Northwest
Seattle Supersonics
Pacific Northwest Ballet
Cascade People Center
Queen Anne Community Council / Uptown Alliance

Workshop Format

The workshop was held on Wednesday, June 23rd from 4:00 – 7:00 p.m. at the Armory on South Lake Union at 860 Terry Avenue North. After a brief welcome, participants were introduced to the workshop purpose and objectives. Following that, an overview of the project was presented including: previous planning efforts, current alternatives, comments to date, how those comments have been addressed and next steps. Participants

were then divided into two smaller groups for a discussion of project objectives and their rankings against the alternatives.

In each small group, a facilitator led the participants through a discussion of the objectives, their priorities and their rankings against the alternatives. Technical project team members were available in each group to clarify questions about the project objectives and alternatives.

Small Group Discussion

Meeting attendees were randomly split into groups of 8-9 members. Both groups were provided the same information and asked the same questions. The differences in the two groups' interpretations of the questions and their respective responses are reflected the following sections.

Group #1 Summary

Group #1 focused on the project objectives, expanding, fine-tuning and eliminating objective components. After some discussion of what is important for the area and for the project to accomplish, the group agreed to take two existing “measures” and make them specific objectives. Those new objectives included: 1) Transit supported environment, and 2) Livability. The group supported making South Lake Union a self-sustaining, yet permeable area. In other words, improve mobility to, through and within the area for automobiles, transit, bicycles and pedestrians. Specifically, the group strongly supported improved pedestrian and bicycle connections. They concluded that measure 3.1 (“number and quality of pedestrian, bicycle, and auto/truck connections”) should be split into three separate measures to illustrate the importance of each type of connection.

Objectives and Measures

The group provided input on objectives, the measures used to score alternatives, and the project team's preliminary ranking of the alternatives against the measures. Comments included:

- Add two additional objectives to the list before prioritizing objectives. Those additional objectives were:
 - Transit supported environment
 - Livability

Transit

The group thought there was not enough mention of transit in the objectives. They agreed that a transit supported environment is important enough to be an objective all its own. The group thought all alternatives should support transit, as it is important on a neighborhood and regional scale, and will maximize the efficiency of the investment in this transportation project. Specific suggestions included providing infrastructure to allow transit to stop in the area, not just pass through;

using water taxis on Lake Union to serve SLU, Fremont, Wallingford and the U-District; and improving connections between SLU and the U-District.

Livability

The group didn't think livability was appropriate as a measure (or sub-objective) to Objective #6 regarding economic development. Rather, the group suggested that livability is important enough to stand alone as its own objective. The group defined livability as:

- Easy to get around the area
 - Area is self-sufficient (necessary services)
 - Regard SLU as a permeable, self-contained unit
- Change objective #3 and its measures to: Provide better connections between South Lake Union and Queen Anne across Aurora Avenue

Measure:

- 3.1 number and quality of auto/truck connections
- 3.2 number and quality of pedestrian connections (including connections to Queen Anne and Fremont, in addition to the Cascade neighborhood)
- 3.3 number and quality of bicycle connections

The group supported this objective and its measure (“number and quality of pedestrian, bicycle, and auto/truck connections”). However, the group agreed that “pedestrian connections” and “bicycle connections” should be pulled out as their own measures, because how those connections are achieved are different for autos, bicycles and pedestrians.

- Expand the area of consideration

There was some support expressed for expanding the area of consideration for the project. It was suggested that the alternatives should be examined for their impact on connections to other nearby areas such as Fremont and the U-District. It was also suggested that Objective #6 (Support economic development goals for South Lake Union) should include the “economic livability of Fremont, North Seattle Industrial Area, U-District and Capitol Hill.”

Prioritizing Objectives

Each group member was asked to allocate 100 points to the project objectives. They were instructed to allocate the 100 points in any way they saw fit. For example they could give all points to one objective or spread points out among all objectives. Individual allocations were tallied and recorded on a flip chart. After the first ranking exercise, the following three objectives received the highest number of points.

High Priority

- Objective 1** Improve mobility and access within South Lake Union using a multi-modal (cars, trucks, transit, pedestrians, bicycles, etc.) approach
- Objective 2** Improve regional access and mobility to and through South Lake Union and Queen Anne/Seattle Center
- Objective 5** Improve safety for cars, bicycles and pedestrians throughout the corridor

Medium Priority

- Objective 3** Provide better connections between South Lake Union and Queen Anne across Aurora Avenue
- Objective 4** Enhance the environment around South Lake Union Park
- Objective 9** Transit supported environment
- Objective 10** Livability

Low Priority

- Objective 6** Support economic development goals for South Lake union
- Objective 8** Ability to implement
- Objective 7** Compatible with Comprehensive Plan goals and policies (by far the lowest ranking)

Discussion

- Some group members thought the rankings Totals/ranking are skewed towards interests in the SLU area because Objective #1 ranked higher than Objective #2 (the general population of Seattle would rank it the other way around).
- Objective #8 should be the number one objective. Is it that we are taking it for granted that the project will be implementable? Should we take that for granted?
- Some group members speculated that Objective #7 received the lowest priority because even if the Mercer Corridor Project is in conflict with other plans, it is such an important problem to fix, that it might be done anyway.
- Group members commented that the theme of the highly ranked objectives was *transportation*.
- It was suggested that Objective #4 is part of Objective #10 and could therefore be eliminated.
- Group members wondered about the ability of the project to actually support economic development in the area (Objective# 6). They seemed to think that regardless of whether the Mercer mess is fixed, the area will grow.
- Group members wondered if Objective #5 (safety) wasn't just an assumption, something that should happen by law, and if so couldn't it be eliminated as an objective. Group members agreed that safety was a requirement of some components of the project, but that there are some components that improve safety, but are not required (e.g. additional bike lanes and pedestrian crossings).

After the discussion of the objective priorities, the group was asked to prioritize the objectives again. Objectives 1, 2 and 5 remained as high priorities, with the addition of Objective 3 as a high priority.

Following in rank, with a similar number of points were Objectives 6, 9 and 10. Objective #6 moved up from low priority.

Objective #7 and #8 remained a low priority, with #7 receiving the fewest points. Objective #4 moved from medium priority to low priority.

Discussion

- Highly ranked alternatives seem to support mobility to, through, and within the SLU area. These are the focus and if these objectives are met, all other objectives are supported.
- Objective #7 (Compatibility with Comprehensive plans and goals) was in both cases given the lowest priority.

Other Comments

The group made comments in addition to their input on the ranking, objectives, and alternatives. The following is a summary of their comments:

- Past O-D studies (mid 80s) performed – volumes haven't really changed so those studies might be useful
- Modeling does not reflect change in high tech management in area
- Eastbound Mercer – if capacity is decreased it will be problematic for Seattle Center event traffic (people tend to arrive at different times, but all leave at the same time)
- Traffic studies should be expanded to include night hours and weekends
- Facilitate flow of traffic to nighttime events
- Alt. B – 2 way Mercer, lots of options for managing event traffic
- Maintain (if not enhance) existing north/south infrastructure
- Maintain bicycle safety/access
- Transportation study should include a bike count
- Objective # 4 – Alt. B should be higher ranked than Alt. C because Park experience is about pedestrian connections in entire neighborhood, not just getting across Valley

Group #2 Summary

Group #2 focused most their discussion on the project objectives and how they should be weighted when evaluating alternatives. The group emphasized the importance of improving regional mobility and access to and through South Lake Union for automobiles, transit, bicycles, and pedestrians (Objective #2) and on providing better connections between South Lake Union and Queen Anne (Objective #3). The group believed that if “you got Objective #2 right” that the other objectives would be met. The

group indicated that while Alternative C would improve east-west mobility through South Lake Union for automobiles it would have negative impacts on all other modes and on neighborhood livability.

Objectives and Measures

The group provided input on objectives, the measures used to score alternatives, and the project team's preliminary ranking of the alternatives against the measures. Comments on the objectives and ranking included:

- Regional access and mobility (Objective 2) should not be limited to South Lake Union and Seattle Center. Mercer has a role in connections to Inter-bay, Fremont/Ballard, and Eastlake.
- Alternative C should not receive a high ranking for Measure 2.4 – Ease of freight mobility on major truck streets – because trucks will have to make multiple turns when traveling westbound on Mercer and their destination is south of Mercer. It is likely that this truck travel pattern will also negatively impact bike and pedestrian safety (Objective #5, Measure 5.2) and Livability (Objective #6, Measure 6.3).
- Ease of freight mobility on major truck streets (measure 2.4) should have well-defined parameters (area and routes).
- Alternative C should not receive a high ranking for minimizing impacts to I-5 (Objective #2, Measure 2.2) because of the three alternatives it has the ability to deliver the greatest volumes of traffic to I-5.
- The measures in Objective #6 don't accurately assess the alternatives' ability to support the economic development goals for South lake Union.

Prioritizing Objectives

Each group member was asked to allocate 100 points to the project objectives. They were instructed to allocate the 100 points in any they saw fit. For example they could give all points to one objective or spread points out among all objectives. Individual allocations were tallied and recorded on a flip chart. The results of the allocation indicated that participants assigned varying levels of priorities to each objective.

High Priority

- Objective 2** Improve regional access and mobility to and through South Lake Union and Queen Anne/Seattle Center
- Objective 3** Provide better connections between South Lake Union and Queen Anne across Aurora Avenue

Medium Priority

- Objective 1** Improve mobility and access within South Lake Union using a multi-modal (cars, trucks, transit, pedestrians, bicycles, etc.) approach
- Objective 5** Improve safety for cars, bicycles and pedestrians throughout the corridor

Low Priority

- Objective 4** Enhance the environment around South Lake Union Park
- Objective 6** Support economic development goals for South Lake Union
- Objective 8** Ability to implement
- Objective 7** Compatible with Comprehensive Plan goals and policies (received the lowest ranking)

Discussion

The group then was asked to explain their reasoning for their allocation of points.

- Many cited regional access to and through South Lake Union as the most important objective for this project. The majority of the group concurred that the solution must be multi-modal, and that focusing on just moving cars was not the right approach to a solution. The group also noted the importance of connecting neighborhoods -- the growing South Lake Union “hub” to Queen Anne. Their allocation was based on the belief that connecting Seattle neighborhoods with a multi-modal approach was important to city residents.
- While regional access and mobility was the highest priority, the group agreed that the other objectives (at least the next level point-wise) were also important.
- Some group members cited uncertainty about what enhancing the environment around South Lake Union Park meant and the idea that South Lake Union Park is part of a broader set of safety, access and livability enhancements as reasons for not allocating Objective #4 a lot of points. The group also perceived the project as having citywide economic development impacts and as a transportation project first and foremost, and thus did not give a lot of importance to Objectives #6 and #7.
- The group did not believe that the ability to implement the project as a priority objective because all alternatives have similar implementation challenges and because firm cost figures and potential funding scenarios are not yet clear.

After explaining their allocation of points the groups were asked to re-allocate their 100 points. They were told that they could allocate the same way they had initially or change their allocation based on what they had heard during the explanation discussion. The second allocation of points yielded roughly the same results as the first allocation. Point totals for each objective changed slightly but the group still ranked improving regional mobility and access to and through South Lake Union for automobiles, freight, transit, bicycles, and pedestrians (Objective #2) and providing better connections between South Lake Union and Queen Anne (Objective #3) as high priority project objectives. Medium priority objectives changed somewhat. Improving mobility and access within South Lake Union using a multi-modal (cars, trucks, transit, pedestrians, bicycles, etc.) approach (Objective #1) and improving safety for cars, bicycles and pedestrians throughout the corridor (Objective #5) remained medium priorities, but enhancing the environment around South Lake Union Park (Objective #4) moved up from a low priority to a medium priority. Supporting South Lake Union economic development goals (Objective #6), compatibility with Comprehensive Plans and goals (Objective #7) and ability to implement (Objective #8) remained as low priority objectives.

Modifying Alternatives

The group was asked to provide their ideas on potential ways to modify alternatives to make them more effective, either by adding new elements or by “borrowing” elements from other alternatives. While no specific suggestions were provided by group members, the group believed that the Mercer Corridor Project should move ahead with or without the Viaduct Project, but indicated that the Mercer project should be compatible with the Viaduct’s selected alternative.

Other Comments

The group made comments in addition to their input on the ranking, objectives, and alternatives. The following is a summary of their comments:

- The Potlach Trail is important for connectivity and should be incorporated into the alternatives
- It is difficult to decipher differences between alternatives with and without the Alaska Viaduct Project
- Wayfinding to and within the Mercer Corridor is important and should be part of whatever alternative is selected
- It is difficult to analyze the Mercer Project without knowing the status of the Alaska Viaduct Project
- If Alternative C is actually double the cost of the other alternatives, but does not rank a great deal higher, it is not worth pursuing
- Alternative C is extremely complicated at both ends of the corridor
- I-5 will continue to be a choke point regardless of improvements made to the Mercer Corridor

Conclusion

The workshop concluded with both groups reconvening to present summaries of their discussions. As indicated in the group summaries, both groups identified similar priorities in terms of project objectives. The groups reiterated that the Mercer project should address the full range of transportation problems within the corridor, and select an alternative that improves regional access and mobility to and through South Lake Union for all modes and that improves multi-modal connections within South Lake Union and between neighborhoods. A straw poll of the group on preferences for alternatives resulted in majority support for Alternative B – Two-Way Mercer. Alternative A – Fairview/Valley Realignment and Alternative C – Below Grade Mercer each received very limited support.