

Mercer Corridor Study

Introduction

The purpose of the Mercer Corridor Study is to develop and analyze a conceptual design for improvements to Mercer Street and Valley Street between I-5 and Aurora Avenue North (SR 99). The concept under consideration is a widened two-way Mercer Street to carry the major eastbound and westbound traffic movements through the corridor. This concept allows for a narrower Valley Street along the south edge of South Lake Union Park.

The Mercer Corridor, currently carrying more than 80,000 vehicles per average weekday, has long been recognized as a critical facility to the city and region. With proposals ranging from the Bay Freeway (1960's) to the Commons (1990's), state and regional decision-makers have been struggling to determine the best way to improve this key link. Now, alternatives developed for the Alaskan Way Viaduct Replacement Project provide a new opportunity to construct a workable solution for the corridor.

By improving Mercer Street to a widened two-way facility, and simplifying connections to SR 99, the Mercer Corridor concept provides the following long-term benefits:

- **Improves approaches to, and connections between, I-5 and SR 99.**
- **Enhances access to surrounding neighborhoods, as well as many regional and statewide economic, cultural, educational and recreational activity centers and facilities.**
- **Relieves demand on Mercer Street** by supporting a comprehensive set of improvements for the South Lake Union area that includes reconnecting the east/west street grid and providing enhanced transit service and bicycle and pedestrian facilities.
- **Provides needed transportation infrastructure** to support the development of a mixed-use neighborhood with transit and walking access to downtown Seattle.
- **Improves regional emergency access** by connecting two designated emergency response routes.

Mercer Corridor provides a **central connection** to multiple activity centers of statewide and regional importance (See Figure 1). The proposed improvement enhances mobility by providing more direct access from I-5 and SR 520 to the following destinations: Seattle Center, Port of Seattle, Seattle waterfront activities, Ballard/Interbay Northend Manufacturing Industrial Center (BINMIC), South Lake Union Air Harbor, South Lake Union marine facilities, the Maritime Museum and proposed South Lake Union Regional Park, Washington State and International Ferries, the Bell Harbor Cruise Ship terminal, the World Trade Center, the Mariners and Seahawks stadiums, and Exhibition Center.



Figure 1. Vicinity Map

Problem Statement

The existing Mercer Corridor, shown in Figure 2, could benefit from the proposed improvements for the following reasons:

- **Lack of direct connections** between I-5 and the Mercer Corridor and SR 99 results in congestion and increased travel time and distance. The west-bound connection in particular, from I-5 to SR 99 and areas west of SR 99, is indirect and confusing to unfamiliar drivers.
- East/west **transit** service between South Lake Union and other regional centers/facilities is **non-existent**, due, in part, to congestion and the lack of continuous east/west streets.
- Lack of alternative east-west connections across SR 99 creates added congestion on Mercer and Valley Streets.
- Mercer and Valley Streets are **barriers to pedestrians and bicycles**, as well as to local traffic circulation in the area.
- The existing street network **hinders urban development** in an area that otherwise has great potential due to its proximity to downtown Seattle and other regional amenities.

Solutions

The Mercer Corridor study is an important first step in developing a set of comprehensive transportation improvements for the South Lake Union area.

The basic concept for the Mercer Corridor, shown in Figure 3, includes the following elements:

- Two-way Mercer Street from Fairview to and across SR 99.
- New Roy Street connection across SR 99.
- More convenient and direct access between the Mercer Corridor and SR 99.
- Modified Mercer/Fairview intersection.
- Reconfigured Valley Street (to a two-way local collector).

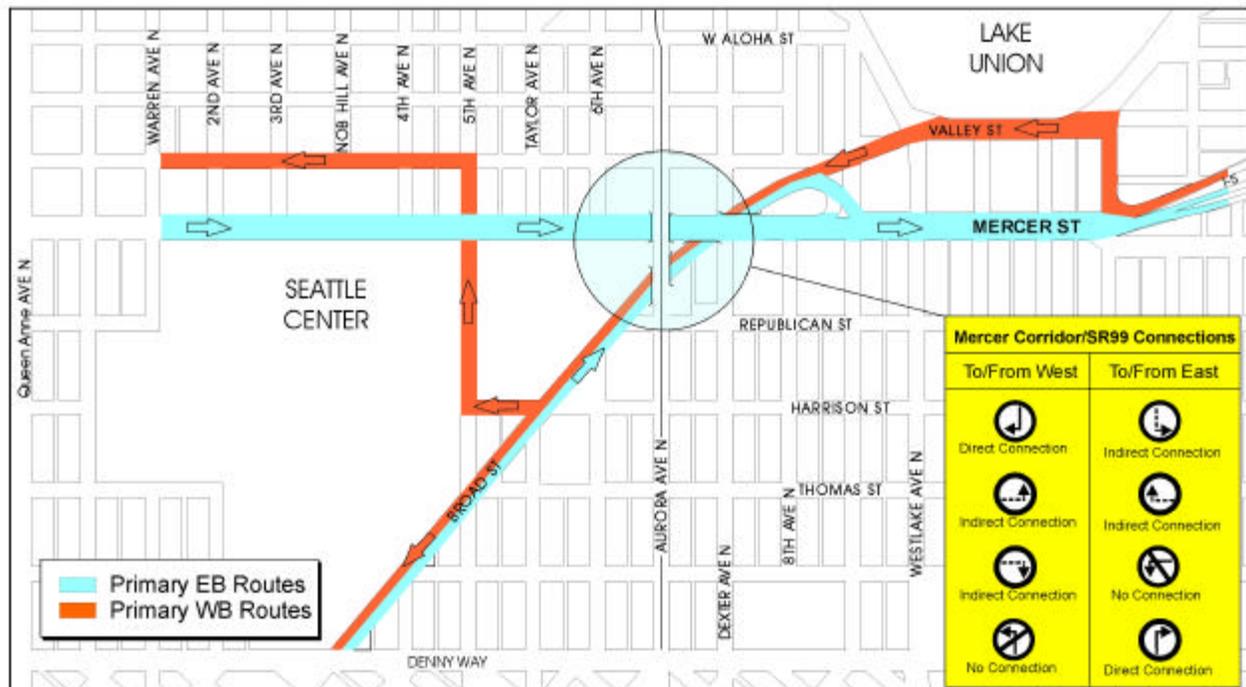


Figure 2: Existing Conditions

Making it Easier to Get Around

The comprehensive transportation vision for the South Lake Union area will be developed through a comprehensive transportation study in 2003. Potential elements include:

- Reconnection of Thomas, Harrison, and Republican Streets across SR 99.
- Street improvements consistent with the South Lake Union Neighborhood Plan, including appropriate designations of arterial streets, transit streets, freight streets and “green” streets.
- Increased levels and types of public transportation service in the South Lake Union area.
- Improved pedestrian and bicycle circulation and connections.

Part of a Larger Vision

The Mercer Corridor and South Lake Union transportation improvements will enhance the development of the *South Lake Union Neighborhood*.

Components of the larger vision include:

- **Employment and housing growth** served by better access to I-5 and SR 99 and increased transit, walking and biking opportunities.
- Required infrastructure for **improved transit service** where virtually none exists today.
- **Improved access and circulation for pedestrians and bicycles** within South Lake Union and connections to regional routes, making these modes safer and more attractive.
- A range of travel options for travelers to and through the South Lake Union area.

Consistent with Regional Policy

The Mercer Corridor also provides access from I-5 to two regionally designated *Urban Centers*: Downtown Seattle and Uptown. Regional policy¹ supports investment in transportation corridors that facilitate the development of designated urban centers as a priority for the region. Regional funding for the Mercer Corridor is a priority for the City of Seattle.



Figure 3. Mercer Conceptual Improvements

¹ Policy Framework for the 2002 TEA-21 TIP Process, adopted by the Puget Sound Regional Council, January 24, 2002

Next Steps

The City will complete the conceptual design and develop cost estimates in December 2002 to support efforts to include the Mercer Corridor in a regional funding plan.

In January 2003, we will initiate a comprehensive transportation study for the South Lake Union Neighborhood. The study will include further development of the Mercer Corridor conceptual design, as well as other transportation improvements to support and shape growth in South Lake Union over the next 20 years.

The study will include the following:

- Street functions, classification, design, and operations to support anticipated demand and support improvements on Mercer Corridor
- Consideration of design and operation changes to Mercer and Roy Streets west of SR 99 to Elliott Avenue
- Improvements that incorporate concepts and recommendations of the *South Lake Union Neighborhood Plan* and streetscape planning efforts
- Pedestrian and bicycle improvements, including opportunities provided by reconnection of the street grid
- Potlatch Trail alignment reflecting the new grid connections
- Transit service, including streetcar routing options, bus route concepts, and connection opportunities with Sound Transit Light Rail and/or the Monorail.
- Transportation demand management (TDM) strategy to reduce automobile demand within the South Lake Union neighborhood

We will host an open house early in 2003 to kick off the South Lake Union Transportation Study.

To Stay Involved

Be sure to provide your contact information on the sign-in sheet, so we can send you notices of future open houses and other milestones.

Fill out the comment sheets provided at the open house, or send your comments to:

Eric Tweit
Seattle Department of Transportation
700 Fifth Avenue, Suite 3900
Seattle, WA 98104-5043
206-684-8834
Eric.Tweit@seattle.gov

Visit the Mercer Corridor website at:
http://www.cityofseattle.net/td/plan_mercer.asp



City of Seattle

November 12, 2002

