



# South Lake Union Transportation Study

Summer 2004



*'These improvements will benefit our entire region by making our city more livable, more appealing and less congested.'*

~ March 18, 2004  
Open House attendee

## FIXING THE MERCER 'MESS'

There is good news for all of us who want progress on Seattle's transportation problems, specifically the Mercer "mess" - that tangle of barriers and blockages in the middle of our city. I'm pleased to announce a package of transportation improvements for the South Lake Union area, including the Mercer Corridor, with broad support from a diverse group of neighborhood, business and community representatives.

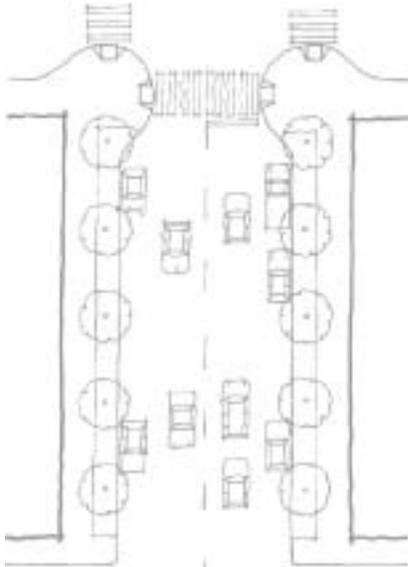
~ Grace Crunican, SDOT Director

The improvements call for a two-way Mercer Corridor, streetcar and a number of other transit, pedestrian and bicycle measures that, taken together:

- reconnect a growing neighborhood to the City;
- untangle streets that create barriers in the middle of Seattle;
- improve mobility for people in Queen Anne, Capitol Hill, Eastlake and surrounding neighborhoods that use this corridor;
- promote transit, walking and biking; and
- continue a smooth flow of freight and people through the corridor.

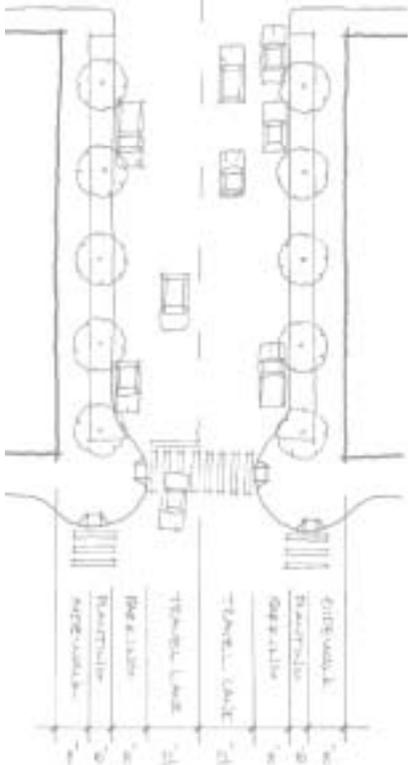
## WHAT WAS CONSIDERED?

SDOT compiled a long list of improvements and broke them into three logical groupings, or packages of improvements. The primary distinguishing characteristics of these alternative scenarios is that each includes a different proposed treatment of the Mercer Corridor.



### All scenarios include:

- A new crossing over Aurora Avenue at Thomas
- Widened sidewalks and additional curb bulbs along Harrison
- An improved pedestrian crossing over I-5 at Denny Way
- Transit signal priority on Fairview Avenue
- A streetcar
- Improved direct regional transit service



Besides the recommended alternative, the following two packages were studied and evaluated:

### Area Improvements with Existing Mercer/Valley

- Retain the existing Mercer/Valley configuration

### Roy Street Underpass and Fairview/Valley Intersections Realignment

- Consistent with SLU Neighborhood Plan
- Realign the Fairview/Valley intersection
- Add new crossing under Aurora Avenue at Roy Street for westbound traffic
- Create a shared bike/pedestrian trail, known as the Lake-to-Bay Trail, along new Roy Street alignment under Aurora Avenue

## THE RECOMMENDED ALTERNATIVE TO FIX THE MERCER 'MESS'

Strong community support emerged for the following package:

### **Two-Way Mercer/Narrow Valley**

#### **Road**

- Two-way, seven-lane Mercer Street
- Narrow Valley Street
- Aurora overpass at Thomas or Harrison Street
- Two-way Westlake and Ninth avenues

#### **Transit**

- Streetcar on Westlake and Terry avenues
- New bus route between Uptown and North Capitol Hill
- Increased frequency on Bus Route 8
- Transit Signal Priority reducing delays for buses on Fairview Avenue

#### **Pedestrian and Bicycle**

- Wider sidewalks and more crossings on Mercer and Valley streets
- Bike path or lanes on Mercer Street across Aurora Avenue
- Bike lanes on Valley and Roy streets connecting Fairview to Dexter avenues
- Bike route on Fairview Avenue north of Valley Street and on Ninth Avenue
- Sidewalk on north side of Denny Way across I-5
- Curb bulbs and pedestrian enhancements on Harrison and Thomas streets



**WHAT WE HEARD /  
WHAT WE'RE RECOMMENDING**

Overall, we heard broad community support from a diverse group of stakeholders. This feedback is reflected in the final recommendations.

**Increase connections between I-5 and Queen Anne**

- Turn Mercer Street into two-way street, improving westbound route
- Add Thomas or Harrison Street crossing of Aurora Avenue

**Increase transit options, reliability, and convenience**

- Give transit priority on Fairview Avenue and increase service frequency
- Provide new or improved east-west transit service
- Add regional transit service to SLU
- Add streetcar between downtown and SLU

**Connect SLU and downtown Seattle**

- Add streetcar between downtown and SLU
- Improve transit bus frequencies and travel times along Fairview Avenue
- Add directional signs to downtown bicycle routes
- Improve pedestrian crossings on Denny Way

**Improve and maintain freight mobility in and through SLU**

- Increase travel route options by creating two-way streets on Mercer Street, Westlake Avenue, and 9th Avenue
- Accommodate trucks in the design of a two-way Mercer Street

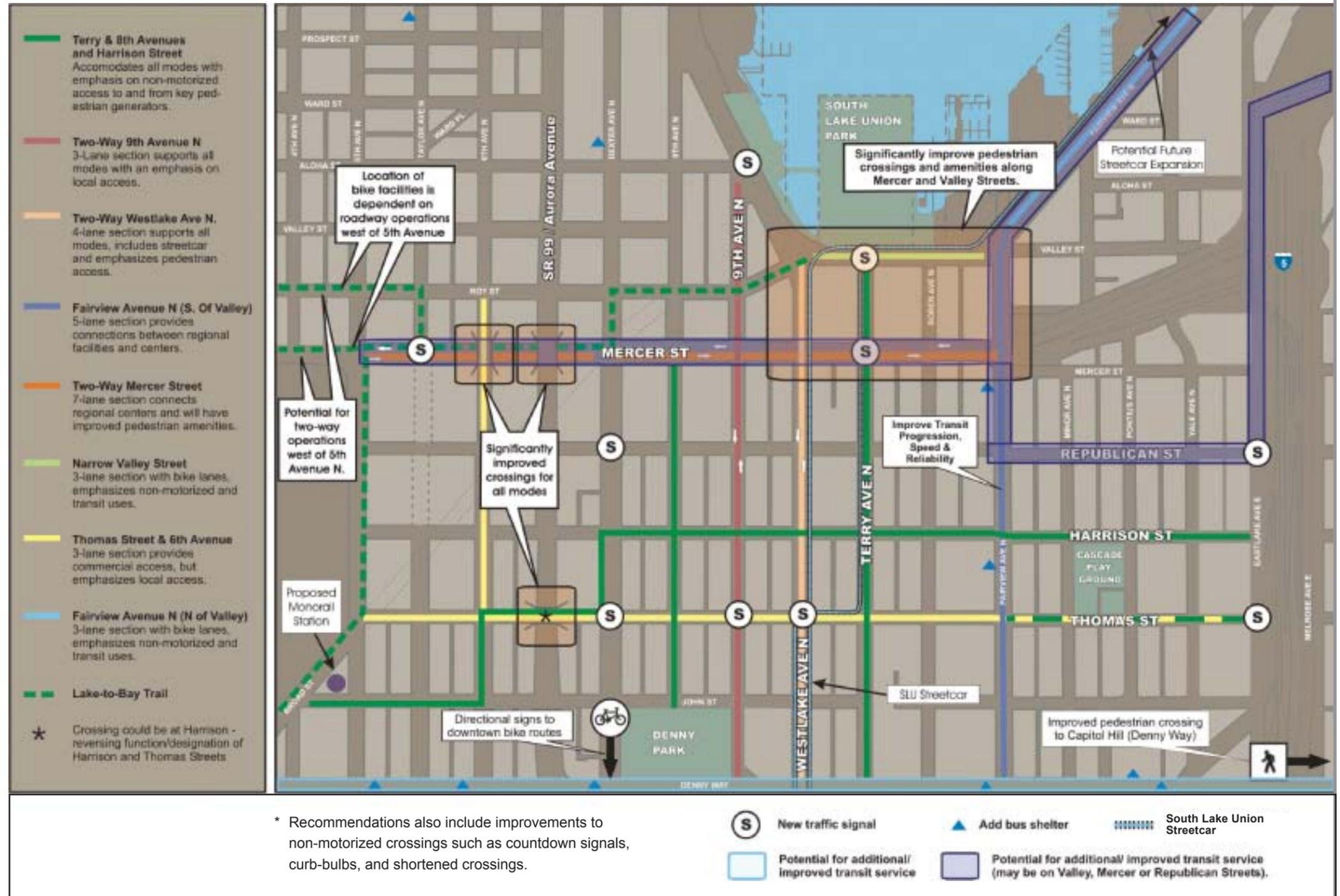
**Enhance the pedestrian experience and improve connections**

- Improve pedestrian crossings of Mercer Street, Valley Street, and Denny Way and across Aurora Avenue
- Add a sidewalk to the north side of the Denny Way bridge crossing I-5
- Provide ample sidewalks along Mercer and Valley Streets
- Incorporate and construct the Lake-to-Bay multi-use trail into the roadway system

**Implement programs to reduce auto trips**

- Develop programs with employers and developers to reduce auto trips to SLU

**TWO-WAY MERCER/NARROW VALLEY ALTERNATIVE**



**Improve access to SLU Park**

- Make Valley Street a narrower, two-lane street
- Improve pedestrian crossings of Valley and Mercer Streets

**Maintain customer parking and existing on-street parking**

- Manage on-street parking to facilitate short-term customer and visitor parking
- Add on-street parking where appropriate

## **HOW WAS THE STUDY FUNDED?**

The SLU Transportation Study was funded by money from the sale of City-owned properties in the South Lake Union area, as authorized by City Council. These properties were originally purchased for the Bay Freeway project in the 1960s. A portion of the property proceeds is still available for transportation improvements in South Lake Union. These funds may be used to implement some of the study recommendations.

## **COST AND POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES**

### **Cost**

The City of Seattle developed conceptual cost estimates for the recommended long-term improvements for the Mercer Corridor, South Lake Union neighborhood, and surrounding neighborhoods. The total cost of the recommended improvements in the study area is estimated to be \$245-258 million. Of that, \$131-144 million is for projects within SLU, with the remaining cost allocated for improvements on Aurora Avenue and connections with other neighborhoods.

### **Funding Sources**

SDOT will explore funding options at the federal, state, regional and local level, including opportunities through the Regional Transportation Investment District, a local improvement district, and mitigation from development.



## HOW DOES THIS STUDY RELATE TO OTHER PROJECTS IN THE AREA?

A number of other studies relevant to the SLU area have been completed or are currently under way. As part of the SLU Transportation Study development process the following studies were reviewed and pertinent policies and data were considered.

- Mercer Corridor Project
- Alaskan Way Viaduct/Seawall Replacement Project (AWVSP)
- Center City Access Study and Center City Circulation Report
- Terry Avenue N. Street Design Guidelines
- Seattle Streetcar Network and Feasibility Analysis
- South Lake Union Park Design
- North Downtown Park Plan (NDPP)
- Cascade Playground Design Guidelines
- Seattle Center Theater District Plan

### **BROAD COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION**

Community members from these businesses and organizations attended informal working sessions at two key study milestones:

**South Lake Union Friends and Neighbors (SLUFAN) • Cascade Neighborhood Council • Uptown Alliance • Seattle Center • Queen Anne Community Council • Eastlake Community Council • Seattle Parks Foundation • Ballard-Interbay-Northend Manufacturing and Industrial Council • Center for Wooden Boats • North Seattle Industrial Association • Seattle Times • Vulcan • Consolidated Works • Shurgard Storage • PEMCO • Fred Hutchinson • Trident Seafoods • Kenmore Air**

In addition, the study team interviewed business and property owners in SLU and nearly 100 people attended an open house in March 2004. We heard from people who live, work, bike and walk in SLU, and from those who travel through the neighborhood to get to Queen Anne, Fremont, Capitol Hill, and other areas.

*‘Two-way traffic on Mercer will address a long-standing regional traffic problem and will help create pedestrian-friendly access to South Lake Union Park and Lake Union.’ ~ March 18, 2004 Open House attendee*

## NEXT STEPS

- Complete an environmental review process for the Mercer Corridor Project.
- Pending Council approval, begin design and preliminary engineering for the South Lake Union Streetcar.
- Incorporate other recommendations into the Capital Improvement Program as funding becomes available.
- Work with King County Metro and other partners to identify funding opportunities and a phasing plan for transit service improvements.

*‘The recommendations presented in the study are all beneficial to the economic future of the Uptown Urban Center. Taken as a whole, the package of improvements will improve access to Uptown, Queen Anne, Interbay and Ballard.’*

~ John Coney  
President of Uptown Alliance



*‘One of my priorities is to get Seattle moving. I’m pleased to see strong community support for untangling the Mercer ‘Mess.’ Step by step we will get the job done.’*

~ Mayor Greg Nickels

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

**Web:** [www.seattle.gov/transportation/southlakeunion.htm](http://www.seattle.gov/transportation/southlakeunion.htm)

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