Seattle design Commission

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MINUTES OF THE MEETING

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Shannon Loew, Vice Chair

Bernie Alonzo

Brodie Bain

Lee Copeland

Thaddeus Egging

Megan Groth

Martin Regge

Ellen Sollod

Ross Tilghman

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August 7 2014
Convened 12:00 pm
Adjourned 4:30 pm

Projects Reviewed
Swedish Ballard Skybridge
Northgate Pedestrian and Bicycle Bridge

Commissioners Present
Shannon Loew, Vice Chair
Bernie Alonzo (arrived at 3:45 pm)
Brodie Bain
Lee Copeland
Thaddeus Egging
Megan Groth

Commissioners Excused
Osama Quotah, Chair
Martin Regge
Ellen Sollod
Ross Tilghman

Staff Present
Michael Jenkins
Valerie Kinast
Nicolas Welch
Joan Nieman

August 7, 2014	**Project:**	**Northgate Pedestrian and Bicycle Bridge**	
3:00 – 4:30pm	**Phase:**	Pre-design	
	Previous reviews:	none	
	Presenters:	Barbara Lee	SDOT
		Stephen Van Dyck	LMN Architects
		Barbara Swift	Swift Company
	Attendees:	Art Brochet	SDOT
		Andrea Burnett	Sound Transit
		Ron Endlich	Sound Transit
		Brianna Holan	LMN Architects
		Kevin Kim	resident
		Fred Lippert	Swift Company
		David McMullen	KPFF
		Walt Niehoff	LMN Architects
		David Sucher	Maple Leaf resident
		Thomas Whittemore	DON
		Fred Young	Alta Planning & Design

Recusals and Disclosures
Commissioner Quotah recused himself. Commissioner Egging disclosed that his employer, KPFF, is working on the project, but he is not involved.

Purpose of Review
The purpose of this meeting was to review the pre-design for the Northgate Pedestrian and Bicycle Bridge. A subcommittee of the Design Commission has twice provided input on the early conceptual design for the bridge. This was the first presentation before the full Commission. The project team was seeking Commission input on two aspects of the project design: alignment and bridge type.

Summary of Proposal
SDOT is proposing to design and construct a pedestrian and bicycle overpass across I-5 that will connect North Seattle College, the Licton Springs neighborhood, and communities west of the freeway with Northgate Mall, the future Sound Transit light rail station, and the eastern portion of the Northgate Urban Center. The bridge would include a spur linking directly to the mezzanine level of the light rail station.

The project team has studied several alignments and connection points and continues to evaluate three bridge types: cable stay, tied arch, and tube/truss. SDOT and Sound Transit have each committed $5 million if the project can secure the $25 million total funding required by July 31, 2015, as established in Resolution 31389. If funding goes forward as planned, construction would start and be completed by the opening of the Northgate light rail station.

Summary of Presentation

Barbara Lee introduced the project team and mentioned that they are in early design and eager for Commission feedback. Stephen Van Dyck gave the presentation dated August 7, 2014, and available on the Design Commission website. The presentation showed the project site, roughly bounded by NE 100th St, NE 103rd St, College Way N, and 5th Ave NE. Photographs showed the unpleasant pedestrian environment in the area. The proposed connection would reduce the current 1.2-mile connection from North Seattle College to the future light rail station to roughly a quarter-mile. It would also link existing and proposed bicycle infrastructure on both sides of the freeway.

Barbara Swift described the landscape and ecology of the Bartonwood Sanctuary, an open space west of I-5 and north of the college. She articulated a goal of designing a bridge type and alignment that slips into this natural context without disruption. A site plan showed existing circulation and paths overlain with the alignments under consideration for the west approach of the bridge. Ms. Swift described the project's opportunity to allow bridge users to move through the natural area.

Mr. Van Dyck described the team's criteria for determining how and where the bridge crosses I-5. One consideration that the bridge might address was the contrast in character from the bucolic setting west of the freeway to an urban condition east. Mr. Van Dyck also noted that the bridge must negotiate a roughly 45-foot drop to get down to grade on the east end.

A slide enumerated the six screening criteria for alignment and bridge type:

- Connectivity/geometry
- Safety
- Visual impact/presence
- Environmental impact
- Constructability
- Cost

A matrix showed that, of the two entry points under consideration west of I-5, the southern entry point outperformed the northern on each of the aforementioned criteria. Of the three east entry points under consideration, the southernmost performed best. These would be the primary points a cyclist would use to get; other secondary entry points may be developed as well.

On bridge type, Mr. Van Dyck remarked that the I-5 crossing in fact necessitates two 200' spans, a requirement that narrowed the potential bridge structure types. The girder bridge was eliminated because it requires more structure under the walking surface and thus height above the freeway. Photographs showed precedents for each of the three bridge typologies explored: cable stay, tied arch, and tube/truss. Mr. Van Dyck described how each would incorporate the required 10-foot-high throw barrier. He noted that the tube/truss, and to some extent the tied arch, have the capacity to be prefabricated, a key advantage given the project site over a freeway. Another matrix summarized other comparisons among bridge types. The project team stated that, because construction of the cable stay may require more involved coordination and due to WSDOT concern that it may be a visual distraction for drivers on I-5, they intend to move forward studying the tied arch and tube/truss.

Finally, Mr. Van Dyck mentioned that Sound Transit and North Seattle College are supportive of the proposed alignment. The community has shown support at recent open houses for the tube/truss span due to aesthetics, its integration of critical systems, and constructability. Mr. Van Dyck stated that, due

to uncertainty that the $15 million TIGER grant application will be successful, the project team wants Design Commission support to find other funding sources.

Summary of Discussion
The Commission greatly appreciated the rigorous analysis the project team conducted in studying the several alignments and span types for the pedestrian and bicycle bridge. The Commission endorsed the team's design direction to move forward with the 1) tied arch and 2) tube/truss alternatives. The Commission recognized that the cable stay was the lowest performing of the three bridge types according to the Level II screening that the project team conducted. The Commission generally appreciated the aesthetics of the cable stay bridge, and some Commissioners questioned its exclusion. They believed the WSDOT's assumption of driver distraction on the basis of aesthetics is tenuous and, if an actual issue, could be addressed through further development of the cable stay bridge. That said, the Commission understood that other factors also contributed to the cable stay's lower performance on the screening, such as constructability.

Given the early phase of design, the Commissioners highlighted some of the questions that warrant exploration as the design progresses: materiality, sustainability, the alignment of connection to the light rail station, and the integration of both the light rail spur and other functional elements like stairs and exits into the language and geometry of the bridge. The Commission stressed maintaining the playful and adventurous quality of the bridge typologies presented as the team resolves these issues.

Agency Comments
none

Public Comments
David Sucher, a Maple Leaf resident, was pleased to see safety on the list of screening criteria. He suggested that the project team consult with the Seattle Police Department on a formal safety analysis for the bridge.

Action
The Design Commission thanked the project team for its presentation of the Northgate Pedestrian and Bicycle Bridge. The Commission appreciated the team's thorough study of the alternative approaches and bridge spans and the rigor employed in the screening analysis. The Commission finds the three bridge types under consideration exciting, playful, and adventurous.

The team's exploration of how the bridge can integrate seamlessly into and respond appropriately to the surrounding context on both sides of I-5 was encouraging. The Commission particularly commended the thoughtful consideration given to the bridge's relationship with the Bartonwood Sanctuary open space and the future Northgate light rail station.

With a **vote of 6 to 0**, the Design Commission approved the design direction for the Northgate Pedestrian and Bicycle Bridge pre-design study and endorsed the preferred east and west approach locations and alignments with the following comments and recommendations:

1. Explore ways to integrate the west approach with the landscape and minimize barriers as you approach the bridge from local streets. It should as seamless an experience as possible to walk or ride onto the west approach from the campus and surrounding neighborhood.

2. At the east approach, consider a more direct connection to grade for pedestrians that is still integrated with the structure. Carefully study and continue to coordinate with Sound Transit on the spur's integration with the light rail station.
3. The Commission finds the tied arch typology open and elegant and appreciates its sweeping lines. Continue to work with the arch structure itself to develop the topographical narrative of multiple sweeps.
4. Given the concern that it could age quickly, exercise restraint as you design the tube/truss bridge. Its capacity for variations in openness and ability to dissolve or disappear at edges is intriguing. Maximize openness to avoid a feeling of enclosure for bridge users.
5. For all bridge types, ensure the footings are integrated into the geometry and vocabulary of the bridge.