Seattle design Commission

APPROVED
MINUTES OF THE MEETING

March 18, 2010

Convened 9:00am
Adjourned 2:00pm

Projects Reviewed

Alaskan Way Viaduct Replacement
Streetcar Network

Commissioners Present

Mary Johnston, Chair
Andrew Barash
Brendan Connolly
Graham Black
Lauren Hauck
Laurel Kunkler
Julie Parrett
Norie Sato
Donald Vehige

Staff Present

Guillermo Romano
Valerie Kinast
Tom Iurino
Jenny Hampton

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March 18 2010	**Project:**	**Alaskan Way Viaduct Replacement**
	Phase:	Design Update
	Last Reviewed:	Feb 18, 2010; Jan 21, 2010; Oct 1, 2009; Jun 18, 2009; May 21, 2009; Jan 15, 2009; Oct 16, 2008; Aug 21, 2008; Jul 3, 2008; Apr 3, 2008; Dec 20, 2007; Oct 18, 2007; Oct 4, 2007; Apr 19, 2007; Nov 2, 2006
	Presenters:	Boris Dramov, Roma Design John Savo, NBBJ
	Attendees:	AJ Yang, Chinatown ID PDA Amy Williams, NBBJ Bob Corwin, Citizen Bonnie Fisher, Roma Design Brian Steinburg, Allied Arts Casey Hildreth, SDOT Cela Fortier, GHD Christi Skinner, HDR Engineering Christina Bollo, Pedestrian Advisory Board Darby Watson, SDOT David Skinner, HDR Engineering David Yuan, NBBJ Diane Hilmo, WSDOT Emily Mannetti, Enviroissues Eric Tweit, SDOT Jeffrey Bailey, NBBJ John White, WSDOT Lloyd Douglas, Cascade NC Mike Johnson, SDOT Ruri Yampolsky, Arts and Cultural Affairs Steve Leach, WSDOT Steve Pearce, SDOT Susan Everett, WSDOT Vaughn Bell, SDOT

Time: 9:00-11:00am (000/RS0000)

ACTION

The Design Commission would like to thank the Alaskan Way Viaduct design team for their presentation. The north portal and the stream analogy along with the trees in general are viewed very positively. The Commission feels there is some strong exploration underway in terms of the stitching together of the vehicular and pedestrian environment. The point of the entrance from the north was carefully considered to create a unique experience. The traffic volumes create opportunities as well as present constraints for both portal areas. The mixed street concept is positive along Railroad Way as it presents opportunities for the pedestrian activities.

With a unanimous vote of 9 to 0, the Design Commission approved the design direction with the following comments:

- **Bring more context to the presentation to allow for more informed opinions about some of the design elements.**

- **Provide more detail about the landscape portion of the project, these are important in terms of size, species, habit and the water retention element.**
- **The Commission likes the idea of the pedestrian zone that leads to the waterfront. Think further about how the landscape will be incorporated.**
- **Perhaps explore a hybridization of the "Camo" and "Strata" design concepts of the support buildings as they will have significant ramifications on the pedestrian experience.**
- **At the north portal consider proper treatments in order to make the entrance (exit ramp) to the city more identifiable.**
- **Consider potential opportunities with the Thomas St. green street plan and incorporate it into the north portal design.**
- **The event facilities near the south portal provide unique opportunities to create significant public spaces. Careful consideration needs to be given to this context.**
- **With regards to the Rail Road Ave design, try to consolidate vehicle/truck access roads in an effort to maximize public pedestrian space.**
- **Charles St requires further exploration and dialog. Two intersections is more costly but allows for a better transition from highway to and urban experience. The redundancy of two streets has an intent that is clear and meaningful.**

Project Presentation

A brief agenda was presented to recap the design/development process thus far. The presenter explained that a draft set of guiding principles had been presented to Commissioners. He then reminded everyone that April 15th is the last Design Commission meeting before a Request For Proposal (RFP) is issued to four design-build teams. Final feedback is critical at this point, according to John. Beyond April, the surface street integration, streetscape, and urban design detailing will be a part of another contract. These projects will not be as vital to the portal design.

Boris then presented an introduction to recap the guiding principles for this project. This presentation will be broken into two parts. The bored tunnel project is unique in that it allows for mobility without typical conflicts. There has been a great deal of effort in developing alternatives to fit better within the fabric of the city. It is important to consider each and every user and how this project will be experienced. There are a lot of similarities in the two portals but the way they fit into their context and their effects are in fact different.

Boris explained the importance of the arrival experience. Steve Pearce mentioned, previously, that the South Portal has an interesting set of characteristics in that Railroad Way, 1st Ave, Occidental, and Alaskan Way each have significance to the area. A sense of arrival is a key characteristic that is being considered.

The role of the overpass is a major feature to the South Portal area. Three options were presented as approaches that were studied into detail. However, there are two approaches that are still under consideration. The Dearborn option had more work to do to create the sense of arrival. Contextually, there is a sequence of events when arriving. There is a boulevard at the approach to the overpass, warning drivers of the changing street patterns ahead. An earth form was studied as a way to give a sense of the modification to the earth at the portals. The design team wanted to try several options. Therefore, next, a larger hardscape was designed over the portal entryway to signify the notion of activity and sense of arrival. A discussion followed about the usefulness of a hardscape in the middle of this busy, automobile area. Next, the boulevard concept was extended into the design further beyond the portal entrance. Sun access was considered as well as utilities. In all of these concepts, the importance of the pedestrian space was considered.

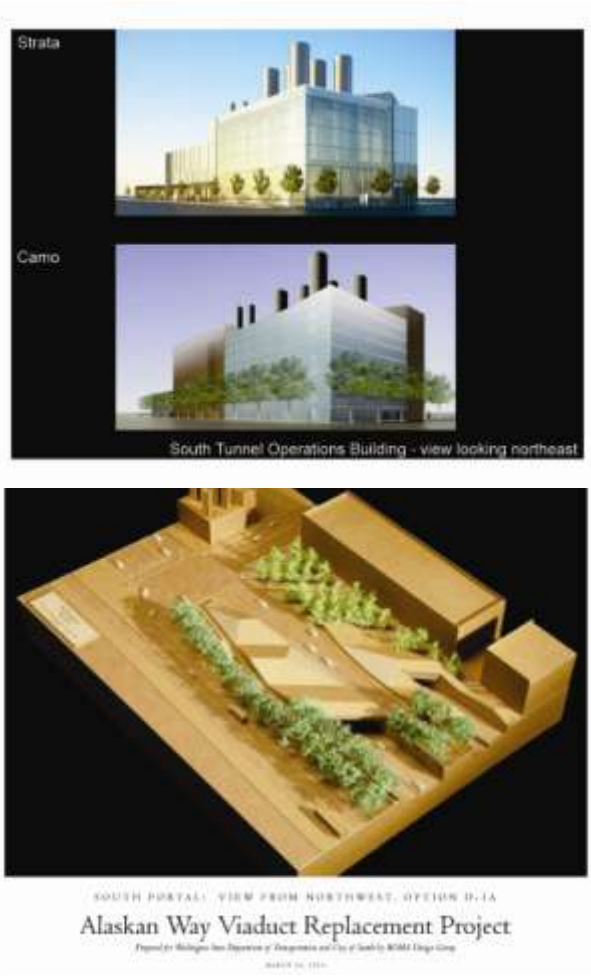
Railroad Way was then discussed. The road is an interesting pathway which serves an important dimension as an axis that connects people from the waterfront to the stadium area. It is mixed-flow, mixed-use, mixed-paving area. The goal is to slow traffic down, significantly. The design team looked for an area where a mix of uses would take place and the sun exposures were thought of as the best places for this. In all of these spaces, staying activities are necessary to make this work and the plaza areas are vital to make this happen. The notion of the

strong geometry helped to tie the project together and allowed for more open space where art can help activate it. Southwest light adds to the attractiveness of the open spaces.

Boris next presented a concept for an entry point to the plan area where a small building with a blank façade exists. The portal entrances have been straightened in the latest version and the open space over the portals have been decreased. The design team is trying to get to the guiding principles before arriving at guidelines which will lead to more details. Patterns of trees have been considered.

Boris next diagrammed the layout of Starbuck's loading docks and their relation to the pedestrian zone being designed. Vehicle patterns were explained and how they may affect traffic in the area. Starbucks' parking garage has 250 parking stalls, lending to complications for the area.

Boris introduced David Yuan to talk about the south tunnel operations building. The design team is trying to work this collaboratively to arrive at a solution. David presented the design principles that have been developed and evolved over the process. He spoke about the exhaust fans and their effect on the design as well as the pedestrian scale of the development that is important to the success of the project.



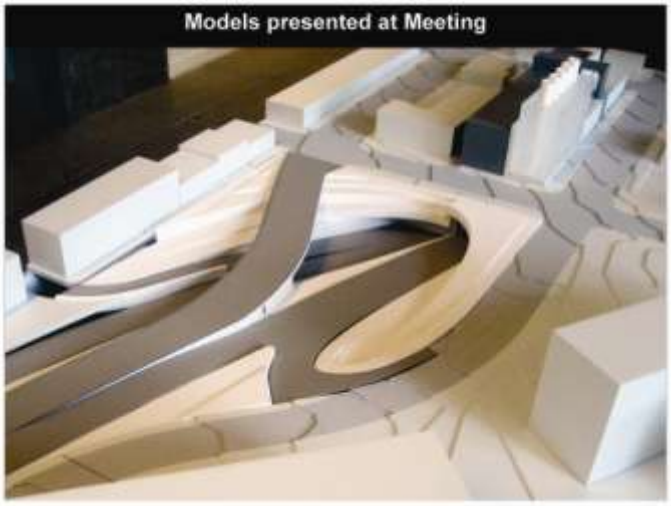
South Portal Vent Building (top) and Arrival (Bottom)

Next, he presented the South portal context along with the vernacular architecture of the area. The design approach and massings were presented. The frame approach with punched holes for windows was a design concept that was abandoned. Two design approaches David called "Camoform" and "Strata" were presented as the inspiration for the design. The camoform design is based upon taking areas of window openings that are collected into a rectilinear composition and set behind a screenwall which allows for more emphasis to be placed on the volume as a whole. The strata approach implies the zones of the earth that are revealed in a soil boring. The façade is composed of a series of horizontal banks of differing materials. Both contain glass fan boxes. However, the camoform contains horizontal striations whereas the strata contains vertical elements which stands in stark contrast to the concrete. The volume is expressed in a darker structure in the camo design which appears as a larger massing.

The strata design appeared to be the favored approach. This option allows for a vertical rhythm which creates enhanced interest in the design. In this design, horizontal paving used to contrast with the vertical lines of the structure. This pedestrian zone design is being further developed.

At the north portal, David presented the context of the area. The camo and strata concepts were then presented as the concepts explored, again. The camo contains a horizontal, dark structure hiding the use. Vertical aluminum is then use to offset against the verticalness. Again, a glass box encloses the exhaust towers. Strata, then, was designed with a textured plane at the street level with shops that open to the street. Strong attention was paid to the pedestrian experience. David then presented the north elevation and the volumetric qualities and explained the secondary scale of the pedestrian realm and the building scale and their relation. Both buildings' urban contexts were considered as well as how the north and south buildings relate to one another.

Next, John presented the north portal design. He started by presenting the challenges posed such as the arrival experience for automobiles going north to south and east to west. The goal, he stated, is to make this design successful at the street level, particularly for pedestrians and bicyclists and to Integrate the hardscape and landscape in a way that is conceptually clear. Issues associated with the design were listed as precepts. The natural experience was considered a clue to how to deal with the portals. Symmetry, context, light quality, water retention, and seasonal plantings were explored. Ultimately, there were three dominant factors. First, there is a large sinuous line along the west side of the portal. There is the building which will be seen as the apex of the portal. Lastly, there is a large rain area that is a landscaping opportunity at the portal entry.



North Portal

At the south portal, the geometric form of the little H was embraced. Second, the asymmetry of the portal entrance area was seen as a dominant factor. The third factor was the movement of the traffic moving in and out of the portal. These three were merged to arrive at a design solution at each portal.

At the north portal, a stream and the way that vegetation changes as one moves away from the stream in nature was the inspiration for the planting patterns along the portal pathways. The geometry of the contours was presented as well as a concept plan showing potential green areas and pedestrian zones as well as potential viewpoints. Similar retaining walls are being used in the north and south portals. A sketch (presented) provides good ideas of what it will be like to enter the tunnel from 6th Ave. A sketch along Harrison Ave illustrates the experiential qualities of the area to the north of the fan building.

Next, the design team rolled in a large model of the north portal area. John presented infiltration concepts designed into the green space surrounding the portal entry. Ponds are designed for stormwater detention which will provide some treatment. They are designed to hold water for 24-48 hours after a storm. The model shows the underlying form that would provide the landscape opportunities.

Meeting attendees were then allowed to view the larger scaled model which led to the question and answer portion of the meeting.

Commissioners' Questions/Comments

Could you outline pedestrian routes about the site and how people might circulate?

> Pedestrians can move along the west and south side of the portal roads but along the south, they cannot go north of the street that lies at the north of Harrison. There is a truck dock at the northeast corner of Harrison and Aurora.

Can you remind us of what's in the building to the east, at the corner?

> Hostess has a building which needs truck access from the corner. There is a problem presented due to truck access and a truck's turning radii.

How fast will traffic be moving along Aurora in that area?

> The tunnel is 50mph, the ramps are 25mph, and the city streets are 30mph.

I want to go into the buildings and comment. I really think this scheme is so appealing in so many ways. There are so many curves and beautiful trees. The experience of approaching a roadway is appealing in this instance. The loop, it might be important to consider what will go there. The strata design seems to be the desired approach.

Perhaps a hybrid of the strata and camo approach might be needed at the north portal due to the variety of architecture styles in the area. A volumetric approach is appealing.

I think the landscape design is great. I am curious about the plant material restrictions noted. It is always more interesting to have big trees at this portal. These add to the interest of major interchanges.

> We had a meeting with landscape architects and they didn't see a problem with these concepts. This concept is aimed at what the site will become. We have tested the sight distance. Once you get north of here you get into a 40 mph zone. There will be barriers separating traffic.

I think there's strong exploration and we appreciate it. The renderings have helped to envision this. I want to reinforce our preference for the strata. There's an inverse pedestrian experience. It seems like there needs to be more intentional exploration around the edges. What kind of textural quality does this have with the light and dark? The terracing and such is good but the strong edges are going to confine movement. There's a lot of promise but you can tie the DNA together. At the north, there is a building and a landscape; maybe the two can be blended.

At the north portal, the landscape is clearly a highway vocabulary that was chosen. When considering the circulation, there is a lack of transition between the vehicular areas and the pedestrian areas. I would also be specific about the types of trees and the habitat. Be as specific as you are with building materials. This doesn't need to happen today but we want to specify as well as can be done.

> It will be a part of the design-build contract.

In terms of the water retention, is that for the zero lot line building as well as what's going on in the street right of way or is that a requirement just for the highway portion?

> We will have to get back to you. It does include the surface street system. The area is smaller than it appears in the sketches. They're running calculations on this today. We'd like to integrate all this. Everyone has been working together to create a holistic approach.

One area that struck me was the view south. The way the terraces and the tunnel are presented, there is a strong emphasis on the tunnel entrance, and the entrance to the city seems to take a back seat. It seems to be that the entrance to the city seems to be hidden. There seems to be an opportunity to treat the building differently to provide more of a view. In the south, it was said that there were opportunities with the H Bridge that enhances the approach, perhaps this type of treatment could be made at the north portal.

> I really think the idea of the pedestrian edge was right on. We think the terraces are very important. The terracing will be more substantial than is presented in the sketch which will enhance that affect. We do need to draw it and study it further. We need to raise the subordinance. The elements of the north tunnel are not the same as the south tunnel but we do need to further develop that.

The green street plan along Thomas St is an important opportunity. Perhaps having two strategies to consider such as a setback or some element to provide space. In order to activate it, maybe the building can be activated by an activity which can be transparent for pedestrians.

> We have been aware of the green street. We will be limited to what we can do on that side of the building for a variety of reasons. We can potentially get transparency but there might not be an activity to do that. Both design approaches contain glass facades at street level. A setback would be difficult. It's a real challenge. City guidelines do not specify any requirements.
>
> We need to recognize that Thomas will play a circulation role in the city as it's a natural transition from Broad St to Westlake and Fairview. This street is going to play a traffic role. We are balancing these elements and a park is not likely.

I think that when we think about what's happening in that area, there will be some more pedestrians than we see today. I think the concrete and its permanence; I would like to see materials that are more engaging. The appeal with the camo is the ability to play with the transparency and depth and layers and enhances variety. I wonder if it can inform the activity across the street. There are some tremendous view opportuntities there at the street, maybe there is a relationship that can happen at the oval and a feature can take place which connects what's below with what's above. That whole fencing thing will be tricky as a big fence does not seem appropriate.

> We felt that getting a strong left and right and a strong form would help combat all the layers.

I want to disagree with the rest of the Design Commissioners. The volumes and the form in the camo scheme are a much stronger move in the context of the interchange. A building with such stark monumentally has an ability to foil with the landscape design and it can be an interesting thing to be discovered at the pedestrian level. Big vote for camo.

It would be helpful to have a larger context when we consider some of these design issues. You begin to see a hierarchy of the pedestrian experience when a larger context is shown.

I was trying to understand the speed on the offramps. What is the traffic load expected?

> The volume is in the realm of 35,000 vehicles a day. Alaskan Way in the midtown area is about 25,000 vehicles per day.

Is there any professional advice to how deal with Charles St.?

> We've narrowed the ramps down and they're coming into a tree boulevard in which we send a message that you are entering the city. I don't think that slowing them down will be issue. The one thing about this facility is you'll be able to enter the stadium district from the south which can't be done today. One of the things we're exploring, is there something we can do to Charles that can enhance the sense of arrival? There is still the idea of splitting the load onto two streets and this has tradeoffs with the one intersection option. We can do things that tells us, even without Charles, you feel like you've entered another block. We have that tailtrack. The pedestrians and bicyclists have been separated to go around the area. You will not be able to cross over to the water.
>
> I think we've started to identify the components and how they come together. I had a period of time where I couldn't imagine being able to overcome those issues.

I love the idea of the shared street. The one-way would be more efficient at getting people out from Starbucks. You are recognizing that the trucks and industrial nature of the area contribute to the people place within this context. The south portal contributes differently than the north.

> From an urban designer standpoint, I think we have to celebrate the working part of the economy as much as the consumer part. Here they are facing the pedestrian space. This one contributes in a different way to the pedestrian environment.

I agree with the comment about the shared street. Prioritize and consolidate the amount of space dedicated to the pedestrian and vehicle. The offramps are potentially intersecting with open plazas which may deter social activity. The plowing of the earth and revealing what is occurring below the surface is a strong gesture. The south building is more clustered and has less diagrammatic clarity than the north. My comfort level of the strata relies on the sense of the concrete face allowing a viable tool for the building to meet the ground. There is a lot of topography at both sites that need to be addressed. That strategy is good but the pedestrian experience around the building is important.

To use the manmade and natural processes in the language of the portal design is strong and maybe a hybrid scheme would be appropriate.

> I can make this very crisp but it's important to not make this look like a buried elephant. It takes a certain level of quality to make it work and I need your help.

You were talking about a green roof and there is validity in it but I'm worried about whether it would have enough thrust and interest at that scale. I don't know what has to go into the initial design-build. I don't know if it's something that needs to be determined by April 15th. Maybe the lid that happens can accommodate either condition and it's a discussion that can continue. I think that adjacent to the development site, we should allow for a wider sidewalk to allow for the greatest use. We want it to be occupiable space. This location within the public realm is important but will not be the dominant root. Money and attention should go toward the other areas. It needs to be vibrant and good. It does have significance in the longer term but it won't be the key public space. We need to be careful along Railroad Way and there are lots of things going on. If we're going to create a shared space we need a strategy about what that will really be in terms of curbs, paving, bollards, etc.

I'm generally in support of everything I've heard. Is there a dedicated user that can be sought out to activate it? Can we activate it in a specific way?

This site does have exposure. It is not bad space and has lots of possibilities. We can expect this area to be congested during events. There will be significant surges that we need to consider.

The place above the portal needs to be further considered in terms of whether it's for people or not.

If that space can be water and industrial, it could be quite dynamic. I would like to see the character of that area much different from Railroad Way.

How should this decision be handled? Maybe it should be handled later? Perhaps leave it flexible.

Having a set of attitudes toward it now might help to move this along. The attitude toward priority and potential is important.

There may be an opportunity to create more of a sense of the city depending on where the portal entrance occurs.

The idea of the vehicle noise may impinge on the value of the pedestrian space that fronts this offramp.

How much are we spending on this tunnel and shouldn't we be buying as much city as possible from this?

Can we obtain a copy of the design guiding principles?