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Commissioners Present

Shannon Loew, Chair
Ellen Sollod, Vice Chair
Brodie Bain (excused from 11:00 - 2:00 pm)
Lee Copeland
Thaddeus Egging
Rachel Gleeson
Theo Lim
Martin Regge
John Savo
Ross Tilghman

Commissioners Excused

Project Description

The University of Washington (UW) is requesting a new term permit ordinance for the following five (5) pedestrian overpasses (skybridges) that cross City rights-of-way (ROW):

- Schmitz/15th Ave pedestrian bridge - located north of the 15th Ave and NE Campus Parkway intersection
- Hitchcock pedestrian bridge - Located near the Hitchcock Building along NE Pacific St
- T-Wing pedestrian bridge - Located near the Magnuson Health Sciences Center along NE Pacific St
- Wahkiakum pedestrian bridge - Located north of the UW track facilities along Montlake Boulevard NE
- Whatcom pedestrian bridge - Located north of the UW sports fields along Montlake Boulevard NE

The UW main campus is generally bounded by 15th Avenue NE to the west, Campus Parkway/NE Pacific to the South, Montlake Blvd to the east and NE 45th Street to the north. Each of the five bridges provide pedestrian connections between UW properties off the main campus, or the adjacent ROW, to the main campus. Four of the five pedestrian bridges - 15th Ave, Hitchcock, T-Wing, Wahkiakum, and Whatcom – also provide direct access to the Burke-Gilman Trail.

As required by Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) Section 15.64, the Seattle Design Commission (SDC) makes recommendations on the re-authorization of an existing skybridge to SDOT and the City Council, including recommendations on a public benefit package to offset the impacts on the ROW as a result of the skybridges.

Meeting Summary

This was the SDC's first review of the University of Washington's (UW) proposal to retain five pedestrian bridges. Following the presentation, the SDC voted, 9-1, to approve one 10-year permit renewal for all five pedestrian bridges as well as the public benefit package, with several recommendations.

Recusals and Disclosures

Brodie Bain, Thaddeus Egging, and Rachel Gleeson disclosed that they are involved with the University of Washington Campus Master Plan.

January 21, 2016

2:00 - 4:30 pm

Type

Skybridge

Phase

Ordinance renewal

Previous Reviews

None

Project Team Present

Sally Clark

University of Washington

Kristine Kenney

University of Washington

Attendees

Beverly Barnett

SDOT

Abbey DeWeese

HCMP

Amy Gray

SDOT

Josh Kavanagh

University of Washington

Anna Stock

University of Washington

January 21, 2016

Summary of Presentation

The proposal was presented by Sally Clark, UW Director of Regional & Community Relations, and Kristine Kenney, UW Director of Campus Design & Planning. Ms. Kenney provided a brief overview of the connections between the University and surrounding community. Ms. Clark then provided an overview of the project background as well as site context for the following five skybridges (see *figure 1*):

- Schmitz/15th Ave
- Hitchcock
- T-Wing
- Wahkiakum
- Whatcom

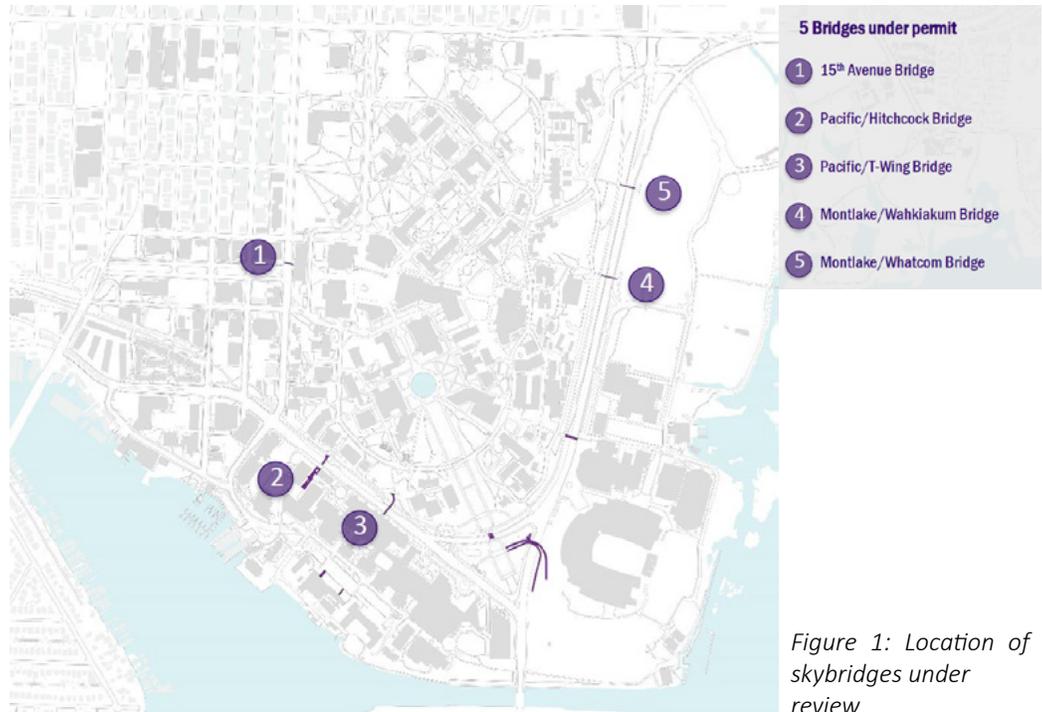


Figure 1: Location of skybridges under review

Each skybridge is open to the public and is used primarily for pedestrian and bicycle circulation to and from the main campus. Each skybridge crosses City ROW that is either not connected to the main campus due to grade changes or, in the case of 15th/Schmitz, provide access due to buildings that impede at grade crossings.

The 15th Ave. pedestrian bridge is located north of the 15th Ave. and NE Campus Parkway intersection. The pedestrian bridge is connected to Schmitz Hall to the west of 15th Ave. and the Henry Art Gallery to the east. The bridge provides an important main campus connection for UW's West Campus, which includes several campus residence halls and public transit stations. The bridge is affixed to Schmitz Hall's open plaza and the Henry Art Gallery public plaza. Although the skybridge serves as an important connector, it is not currently ADA accessible. The Henry Art Gallery and its addition block access from Campus Parkway.

The Hitchcock skybridge spans NE Pacific St between the Health Sciences Center and Burke-Gilman Trail. The skybridge is ADA accessible and is integrated into the structure of Hitchcock Hall, whose main entrance is located above street level adjacent to the bridge. An at grade signalized pedestrian crossing along NE Pacific is adjacent to Hitchcock and is underneath the skybridge.

The T-wing skybridge spans NE Pacific St. between the Magnuson Health Sciences Center and Garfield Lane. The bridge does not directly connect with the Burke-Gilman

Trail and is not ADA accessible. Similar to the Hitchcock bridge, the T-wing bridge is integrated into the structure of Magnuson Health Sciences Center. The main entrance into the facility is located adjacent to the skybridge. The UW has no plans for future street-level development along NE Pacific St.

The Wahkiakum and Whatcom skybridges are located north of the UW athletic facilities along Montlake Blvd. Both bridges connect the eastern portion of the main campus and the Burke –Gilman trail to parking facilities, intramural fields and natural areas east of Montlake. Neither pedestrian bridge is ADA accessible.

Without the skybridges, UW contends that connectivity between main campus and the areas served by the skybridges would be significantly reduced. The grade changes, building configurations and built environment cause significant barriers to at grade connections. UW estimates that over 28,000 pedestrian trips per day would be affected and displaced by removal of these skybridges.



Figure 2: Proposed improvements to Burke-Gilman Trail



Figure 3: Proposed mixing zones and pathways

UW had proposed a public benefit package that includes improvements to a 1.8 mile segment of the Burke-Gilman Trail (see figure 2) located between Pacific St and the Rainier Vista. Improvements to the trail include widening the trail width from 14 feet to 21 feet and separating pedestrian and bicycle (see figure 3) uses as well as providing bicycle shelters and new trail furnishings. A new stairwell will be added on the northeast side of the Hitchcock pedestrian bridge in order to create a direct connection between the Burke-Gilman Trail and transit stops along NE Pacific Ave (see figure 4.)

Agency Comments

Amy Gray, of SDOT, stated that the Skybridge Review Committee (SRC) had reviewed the proposal and made recommendation to approve the



Figure 4: Proposed stairwell along NE Pacific Ave

bridges. Ms. Gray said the SRC is concerned with long-term ADA accessibility with the 15th Ave Skybridge. She feels that, as part of the MIMP (Major Institutional Master Plan) process, UW should address accessibility to all bridges, regardless of location. Ms. Gray also mentioned that SRC would like to see a plan to open the wall up from the Henry Art Building to create an entrance into the main campus.

Beverly Barnett, of SDOT, mentioned that the skybridge review process is somewhat different from reviewing street and alley vacation petitions. Ms. Barnett explained that SRC provides a more formal recommendation to the SDC. She then stated that the SRC wanted to understand which bridges are actually very critical for circulation around UW's campus and which bridges only critical because they exist. Ms. Barnett mentioned that, because UW is in the very early stages of updating their MIMP, it is appropriate to evaluate these specific connection locations. Ms. Barnett wants UW to understand if the specified bridges are critical for current and future connectivity. Ms. Barnett mentioned that SDOT's goal is to see fewer skybridges in the future. She also mentioned that one solution for creating greater accessibility while reducing the overall number of skybridges is to consolidate several bridges into one accessible bridge.

Public Comments

None

Summary of Discussion

The Commission recognized the importance of each skybridge in terms of connectivity throughout the University of Washington's campus. Commissioners agreed it would be problematic and shortsighted to deny the permit renewal request. Instead, The SDC focused on providing recommendations to the project team for improving the design, functionality, and accessibility of each skybridge.

The Commission organized its discussion by grouping pedestrian bridges based on location:

- 15th Ave pedestrian bridge
- Hitchcock & T-Wing pedestrian bridges
- Wahkiakum & Whatcom pedestrian bridges

15th Ave pedestrian bridge

The SDC agreed the current location of the 15th Ave. skybridge is problematic as it relates to pedestrian circulation. As with other bridges located on campus, the 15th Ave. skybridge is integrated into the functionality of Schmitz Hall and The Henry Art Gallery Plaza. Commissioners encouraged the project team to reevaluate the current location and alignment of the 15th Ave. skybridge in a way that will improve the pedestrian experience while transitioning from an urban street into campus.

Hitchcock & T-Wing pedestrian bridges

In recognizing that both bridges are integrated into the design and functionality of UW facilities along NE Pacific St, the SDC recommended the project team enhance the transparency, accessibility, and connectivity along both corridors. Commissioners agree accessibility should move beyond the immediate edge of each skybridge, extending from the health science facilities, throughout campus, and to the waterfront. The SDC also recommended the project team address design and aesthetic issues of each skybridge during the MIMP update process.

Wahkiakum & Whatcom pedestrian bridges

The Commission agreed the Wahkiakum and Whatcom bridges serve as an important connection between the main campus, Burke-Gilman Trail, and UW facilities located east of Montlake Blvd. Commissioners encouraged the project team to begin understanding how to create an accessible connection from the eastside of Montlake Blvd, which is currently undeveloped, to the main campus located to the west. Because land is largely undeveloped east of Montlake Blvd. the Commission encouraged the project team to first think about connectivity to the main campus, through the potential construction of a land bridge, rather than allowing it to become an afterthought once development has already occurred.

Action

The SDC would like to thank the University of Washington's project team for their proposal to retain five skybridges. The commission appreciated the level of detail presented for each skybridge, given the ambitious undertaking to present information about five skybridges simultaneously. The SDC voted, 9-1, to recommend council approve one 10-year permit renewal for all five pedestrian bridges, as well as the approval of the public benefit package proposal.

The one 10-year permit approval was in support of recommendations made by the City's Skybridge Review Committee, in order to time re-approval of the skybridges concurrent with Council approval of UW's new Major Institution Master Plan.

As part of the approval, the SDC provided the following recommendations for the project team to consider while initiating the MIMP process:

1. Evaluate the alignment and location of each bridge to best serve accessibility and connectivity throughout the surrounding campus and urban areas
2. Consider the location of Burke-Gilman Trail crossings with respect to the location of a potential land bridge across Montlake Blvd
3. Encourage street level porosity and an increased public pedestrian environment, as it relates to the character of the campus landscape
4. Ensure new bridge construction properly addresses the quality and character of the public environment through the establishment of a design manual or guidelines

The following are comments from those commissioners that voted against the project:

Theo Lim - Although I do not disagree with the action taken by The Commission regarding the permit approval, I feel, from an urban design perspective, there are significant accessibility and equity issues that must be addressed prior to approval.