



# What We Heard

## West Seattle Bridge Program: Community and Business Outreach Summary

Spring/Summer 2021



**Seattle**  
Department of  
Transportation

# Our Approach

The West Seattle High-Rise Bridge is the City's most used bridge, typically carrying an average of 84,000 vehicles and 19,000 transit riders per day and providing a vital connection across the Duwamish River. The closure of the bridge has caused disruptions to traffic and increased demands on communities in the area.

Between February and April 2021, the Seattle Department of Transportation, Department of Neighborhoods, ECOSS, and The Vida Agency conducted 10 focus groups and over 60 one-on-one conversations with West Seattle, Duwamish Valley, and Georgetown residents and businesses who have been impacted by the closure of the West Seattle High-Rise Bridge. We specifically sought to hear from businesses and community members who have been traditionally underserved as well as essential workers and individuals receiving lifesaving medical treatment.

These discussions have been synthesized below into key takeaways and insights, and our planned next steps.

## Wayfinding Icons

To help navigate this document, look for these icons:



**Key Takeaways**



**Next Steps**

Click below to read this report in the following languages:

[Chinese](#)

[Khmer](#)

[Korean](#)

[Oromo](#)

[Spanish](#)

[Somali](#)

[Vietnamese](#)

## Businesses Engaged:

- Small business owners
- Black, indigenous, or person of color owned and operated businesses
- Ride-hail drivers
- Restaurants
- Landscapers
- Plumbers
- Assisted living centers
- Janitors
- Nail and hair salons
- Harbor Island-based employees
- Food access and social service providers

## Languages Outreach was Conducted in:

Chinese (Cantonese & Mandarin dialects)  
Khmer  
Korean  
Oromo  
Spanish  
Somali  
Vietnamese



# What We Heard

## 1. Community members say West Seattle feels like an island

Many residents shared that they feel isolated and disconnected from family, community, and other parts of the city due to extended traffic delays and long commutes along detours compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. They noted the human impact of West Seattle bridge closures:

- Increased traffic, reckless driving, environmental and health impacts in neighborhoods along detour routes.
- Barriers to getting to work, services, doctor's appointments, and childcare predictably or on time; increased expense of gas and vehicle wear and tear.
- Negative career impact due to recurring late arrivals, particularly for parents who may also need to leave early from work in order to arrive before childcare facilities close.
- More time spent in traffic means less time for family, placemaking, sleep, wellbeing.
- Some wait longer to receive medical care due to the added distance and expense of reaching providers across the Duwamish River.

*"The drivers have become more aggressive, they don't respect cyclists much, or pedestrians. Unfortunately, I've seen mothers crossing the street with kids and the drivers are really aggressive... It seems really dangerous to me."*

- Spanish Focus Group Participant

*"My family is very hesitant to come to West Seattle. The burden to see family, keep the connection, is on us. It has significantly impacted ability to see family members and has challenged those relationships."*

- Delridge Resident

## What we are doing about it

- Working fast to get the high bridge fixed to restore traffic in mid-2022.
- Addressing safety concerns for people walking and biking through the Home Zone program and sidewalk beveling.
- Creating programs and resources to help people get across the Duwamish River through a variety of modes.
- Evaluated signage needs and gaps for detour and ferry.
- Launched the Flip Your Trip West Seattle campaign to encourage transit usage.

## How Has Your Business Been Impacted?

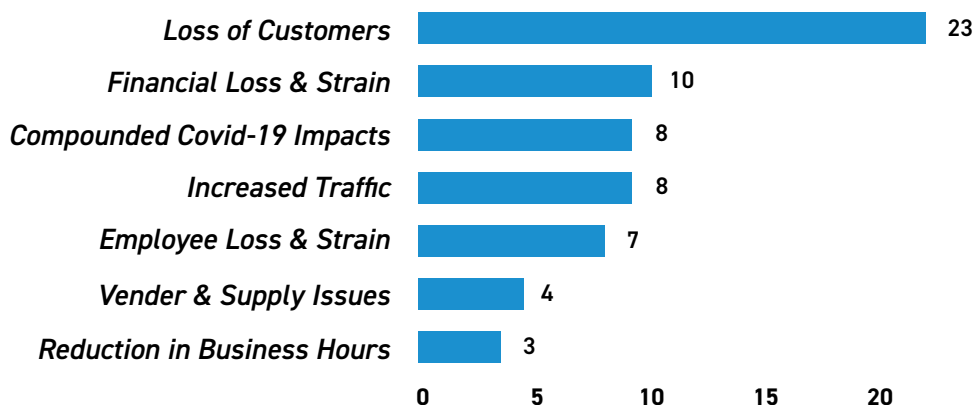


Figure 1: Qualitative Responses during one-on-one business interviews

## 2. Businesses report loss of customers and increased expense of doing business

*Businesses reported a negative impact on revenue and customer access, citing the compounding circumstances of the bridge closure, construction along detour routes, and a pandemic striking at the same time.*

- Supply runs are the primary driver of business traffic across the Duwamish River, and many businesses note that they are unable to purchase what they need from West Seattle stores.
- For many restaurants, lack of access to the Low Bridge while picking up perishable goods became an added expense and source of stress, particularly for those without refrigerated vehicles to store perishable products during long detour delays.

*"I have vendors [who have] refused to come to West Seattle to deliver."*

*- West Seattle Deli Mart/Grocer Owner*

*"We've definitely lost income from the bridge closure and a lot of our customers who used to come from Sodo, or Georgetown can't come anymore. We lost around 30-40 percent of our customers from both the pandemic and then even more [from the bridge closure]."*

*- West Seattle Restaurant Owner*

### » What we are doing about it

- Restaurants and retail businesses have now been provided conditional access to the West Seattle Low Bridge.

## 3. Community supports expanding access to the Spokane St. Swing Bridge ("low bridge"), particularly for emergency medical staff & patients

*Respondents across demographics expressed interest in expanding access to the low bridge to help improve travel times across the Duwamish River and to reduce traffic on the detour routes.*

- Many expressed confusion about access to the low bridge, and suggested improvements to signage and communications.
- Most expressed support for medical and emergency trips (whether for health, family, or financial emergencies) and medical employee access.
- Several suggested a fast-track mitigation process for low bridge tickets received during a medical emergency.

*"Lower bridge restriction has created high traffic congestion, limited mobility, more extended time in traffic, and unnecessary penalties and warnings."*

*- Sikko Mando Relief Association  
Focus Group Participant*

### » What we are doing about it

- We've expanded temporary access to the low bridge for medical workers and patients, restaurants, and businesses. People must meet eligibility requirements, apply, provide a license plate, and be approved by SDOT before using the low bridge. There is no cost to apply for access.

**Community members and businesses can [click here to apply for Low Bridge access.](#)**



## 4. Residents call for increased transparency and low-tech communication

Many community and business participants want increased communications about the West Seattle Bridge Program and efforts to reconnect West Seattle.

**Technological barriers:** Community members without access or knowledge of computers request more low-tech and printed materials to keep them in the loop. They recommend:

- Physical flyers with visual updates and opportunities for input, posted and distributed throughout the West Seattle community.
- Direct mail updates to residents.

**Language barriers:** Non-English speakers and linguistically isolated residents say text-heavy content is hard to digest; they're also worried about what to do in a community-wide emergency (natural disaster) due to lack of knowledge about in-language resources or guidance. To address this, they recommend:

- Phone and text updates through Community Liaisons to linguistically or socially isolated residents.
- Use of photos and visuals within updates to provide comprehension across languages.

**Transparency barriers:** Numerous respondents voiced concern that they were asked to provide input, but that it was unclear how or whether their input would influence decisions. To address this, they recommend:

- Regular updates to local and in-language media (broadcast and digital).
- Continued public engagement events (in person, virtual, short), one-on-one interviews, and focus groups.

*"The problem here is a language barrier and education barrier. There are many people that don't know how to go to the website. How do you make it available for those people?"*

- High Point Resident

*"I feel forgotten about in West Seattle. It feels like people are telling us to 'figure it out' and have left us to our own devices."*

- Delridge Resident

### » What we are doing about it

- Launched SDOT's multi-language voicemail line.
- Improving overall awareness of project status and activities by providing more explanation about what is being done and why.
- Continuing to host virtual public open houses with language interpreters.
- Developing more photos and visuals to convey the changes that are happening.
- Increasing printed outreach (flyers, posters, direct mail).



Community members can scan or [click here for the Alert Seattle emergency alert system.](#)

## 5. Improved mobility and safety measures could help reconnect West Seattle to the broader Seattle community

Overall, participants felt that the most urgent need is to reduce traffic along detour routes, which they anticipate will become more congested as COVID-19 restrictions lift and in-person work and school resume.

- Residents are attempting to travel less, but leave West Seattle for work, affordable or culturally relevant groceries, medical appointments, assisting family members, banking, volunteering, childcare, religious services, and visiting friends and family.
- Many residents who took the bus or carpooled prior to the pandemic have now transitioned to single occupancy vehicles, and several noted that they would not ride in a vanpool with strangers during a pandemic.
- Knowledge of official carpooling was limited, however several participants voiced interest in carpooling with neighbors or coworkers if there were incentives such as faster travel, financial savings, and access to the low bridge.
- Many are walking more within West Seattle, however they say that increased traffic, reckless driving, and construction pose safety concerns for pedestrians.

- Numerous respondents noted barriers to the use of bikes or scooters, including construction along roadways, risk of injury, cost, time, and inconvenience for routine errands. For families in particular, these modes were not considered relevant.
- Some shared that they find trip planning tools and websites confusing or difficult to use, particularly for trips that include multiple modes.

*“I used to take the bus to work, but because of COVID I stopped. Because of COVID, I drive to and from work. But I don’t want to spend two and a half hours getting to and from work.”*

- High Point Resident

*“We can’t carry all the supplies on the bus and scooters or bikes. We need our cars because of gentrification. We live far from each other. There is no way around that unless you are going to fix the housing for us.”*

- Indigenous Tribal Member & Essential Worker

### » What we are doing about it

- Implemented over 200 project improvements along detour routes, including many that provide safe crossings for pedestrians.

For regular updates about the West Seattle Bridge Program, subscribe to our newsletter. Have questions or concerns you’d like to share? Contact (206) 400-7511 or [WestSeattleBridge@seattle.gov](mailto:WestSeattleBridge@seattle.gov)



#### Cover Page Image Descriptions & Credits

Top Image: RapidRide Transit in West Seattle; The Vida Agency

Bottom Left: West Seattle roadway with multi-modal transit; SDOT Flickr

Bottom Right: Georgetown community members discussing infrastructure; SDOT Flickr