

West Seattle Low Bridge photo enforcement starts on January 11, 2021 to prioritize emergency vehicles, transit, and freight

New enforcement system will mail owners of unauthorized vehicles a \$75 citation for every illegal trip

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With the West Seattle High-Rise Bridge closed for public safety, the [West Seattle Low Bridge](#) (also called the Spokane St Bridge) has become an extremely important path for emergency vehicles, buses, and heavy freight to get in and out of West Seattle. To keep this critical route clear for these essential trips, other vehicles may not drive on the Low Bridge between 5 a.m. to 9 p.m. Beginning on January 11, 2021, the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) will turn on an automated photo enforcement system which may issue \$75 citations to the owners of unauthorized vehicles recorded crossing the Low Bridge in either direction.

The rules for which vehicles may use the Low Bridge are not changing:

- The only vehicles authorized to use the Low Bridge from 5 a.m. to 9 p.m. are emergency vehicles, buses, employer shuttles, vanpools, freight, and certain pre-authorized vehicles. [See the Low Bridge webpage for a complete list.](#)
- People riding a bike, scooter, bus, or walking may continue using the Low Bridge any time.
- All other vehicles (including personal cars, motorcycles, taxis, and ride-hailing app vehicles like Uber and Lyft) may not use the Low Bridge from 5 a.m. to 9 p.m. and will be sent a \$75 citation.
- Everyone may drive on the Low Bridge overnight from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. No citations will be issued during these times.

Access restrictions on the Low Bridge are necessary to keep a clear path for authorized essential vehicles, and especially for emergency vehicles to reach hospitals. The Low Bridge is only one lane in each direction and does not have room to carry all the cars that used to travel on the seven lane High-Rise Bridge. If there were no restrictions, it would create bumper-to-bumper traffic congestion and long back-ups.

Alternate routes for people who cannot drive on the Low Bridge include the 1st Ave S Bridge or South Park Bridge. SDOT is continuing to help people traveling to and from West Seattle. Through our [Reconnect West Seattle framework](#), we are working with nearby communities to prioritize projects that will reduce the impact of increased detour traffic; prioritizing transit connections to and from West Seattle; building new bicycle projects; and establishing and improving detour routes. People can also find help exploring their commute options on the [West Seattle and Duwamish Valley Travel Options portal](#).

The photo enforcement system will work like traffic cameras in other parts of Seattle which issue tickets for red light violations or speeding in school safety zones. The system will take pictures of license plates when they cross the Low Bridge. This will be compared to a list of authorized license plate numbers, and if the vehicle was not authorized to travel on the low bridge then a \$75 citation may be mailed to the vehicle owner at the address on the vehicle registration.

The photo enforcement system has many benefits and efficiencies. This will mean fewer police officers on-site and in-person traffic stops, so that police can focus on other public safety needs. It also makes enforcement more uniform and objective, eliminating the visual guesswork about who is or is not authorized to use the Low Bridge. Most importantly, the system will help deter cheaters from using the bridge so that emergency vehicles, freight, and transit can travel safely and efficiently.

To protect privacy, the cameras will only record vehicle license plates and not the people inside the car. The photos are only intended to be used for enforcing the restrictions on the Low Bridge, and are not intended for other law enforcement action.

Emergency vehicles, transit, and freight are automatically approved to use the Low Bridge and will not receive a citation. A very limited number of maritime, government, and West Seattle business vehicles performing nearby urgent work functions have been pre-approved to use the bridge. SDOT has worked with these organizations to input their license plates into the system. If you believe you are eligible for pre-authorized use based on the description above, please email westseattlebridge@seattle.gov or call 206-400-7511.

SDOT will be monitoring Low Bridge traffic volumes in early 2021 after the new enforcement system is turned on. If traffic data shows us that there is room to expand access, we will work with the West Seattle Bridge Community Task Force to recommend a balanced approach for Low Bridge access.

West Seattle Low Bridge photo enforcement FAQs

How long should it take to receive the notice of infraction?

The registered owner of an unauthorized vehicle will receive a notice of infraction in the mail within 14 days. Citations can be issued for both directions of travel on the bridge. If the violation took place while driving a rental car, the timeframe will be longer. The rental car company has the opportunity to identify the vehicle operator and forward the information so a notice of infraction can be mailed to the renter of the vehicle.

The Seattle Municipal Court provides an option for community service in lieu of paying the fee and zero-interest payment plans to reduce financial hardship to qualifying individuals. If you receive a notice of infraction, you have 18 days to pay it.

How do I pay a citation?

If you receive a notice of infraction, you have 18 days to pay it. You have three payment options:

1. Send a check or money order in U.S. funds, payable to Seattle Municipal Court, for the amount due shown on the front, on or before the due date. Please include the enclosed coupon with your payment. Write your Notice # and your license plate # on your check or money order. PLEASE DO NOT MAIL CASH.
2. Pay through the internet, on or before the due date at www.seattle.gov/courts/ticketinformation.htm or through our automated payment system accessible from any touch-tone telephone at (206) 233-7000.
3. Pay in person, on or before the due date, Monday through Friday, 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM at the Court Payment Office on the 1st floor of the Seattle Municipal Court Building, 600 Fifth Avenue, Seattle, WA. A payment box is located in the front of the Seattle Municipal Court Building for after-hours convenience.

How do I contest a citation?

Use the coupon enclosed with your citation to request a mitigation hearing or contested hearing. To submit a declaration of non-responsibility, follow the instructions on the citation.

- A HEARING TO EXPLAIN THE CIRCUMSTANCES: By requesting a mitigation hearing, you will be deemed to have committed the infraction. You may not subpoena witnesses for this hearing. You would request a mitigation hearing if you agree you committed the infraction but believe the circumstances may be such that the court could reduce or waive the penalty.
- A HEARING TO CONTEST THE INFRACTION: At a contested hearing the City has the burden of proving by a preponderance of the evidence that the infraction was committed. You may subpoena witnesses including the officer who issued this Notice of Infraction. If you request a contested hearing the Court will schedule a pre-hearing conference, which you may waive by using the form attached to the Notice of Hearing that the Court will send you.
- SUBMIT A DECLARATION OF NON-RESPONSIBILITY: If your vehicle was stolen, sold by you prior to the date of the violation, or was otherwise not in your care, custody or control at the time of the violation, you may [submit a sworn statement](#) to that effect to the Court to rebut the presumption, established in SMC 11.31.090, that you were driving the vehicle at the time of the violation

Can I see the evidence that I illegally crossed the Low Bridge?

You may view the photographic images and video online at www.ViolationInfo.com. You must use the Notice # and PIN printed on the front of the notice to login.

Persons without access to a computer can visit any [Seattle Public Library branch](#) or at the Municipal Court (600 Fifth Avenue) to view photographic and video evidence.

What happens to my license or insurance if I pay the citation or I am found guilty in court?

A photo enforced violation is treated like a parking infraction. There are no issues with your license, no points assessed, and no impact to your insurance.

I am concerned about my privacy. What happens after the camera takes a photo of my car? Does anyone review the footage?

To protect privacy, the cameras will only record vehicle license plates and not the people inside the car. The photos are only intended to be used for enforcing the restrictions on the Low Bridge, and are not intended for other law enforcement action.

The system will then cross-reference those license plate numbers with a database of authorized users to identify whether a vehicle is allowed to use the Low Bridge at that time. Seattle Police Department officers will review the images of every potential violation before issuing a notice of infraction. Unauthorized vehicles are subject to a \$75 citation for every trip across the Low Bridge.