

May 31, 2004
Comments regarding the Viaduct replacement options
From a Seattle Citizen, P O Box 17023, Seattle WA 98127

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AWWSP Team Office

I-013-001

I am sending in my comments as a matter of conscience. I don't think they'll make any difference to anyone, since minds have clearly already been made up, and there has been extreme lobbying by downtown groups, Allied Arts and others. But I do need to express my thoughts.

I attended two of the open houses. I found that the engineers who were on hand were informative and not biased. The information they presented was excellent.

I-013-002

However, the **bias** in the overall direction was clear at the open houses.

Slide Show

For example, the open houses featured an elaborate propaganda piece: the well-researched and detailed **slide show** that showed how the views from street level would improve if there were no aerial structure. Where **was the comparable slide show** that showed the views from a new aerial structure?

Here is how the monorail staff addresses the same question: "*Visual impact of the monorail can be viewed from two different perspectives: from the ground as a pedestrian and from the monorail train as a passenger. The pedestrians' perspective from the ground is primarily a negative impact in terms of scale, shade/shadow and view blockage. The perspective from the train would most likely be a positive visual impact giving the passenger a spectacular, constantly changing view of the Seattle skyline and surrounding amenities above the cars, trees and small buildings.*"
http://66.102.7.104/search?q=cache:oyHGCAaBjfoJ:archives.elevated.org/project/tech_screening.shtm+seattle+%22view+from+the+monorail%22&hl=en

The same prominence should have been give to the views from an aerial viaduct alternative as was given to the views that were shown from ground level in the slide show.

And of course, there was no comparable slide show that showed the awful experience those drivers using the tunnel will experience.

I-013-003

Cost Estimating

In all of the cost estimating that was on display at the open houses, the cost estimating combined the sea wall replacement with the viaduct replacement.

That may be appropriate for the tunnel alternative, which incorporates the sea wall as part of the project.

I-013-001

Thank you for providing comments on the Draft EIS and attending project open houses. We are glad that you found the information provided by our engineers to be helpful and informative.

I-013-002

The analysis of impacts and visual simulations for the Elevated Structure Alternative is equivalent to the analysis provided for the other alternatives evaluated in the Draft EIS, Supplemental Draft EISs, and Final EIS. Attachments to the EISs contain further analysis and additional simulations for the alternatives evaluated. In the Final EIS, these can be found in Appendices D (Visual Quality Discipline Report) and E (Visual Simulations). Visual simulations are provided for views from the proposed facilities (including the tunnels) as well as from street level. For the tunnel alternatives, the loss of the panoramic view from atop the viaduct is acknowledged.

I-013-003

A road cannot be built without a foundation, and for this project the seawall would effectively form the foundation for both the surface street and any aerial structures along the waterfront. Therefore, for the Cut-and-Cover Tunnel and Elevated Structure Alternatives, it is a necessary part of the overall project. For the Bored Tunnel Alternative, seawall replacement is not necessary for the operation of the bored tunnel facility, but it is necessary for the construction of the new Alaskan Way Surface Street and Waterfront Promenade, which are independent projects that will be led by the City of Seattle.

I-013-003

It is not appropriate to combine the costs in the other alternatives. For example, I understand from talking to one of the engineers at an open house that replacing the sea wall is estimated at \$5 billion to \$1 billion. That is a separate project and is not a transportation project. While it needs to happen, it is not a viaduct cost, and should not be represented as such. Therefore, the cost to rebuild the viaduct or to do a new aerial viaduct is actually in the \$2.2 billion to \$3 billion range and should be shown in that manner. The sea wall expenses should be shown separately.

I-013-004

Cost Reduction:

The earlier figures for the tunnel ranged up to \$11 billion, and the Mayor was recommending it even at that price, which was laughable. Tremendous effort and research has obviously been invested in finding alternatives to reduce the cost of the tunnel to less than \$4 billion (including the sea wall). This brings it nearly into the same general price range as the other options. Was the same effort put into researching possible ways to reduce the cost of the rebuild or aerial option? The reduction in cost is certainly not as significant as the reduction in the tunnel option. **I don't trust that the same energy was invested in exploring ways to reduce the cost of the rebuild or aerial options, and I believe that further cost savings could be found if staff and/or elected officials were sufficiently motivated.**

I-013-005

Safety:

It appears that drivers will be expected to feel safe driving in a tunnel that is below sea level, and that is being built by the same people who cannot keep our floating bridges afloat....That is being built by the same people that approved putting water during a construction project into the pontoons that kept the Lake Washington Floating Bridge afloat:

To control contaminated water, the contractor severed the roadway drains that would have allowed water on the surface of the bridge to flow into the lake. After the drains were cut, essentially all water on the sidewalks and roadway surface of the floating pontoons drained into pontoon cells where it was collected for later removal. To prevent contaminated water from flowing over the side of the pontoons when hydrodemolition was in progress, water-collection barges were moored against the pontoons. The water that was collected in the barges was transferred temporarily into pontoon cells for later removal.

<http://66.102.7.104/search?q=cache:2YYaDrhflDwJ:www.sgh.com/technicalpapers/tplac e.htm+sinking+of+the+floating+bridge&hl=en>

If the tunnel is at least open at the top, drivers could float to the surface.

I-013-006

Transportation Corridor

There are those who would like to stick their heads in the sand, and underestimate the importance of the viaduct in carrying traffic. They advocate not replacing the viaduct and believe the traffic can be absorbed in surface streets, on I-5 and other routes. I am glad I will likely be retired by 2008 and not commuting in that traffic, if that were to occur.

I-013-004

Efforts to reduce project costs are ongoing and will continue throughout the design process. This includes periodic detailed review by independent experts not affiliated with the project.

I-013-005

The preferred Bored Tunnel Alternative is a safe alternative. Generally, structural engineers agree that tunnels are one of the safest places to be during an earthquake, because the tunnel moves with the earth. No Seattle tunnels were damaged during the 2001 Nisqually earthquake, including the Mt. Baker and Mercer Island I-90 tunnels, Battery Street Tunnel, Third Avenue Bus Tunnel, and Burlington Northern Tunnel.

The bored tunnel would be built to current seismic standards, which are considerably more stringent than what was in place when the viaduct was built in the early 1950s. The bored tunnel design includes improving relatively soft, liquefiable soils found near the south tunnel portal. Emergency exits would be provided every 650 feet in the tunnel. Project engineers have studied current data on global warming and possible sea level rise and concluded that the seawall provides enough room to protect the tunnel from rising sea levels. The engineers also considered the possible threat of tsunamis during the design process.

I-013-006

WSDOT agrees with your belief that the viaduct needs to be replaced with a new highway. Many people asked the lead agencies to consider an alternative that would remove the viaduct and replace it with a four-lane surface roadway along Alaskan Way and include transit improvements. Without a host of improvements and modifications, a four-lane Alaskan Way would create even more congestion on I-5 and downtown streets than the alternatives evaluated in the Draft and Supplemental Draft EISs. Transportation studies performed for this project indicate that replacing the viaduct with a four-lane surface street

I-013-006

There are those who use I-5 to commute and feel they will not be affected by what happens to the Viaduct. I believe they will be extremely affected if/when the traffic that is currently accommodated by the Viaduct would need to use I-5 instead.

Some people advocate widening the street along the waterfront to accommodate much of the traffic at street level. As one of the engineers told me at an open house, to accommodate the volumes of traffic that are now carried by the viaduct, the street traffic would be about the same as current traffic at Mercer and Valley. Not exactly an idyllic waterfront experience.

I-013-007

Views

It will be an extreme loss to the everyday person to lose the views that are available from the viaduct. They are breathtaking and are available to those who can't afford to live in the expensive downtown condos that will benefit from the removal of the viaduct.

In conclusion, for safety reasons all agree that the viaduct must be replaced. In my opinion:

I-013-008

- Transportation funding should be identified to rebuild the viaduct or to build a new aerial viaduct. This will likely cost significantly less than \$3 billion. Separate funding should be identified to replace the sea wall.

I-013-009

- While the "fix is in" in my opinion for a tunnel alternative, I still hope that the West Seattle Herald and Ballard News Tribune editorial will be considered:
"The aerial or rebuild options are among the least expensive choices on the table. Retaining a magnificent vista also makes them the most attractive."

Or I hope that State Rep. Helen Sommers is correct in her April 2004 newsletter:
"I believe the more likely alternatives will be the rebuild or the new aerial."

would substantially increase congestion for most of the day and part of the evening on I-5 through downtown Seattle, downtown streets, and Alaskan Way. On downtown streets, traffic would increase by 30 percent, though traffic increases to specific areas like Pioneer Square and the waterfront could exceed 30 percent. With a four-lane roadway, traffic on Alaskan Way would quadruple to 35,000 to 56,000 vehicles per day compared to about 10,000 vehicles today. This traffic increase would make Alaskan Way the busiest street downtown, carrying more traffic than Mercer Street does today. The increased traffic congestion would also make travel times worse for buses, making transit improvements along these streets largely ineffective. Finally, neighborhoods west of I-5 (Ballard, Queen Anne, Magnolia, and West Seattle) would be less accessible and would face longer commute times.

I-013-007

The views of Elliott Bay, Puget Sound, and the Olympic Mountains are prized by many. Views are currently enjoyed by motorists and passengers traveling on the upper deck of the existing viaduct. However, the views for motorists and pedestrians using downtown streets in the vicinity of the waterfront are interrupted by the existing viaduct structure. This structure is considered by some to be a substantial visual intrusion as well as a source of noise and shadow for the Pioneer Square Historic District and the Central Waterfront. Impacts to views are discussed in the Final EIS and considered in detail in Appendix D, Visual Quality Discipline Report.

I-013-008

A road cannot be built without a foundation, and for this project the seawall would effectively form the foundation for both the surface street and any aerial structures along the waterfront. Therefore, for the Cut-and-Cover Tunnel and Elevated Structure Alternatives, it is a necessary part of the overall project. For the Bored Tunnel Alternative, seawall replacement is not necessary for the operation of the bored tunnel



April 2004

WASHINGTON'S UNIQUE PRIMARY ELECTION

For 70 years we have enjoyed a range of party choices in our unique "blanket" primary election. The voter could pick a Democrat in one race, a Republican in another, a Libertarian in the third, and on to a Green in yet another.

Almost all other states 1) allow only registered party members to vote in the primary, or 2) make the voter choose the ballot of one of the parties. Louisiana allows choice among all party candidates, but only the top two go on to the general election. So, it is possible to see two Democrats or two Republicans as the only choices—and probably none of the minor party candidates.

Last year the major parties challenged our unique primary in court. The federal court banned our open system, finding that the parties have the right to select their own nominees.



The Legislature approved the "top two" Louisiana model. In case of another court challenge, the bill provided an alternative—"open primary/private choice", where voters choose among candidates of one political party but the choice of party is private.

The Governor vetoed the first alternative. The Governor reasoned that the "top two" alternative was likely to be challenged, and that minor party and independent candidates have the right to bring their diverse views to the November ballot.

In summary, in the September primary you will choose a Democratic, Republican, Libertarian or other party ballot, but you will not be required to declare any party affiliation.

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Committees: Appropriations, Chair
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THE VIADUCT - HIGHEST PRIORITY

In transportation polling, the Viaduct rates highest even among residents east of Lake Washington. The Dept. of Transportation has completed initial analysis of five alternatives. They are: a six-lane tunnel, a four-lane tunnel, rebuild the present structure, a new aerial structure, and a six-lane surface boulevard along the waterfront. Costs range from \$3 to \$4 billion.

I believe two or three of the alternatives are not feasible. The all-surface boulevard would be a rush hour nightmare for commuters, business and industry traffic. The four-lane tunnel would eliminate the north portal (access from Elliott Ave. and exit to Western Ave.) and therefore be closed to all traffic to or from the Regrade, Magnolia, Queen Anne, Interbay, Ballard and further north, including industry along the Canal. The six-lane tunnel shows the north portal as an option, NOT included in the basic design, and is the most costly.

I believe the more likely alternatives will be the rebuild or the new aerial.

Public hearings are scheduled for: April 27, Dome Room, Arctic Bldg., 700 Third Ave., 4 to 7 pm; and April 29, Leif Erickson Hall, 2245 N W 57th St., 5 to 8 pm. Comments may also be sent by e-mail via the website www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/Viaduct. Make your voice heard.

facility, but is necessary for the construction of the new Alaskan Way Surface Street and Waterfront Promenade, which will be led by the City of Seattle.

I-013-009

FHWA, WSDOT, and the City of Seattle appreciate receiving your comments on the Rebuild or Aerial Alternative. After studying several retrofitting concepts, the lead agencies found that rebuilding the viaduct would not be a cost-effective, long-term solution that adequately addresses the risks to public safety and the weakened state of the viaduct. Elements of the Rebuild and Aerial Alternatives were incorporated into the Elevated Structure Alternative, which was analyzed in the 2006 Supplemental Draft EIS and the Final EIS. Because the project has evolved since comments were submitted in 2004, please refer to the Final EIS for current information.

VIEWS

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COMMENT

Viaduct views

One unheralded factor makes it worth risking life and limb to travel along the Alaskan Way Viaduct: the amazing view.

Most of the time when the word "view" comes up during discussions on how to replace the viaduct, it's in the context of saving the precious waterfront vista for people who live and work downtown. The current viaduct, downtown boosters say, is a visual blight that cuts off the city from its birthright. Thus they drool at the thought of an underground tunnel that would keep all that annoying traffic out of sight.

The six-lane tunnel has its practical drawbacks — astronomically high expense, to name one — but on an aesthetic level, it would remove a view corridor for many Seattle drivers while "restoring" one that the city has lived without for close to a half century.

Travelers going either north or south on the Alaskan Way Viaduct get a spectacular view of the city and the water. It's an intangible benefit of the elevated structure.

Outlying neighborhoods like Ballard and West Seattle, which depend on this transportation corridor, should consider the view benefit that an elevated structure offers. Few people in the city can afford the kind of view they can get from the Alaskan Way Viaduct. It's a non-proprietary benefit of the structure.

A tunnel won't offer that kind of view. A surface boulevard, also under consideration for replacing the viaduct, won't offer it, either. (Indeed, by putting tens of thousands more cars on Alaskan Way, the surface boulevard will do more to cut off the waterfront from downtown than the existing structure does.)

Aesthetic appeal should not be the only consideration when choosing a replacement option for the Alaskan Way Viaduct. Downtown tunnel-hawks would do well to remember this. But the idea of preserving a view corridor that all of Seattle can enjoy should be a factor in choosing the best replacement.

The aerial or rebuild options are among the least expensive choices on the table. Retaining a magnificent vista also makes them the most attractive.



Levy renewal offers Seattle's children the chance to succeed