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From: Richard.A.Miller@med.va.gov [mailto:Richard.A.Miller@med.va.gov]
Sent: Tuesday, June 01, 2004 12:02 PM
To: viaduct@wsdot.wa.gov
Subject: comment

Dear Sirs,

I-360-001

I would like to voice my support for the proposal by the People's Waterfront Coalition to simply tear down the viaduct, rebuild the seawall, and use some of the money saved to improve traffic flow on existing arterials. Commuters and other drivers are far more fluid and flexible than suggested by your other projections. This is amply supported by the literature on complex/chaotic systems but, as evidence, I would point out the following real-life examples:

1. When an earthquake destroyed several miles of I-10 ("the busiest interstate in the country") through west-central Los Angeles everyone predicted gridlock. What transpired was that traffic was pretty bad the following day, less severe the next, etc. until by the following week things were pretty much back to normal on other highways and surface streets.
2. When the Embarcadero section of freeway in San Francisco collapsed there was similar hand-wringing about the catastrophic effect of traffic. In reality drivers adjusted very quickly and life has gone on just fine without the viaduct-like eyesore. They even coped with the loss of a major freeway in Oakland and the temporary closure of the Bay Bridge.
3. Locally when the viaduct was closed after the Nisqually quake the projected traffic jams never materialized and, after the first couple days, the impact on I-5 was marginal.

All the evidence suggests we can live without the viaduct or its replacement. Individuals and businesses will decrease discretionary trips, alter commute or delivery times, etc. Use the funds to improve flow on I-5 (the Mercer Mess and the bottleneck around the I-90 interchange), north-south surface arterials (including Boren, 23rd, and the new Alaskan Way) and to create a vibrant and people-friendly waterfront for the city. Future generations will thank you for it.

Sincerely,

Richard A. Miller, MD
Assoc. Professor of Medicine
University of Washington

I-360-001

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 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.