AWV Draft EIS Comment Form Results:

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Would like to be added to the project mailing list?

Yes

Project Comments:

I-517-001 April 8, 2004 I tried to send my comments to you earlier regarding the "SR 99 - Alaskan Way Viaduct and Seawall Replacement Project," but your website's email system crashed on me unexpectedly. It has been necessary to rewrite my comments entirely. Please forgive the length of this communication, but I believe it is necessary that I state, in general terms, the full case. I find all of the alternatives for this project to be thoroughly analyzed, studied and professionally presented. In my opinion, however - and the opinion of others I know - none of them satisfactorily resolve the current Viaduct/seawall problems AND potential development opportunities that currently exist in the waterfront district. (Please forgive me for being so blunt, but I and others believe this to be the truth.) The famous, Finish architect, Aero Saranin (sp?), the designer of St. Louis' Gateway Arch, among other noted projects, stated it this way: 'The solution lies in the problem." What he meant by that statement is that any solution (including the best available solution) to a problem is determined by how that problem is defined. The narrower and more detailed a problem's definition, the fewer the possible solutions and the less likely that the final, selected solution will actually be the "best" one available.

On the other hand, the broader a problem's definition, the more likely that the best available solution will be found. Most new inventions have been created in this fashion - i.e., by defining the problem in a manner that leads to new, original and improved solutions. The City of Seattle has defined the Viaduct/seawall and waterfront "problem(s)" generally as follows: 'The Alaskan Way Viaduct and portions of the waterfront seawall need to be replaced. Which of the following alternatives should be adopted: 1) a direct replacement of the existing, elevated Viaduct, 2) demolition of the existing Viaduct and construction of a new vehicular traffic system at ground level, 3) demolition of the Viaduct and construction of a tunnel for vehicular traffic below ground level, or 4) a combination of any or all of the above? All four alternatives shall also contain the necessary repairs to the seawall.' (There may be one or more alternatives that I have not accurately described above, but let's assume, for the sake of argument, that there are currently only these four.) Because of the way the problem has been defined, the currently available solutions have been limited to these four basic "alternatives."

The obvious question arises: Have all of the feasible alternatives (solutions) been analyzed and presented for final consideration? The answer is NO. More importantly, the selection of one of these four alternatives could severely limit and adversely affect all future development in Seattle's waterfront district. All four of these alternatives would be tremendously expensive. All four of them would take a very long period of time to complete (7 to 11 years) before the new structures would be full operational.

I-517-002 The economic impact on businesses and facilities located along the waterfront would be absolutely devastating because of the long time periods during which they would be totally "cut-off" from convenient access to the City's CBD. As a result, many of the private establishments in waterfront area would likely go out of business.

I-517-001

Thank you for your comments. Many options were looked at during the initial phases of the project's screening process. This process involved early analysis by the project team and discussions with community groups at more than 140 community meetings and community interviews, including businesses along the corridor. A total of 76 initial viaduct replacement concepts were considered, and concepts that were not feasible, or were outside the purpose of the project were dropped from further consideration. The most workable ideas were shaped into the alternatives analyzed in the 2004 Draft EIS. Further screening and analyses were conducted for the two Supplemental Draft EISs and the Final EIS. The alternatives analyzed include a range of viaduct repair and replacement designs with some elements of earlier concepts combined with other design structures as the engineering team looked at feasibility, cost, and other criteria.

I-517-002

The lead agencies plan to maintain access to businesses and residences throughout construction. Temporary limitations and any required changes to access during construction will be mitigated to the extent practicable. Mitigation measures for parking, pedestrian and vehicle access, and business assistance are discussed in Chapter 8 of the Final EIS. The project team will continue their coordination and mitigation activities with local businesses and residents, freight/delivery companies, the Port of Seattle, neighborhood groups, and other affected groups.

I-517-003 The vehicular traffic that is currently served by the Viaduct would have to be totally diverted to other routes for nearly the entire duration of the new construction. None of these four alternatives comprehensively addresses the other uses, buildings and facilities that currently exist along the waterfront, except for portions of the seawall. The tunnel alternative - the most expensive and time-consuming of the four - is the only one that provides signif! icantly more developable land surface area than what currently exists today. And finally, regardless of the alternative eventually selected, its long-term effects on future development will be IRREVERSIBLE. So, let us try defining the problem differently, as follows: 'What is the best way to quickly and efficiently move vehicular traffic through and/or around the waterfront district of central Seattle, and what is the best way to develop that area for future use?' By defining the problem in this manner, the number and variations of possible alternatives (solutions) is greatly expanded, and a broader scope of potential development opportunities arises.

I-517-004 A "fifth alternative," resulting from the revised problem definition just stated, is the subject of this message to you. It can be generally described as follows: The concept for this fifth alternative involves the construction of a new vehicular traffic conveying structure that would extend out into Elliot Bay and COMPLETELY BYPASS THE WATERFRONT AREA. This "bypass structure" would be essentially linear in form and would be connected on land to both the Battery Street Tunnel and the southern end of the existing Viaduct. A totally new, protected "inner harbor" would thus be created. Close to the middle of the new bypass structure, an elevated bridge would be provided to allow water traffic into and out of the inner harbor. Vehicles traveling through town - i.e., the existing Viaduct traffic - would ultimately be directed onto the bypass structure, thus relieving the waterfront district of all such traffic. Vehicles traveling to and from the waterfront would be directed along Alaska Way and Western Avenue. The new bypass structure itself could be supported on floats, submerged piles and/or a combination of the two. The demolition of th! e Alaskan Way Viaduct could take place at any point after the north and south bypass structure connections are completed.

The entire Viaduct area would therefore be made available for future development. In addition to conveying vehicular traffic, the new bypass structure could have new "surface elements" appended to it that could accommodate other uses, mostly on its protected inner harbor side. Thus, the surface area that could support additional development would be expanded dramatically beyond the total land area (real estate) that would be recovered by demolishing the Viaduct. This solution would be the LEAST EXPENSIVE alternative, primarily because portions of the new bypass structure's surface elements could be leased out or sold to help defray the project's costs. 95% to 98% of the new bypass structure could be constructed without affecting the existing Viaduct traffic. (This traffic would have to be diverted elsewhere only during the brief period necessary to complete the north and south connections of the bypass structure.)

Also, it would not be necessary to "cut-off" or physically isolate any of the waterfront facilities and businesses at any time during the project's duration. The VISUAL IMPACT on Seattle's waterfront district would be dramatic. An opportunity would thus exist for an excitingly new and different appearance and spatial construct. The total waterfront "experience" would be altered with additional, new structures, activities and uses. By applying skilled and creative designers and planners to the individual elements of the project, such as the bridge, inner harbor structures and land-based developments, the overall aesthetic character of Seattle's "skyline" could be significantly improved. The project could thus become the central catalyst for a new, expanded image for the City, and begin the creation of a new "landmark" that might eventually rival the Space Needle. Similarly, the ECONOMIC IMPACT on Seattle would be tremendous.

First and foremost, the visual and physical impediment that the Viaduct currently represents will be completely eliminated. The new bypass structure's surface elements and the district's recovered land areas could support new or expanded uses that are only partially feasible at this point - such as parks,

2

I-517-003

Your comments on developing the waterfront district of Seattle are understandable; however, the stated purpose of the project is to provide a replacement transportation facility. The build alternatives advanced for consideration in the Final EIS are: the Bored Tunnel Alternative, the Cut-and-Cover Alternative, and the Elevated Structure Alternative. Land uses adjacent to the proposed alignments for these alternatives are addressed in the Land Use Discipline Report (Appendix G) for the Final EIS. Although the two tunnel alternatives may result in more new development opportunities than the Elevated Structure Alternative, none are expected to be directly responsible for substantial development in the project area.

The City is leading the Central Waterfront Project, which will guide future development in that area. The City is also working on a plan for the South Downtown area that will help determine future uses along much of the project route. Additionally, the amount and type of future land uses will also be influenced by other factors, especially future economic conditions that will affect the rate and timing of development that may take place along the viaduct and within nearby neighborhoods.

I-517-004

Several concepts were considered that would construct a bridge over Elliott Bay as an alternative to reconstructing the viaduct in its current location. However, these concepts were screened out for several reasons:

- A bridge over Elliott Bay would restrict navigation within Elliott Bay, which would affect both the Port of Seattle's container terminal operations and the Washington State Ferry operations at Colman Dock.
- Obtaining the necessary permits for in-water bridge construction would be extremely difficult.

I-517-004 playgrounds, mass transit facilities, parking garages, marinas, high-density housing, restaurants, specialty retail establishments, commercial buildings, a new cruise ship terminal..... one's mind boggles with the possibilities! Such new activities and uses could be allowed to develop over time. Would they have a favorable impact on future city revenues? Would their spin-off effects generally benefit existing downtown businesses? You do the math; you be the judge. The ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT of this fifth alternative would be the least of all of the proposed alternatives. The bypass structure itself could be built elsewhere in sections that could be moved by water into place, similar to the way the two Lake Washington floating bridges were built. It would not be necessary to disturb the subsoil adjacent to the seawall, which the tunnel alternative would require, nor widen the existing surface streets. (Of course, the seawall would be repaired or replaced on an as-needed basis.) Because of the reduced time constraints, demolition of the Viaduct could be carried out in a manner that would have the least impact on the environment. The need to reroute existing vehicle and pedestrian traffic for long time periods would be minimized. The bypass structure's impact on Elliot Bay's marine life and its effects on currents and such would have to be studied, but I do not foresee the significant endangerment of any animal or plant species, nor the al! tering of any existing natural structures.

One potential use for the newly recovered waterfront land might be the development of a storm water treatment facility. (Currently, all of Seattle's storm water on the west side of the CBD is dumped, untreated, directly into Elliot Bay.) The project could be expanded to address this additional opportunity to help improve Puget Sound's marine environment. In the selection of the "best" alternative, the following general criteria must be considered: a) money - i.e., the overall financial costs, savings and economic benefits to those entities that will have to pay for the project, b) time factors - i.e., the overall duration of the project, its impact on vehicular and pedestrian traffic, local business "down time," etc., c) environmental impacts, d) visual/aesthetic impacts, and e) the extent of public and private amenities gained or lost. With all of these things considered, the BEST ALTERNATIVE is the one I have just described. The four alternatives provided by the City of Seattle fall considerably short of this alternative's cost-benefit considerations. In more general terms, the selected alternative should provide a long-term, comprehensive strategy for the overall development of Seattle's waterfront district, present and future, in a manner that addresses ALL aspects of the current situation. In this regard, the four alternatives presented by the City of Seattle are sorely lacking.

The problems and potential opportunities existing in the waterfront district extend far beyond the Viaduct and the seawall situations, upon which those four alternatives focus. They are safe (but dull and unimaginative) solutions that are undeserving of the time, money and efforts that need to be spent. The alternative I have just described was not my own idea originally. All such credit should be directed to Mr. Roger Patten, an architect and life-long resident of Seattle, currently living in Burien. It is my understanding that Roger was able to present his idea during the recent public exhibition of design solutions for the Viaduct/seawall project. At that exhibition he apparently displayed a scale model of the concept, along with other materials. I am, however, unfamiliar with what sort of response(s) he received. I am writing to voice my own support for Roger Patten's idea - i.e., the fifth alternative to the Viaduct/waterfront project - and to request Seattle's City Planning Department and other entities involved to give it serious consideration, equal to that already given to other four alternatives. Doing so could potentially save Seattle, its residents, the WSDOT, etc., a great deal of time, money and inconvenience, while jumpstarting a comprehensive development process that could totally transform Seattle's waterfront district in the near future. Not giving Roger Patten's idea its due consideration could be construed to be a serious abrogation of your department's fiduciary responsibility to review all reasonable urban planning concepts and ideas that might benefit the public's welfare. In this case, the potential losses to the public and private sectors of Seattle could be enormous. In closing, it is my understanding that this communication will be made part of the Public Record concerning this matter and its associated EIS. I look forward to receiving your response. Thad E. Wardall Seattle, Washington

PS: Since I can no longer rely on your website's email capabilities, a similar hard copy of this communication will be sent to you via mail.

3

- The bridge concept has visual quality impacts that are not consistent with the City's existing land use and shoreline plans.