

Belltown Housing and Land Use Subcommittee
Belltown Community Council
c/o John Peterson, Chair
2000 First Ave #2301
Seattle, WA 98104

May 31, 2004

Allison Ray
WSDOT Environmental Coordinator
Alaskan Way Viaduct and Seawall Replacement Project
999 Third Ave., Suite 2424
Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Allison Ray:

This is a coordinated response from the Belltown Housing and Land Use Subcommittee (BHLUS) of the Belltown Community Council that represents those who live and work in Belltown. Please consider it complementary to the response from the Belltown Business Association (Chuck Stempler to Allison Ray dated 5/25/04) that represents businesses in Belltown.

We are very concerned that the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) largely ignores the impact of the Viaduct replacement alternatives on the Belltown neighborhood. We have 6 areas of concern that must be addressed before the Final Environmental Impact Statement is released. These concerns are outlined below.

C-005-001

1. Impact of SR 99 related traffic on Western and Elliott Avenues

- a) By the design of the City of Seattle, both of these avenues are now in a residential neighborhood, with huge increases of residential units in the past 10 years. Any traffic increases on these two avenues caused by the viaduct replacement (such as closure of other exits and entrances) would have a negative impact on that residential character and must be avoided. We were unable to find in the thousands of pages of documentation how these Replacement Alternates would affect the traffic on these two avenues, but we expect it would increase. Belltown has accepted and embraced population density and diversity. It is time for the City to recognize that and by their actions support that residential character.
- b) The existing traffic patterns on these two avenues are not pedestrian friendly. Only half of the intersections on these two avenues have traffic lights to help pedestrians cross. There is a lack of "pedestrian bubbles" at intersections where they could be located. At a minimum, traffic lights need to be added and timed appropriately for a residential area (e.g. <25 mph).
- c) The pedestrian environment on these two avenues will become more important when the Olympic Sculpture Park (OSP) is completed at Broad Street. Then there will be east-west pedestrian traffic to the OSP on Broad, and the primary pedestrian routes from the Pike Place Market to the OSP will be Western and Elliott Avenues. Any added traffic without pedestrian amenities would be detrimental to this visitor-walking corridor.
- d) There are a number of dangerous pedestrian crossings in Belltown. Three of the worst are at Western Avenue and Bell Street, at Elliott Avenue and Battery Street, and at Elliott Avenue and the entrance to the existing viaduct. All of these should be fixed now, but the permanent resolution of these problems must be a priority of any viaduct replacement and must be specifically addressed in the Final EIS.

C-005-002

2. Physical/Visual impacts on Belltown

- a) There are many visual simulations in the DEIS, but none east- or west-looking in Belltown. That is unacceptable. We need to see the impact of the viaduct replacement at Lenora, Blanchard and Bell Streets.
- b) A buried SR99 in the central waterfront has great advantages to the central downtown and waterfront. A buried SR99 in the Belltown area would have similar benefits to Belltown and the north waterfront, but was not considered in any of the Alternatives. Such a buried or semi-buried alternative must be considered between the overpass over the railroad and the entrance to the Battery Street Tunnel in the final EIS.
- c) A fidded or semi-fidded SR99 could be an alternative to burial in this same area.

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C-005-001

FHWA, WSDOT, and the City of Seattle appreciate receiving your comments. The lead agencies have identified the Bored Tunnel Alternative as the preferred alternative due to its ability to best meet the project's identified purpose and need and the support it has received from diverse interests. Because the project has evolved since comments were submitted in 2004, please refer to the Final EIS for current information.

Although the Bored Tunnel alternative would remove the Elliott and Western ramps connecting to SR 99, the City of Seattle would provide a new connector from a reconstructed Alaskan Way surface street to Elliott and Western. The Elliott/Western Connector is an independent project from the Bored Tunnel Alternative. The connector would be four lanes wide and would provide an overcrossing of the BNSF mainline railroad tracks. Additionally, it would provide local street access to Pike and Lenora Streets and integrate back into the street grid at Bell Street, which would improve local street connections in Belltown. The new roadway would include bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

The project team is currently evaluating opportunities to improve pedestrian access and safety. More information about mitigation during construction can be found in Chapter 8 of the Final EIS and Appendix C, Transportation Discipline Report.

C-005-002

Appendices D and E, Visual Quality Technical Memorandum and Visual Simulations, from the Supplemental Draft and Final EISs include the view to the south down Elliott Avenue from Bell Street. The Visual Quality discussion describes the differences between the three alternatives, as to which design could act as a barrier, or conversely, allow a continuous corridor for views as well as for pedestrian movements.

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- C-005-002 d) If it must be an aerial structure in this area, Landscape Architects should be hired to consider more attractive use of the space under the viaduct. This space is currently dark, un-inviting, and a health and safety concern.
- C-005-003 3. Viaduct Noise
a) Mitigation measures must be studied to reduce the traffic noise of the viaduct replacement in Belltown. We did not see these considerations in the DEIS.
b) A buried or semi-buried SR99 in Belltown, as discussed in 2.b) above, would certainly solve this problem.
c) If SR99 is not buried in Belltown, at least lids or vertical barriers should be added to reduce the noise.
d) In addition, special surface treatment of the roadway must be used to significantly reduce the noise
- C-005-004 4. Belltown access to the Waterfront
a) It is important to maintain or improve Belltown access to the Waterfront at Lenora. As we could find no elevations or visual simulations in this area we could not see the impacts.
b) It is important to improve Belltown access to the Waterfront at Bell. Again, as we could find no elevations or visual simulations in this area we could not see how access is being improved.
c) It is important to improve the safety of the access to the waterfront from Bell Street, specifically at Western and Bell Streets. This is currently dangerous, with high-speed traffic exiting SR99, merging with surface traffic on Western at a pedestrian crossing without traffic lights!
- C-005-005 5. Traffic on other Belltown Avenues and Streets
a) Avoid alternatives that put more through traffic on Belltown Avenues and Streets. This is a particular concern with the surface street alternate. Per the City of Seattle's design, Belltown is a highly dense residential neighborhood and not a traffic conduit for north/south traffic.
- C-005-006 6. Construction impacts
a) The project is proposing a 24-hour, 7-day per week construction schedule and variances from the City's noise control ordinances. This may be acceptable in business or commercial areas, but is not acceptable in residential areas like Belltown. Any noisy activity, beyond the City's noise code, is only allowed from 7:30am to 5:30pm for non-holiday weekdays for major projects in our area. That must be considered as a constraint for any noisy or disruptive construction activities in the residential areas of Belltown.

It is informative, that all six concerns expressed are consistent with the Belltown Neighborhood Plan, adopted by the City of Seattle in 1999.

We would appreciate the opportunity for the neighborhood to meet with your team to discuss these issues further in the coming months. Please contact us at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,



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cc: Peter Steinbrueck, City of Seattle, Councilmember
Tom Rasmussen, City of Seattle, Councilmember
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Greg Schuler, Belltown Business Association
Zander Batchelder, Belltown Community Council

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In the 2006 Supplemental Draft EIS, the Tunnel Alternative did consider two types of lid structures from Pike Street to Victor Steinbrueck Park. Also considered was the option of configuring SR 99 under Elliott and Western Avenues as it approached the Battery Street Tunnel.

C-005-003

Noise mitigation measures are discussed in Appendix F, Noise Discipline Report, and in Chapter 8 of the Final EIS. With the Cut-and-Cover Tunnel and Elevated Structure Alternatives, the majority of sensitive receptors in the Belltown area would not experience a significant change in noise levels compared to existing conditions. The preferred Bored Tunnel Alternative would decrease noise levels in the area just south of the Battery Street Tunnel, but it would not change noise levels significantly in other areas of Belltown.

C-005-004

Please see the Final EIS, Appendix C Transportation Discipline Report for updated discussion and analysis of pedestrian facilities and safety issues for the Bored Tunnel Alternative (preferred alternative), Cut-and-Cover Tunnel Alternative, and Elevated Structure Alternative in the Belltown area.

Although the Bored Tunnel alternative would remove the Elliott and Western ramps connecting to SR 99, the City of Seattle would provide a new connector from a reconstructed Alaskan Way surface street to Elliott and Western. The Elliott/Western Connector is an independent project from the Bored Tunnel Alternative. The connector would be four lanes wide and would provide an overcrossing of the BNSF mainline railroad tracks. Additionally, it would provide local street access to Pike and Lenora Streets and integrate back into the street grid at Bell Street, which would improve local street connections in Belltown. The new roadway would include bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

C-005-005

The alternatives analyzed in the Final EIS do not introduce additional connections in the Belltown area, and actually eliminate the Battery Street ramps to general purpose traffic, except for emergency and maintenance vehicles. While Elliott and Western Avenues will continue to carry heavy traffic volumes (as they do today), volumes on other streets in Belltown are generally not expected to increase for the three alternatives analyzed in the Final EIS. Please refer to the Final EIS Appendix C, Transportation Discipline Report, for more information regarding traffic impacts in the Belltown area.

C-005-006

Construction of the project will require nighttime construction activities, and the City requires a Major Public Project Construction Noise Variance. Construction noise mitigation requirements would be developed and specified in the noise variance. The Major Public Project Construction Noise Variance will be presented for public comment. Mitigation measures are described in the Final EIS and Appendix F, Noise Discipline Report.