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SEATTLE AQUARIUM SOCIETY

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May 12, 2004

Ms. Allison Ray
Alaskan Way Viaduct and Seawall Replacement Project Office
999 Third Avenue, Suite 2424
Seattle, WA 98104

RE: Draft Environmental Impact Statement:
SR 99 Alaskan Way Viaduct and Seawall Replacement Project

Dear Ms. Ray:

On behalf of the Seattle Aquarium Society, we write to offer comment on the SR 99 Alaskan Way Viaduct and Seawall Replacement Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Our general comments are based upon the same funding assumption used for the Draft EIS, i.e. that funding is committed for the total project at the beginning, allowing the most efficient staging and shortest time to completion. The availability of funding may affect construction sequencing, which, in turn, may affect the impacts on the Aquarium. For example, if funding availability required that the Seawall be constructed earlier than the Viaduct replacement, this could impact the Aquarium. With this caveat, we favor alternatives, and their appropriate financing stream, that can be sequenced in such a way that allows the business of the Seattle Aquarium to successfully endure and survive. Through the entire process, the Aquarium must be made whole from operating disruptions.

We strongly support the Tunnel Alternative for the SR 99 Alaskan Way Viaduct and Seawall Replacement Project. While we do not support the Bypass Tunnel, we find it preferable to the Rebuild, Aerial and Surface Alternatives, all of which we oppose.

Standing and Institutional Interest

The Seattle Aquarium Society represents 20,000 member families throughout Seattle and King County and is the official not-for-profit support organization for the Seattle Aquarium. The Aquarium is located squarely in the middle of the Seattle Central Waterfront at Piers 59 and 60. Our concern is the preservation and enhancement of the Seattle Aquarium as a core cultural resource for the region and as a major tourist/economic driver for the Central Waterfront. The Aquarium is the region's leading marine conservation educational institution and one of the City's top visitor attractions. The Aquarium attracted 660,000 visitors during 2003, generating a combined Aquarium/Society operating budget of \$7.4 million with a payroll of 72 FTE. Roughly one-third of Aquarium visitors come from Seattle, a third from the broader region, and a third from outside the State. Plans are being prepared for significant near-term capital investment in the existing Pier 59 facility, and, further out, major capital investments that will ultimately create one of the world's great aquariums on Piers 59 and 60.

C-013-001

FHWA, WSDOT, and the City of Seattle appreciate receiving your comments and recognize your preference for the 2004 Cut-and-Cover Tunnel Alternative. The lead agencies have identified the Bored Tunnel Alternative as the preferred alternative. If this alternative is selected, the City of Seattle would replace the seawall under another project, called the Elliott Bay Seawall Project.

The lead agencies plan to maintain access to businesses throughout construction. Mitigation measures for parking, pedestrian and vehicle access, and business assistance are discussed in Chapter 8 of the Final EIS. The project will continue its coordination and mitigation activities with businesses and other affected parties in the project area.

Primary Evaluation Considerations

C-013-002

1. Survival of the Aquarium depends upon convenient visitor access.

Access to the Waterfront – Vehicular and Pedestrian

- Families: Aquarium visitors come, for the most part, in multigenerational family groups, often with young children (walking, automobiles, public transportation). Automobile access, including parking in close proximity to the Aquarium, is a key factor for family groups.
- Students: 43,000 students arrive annually at the Aquarium in class groups via 500 school buses. Students, many of elementary school age, must be able to load and unload in close proximity to the Aquarium for safety reasons, and buses must have locations for waiting during the school visit.

C-013-003

2. Integration of the Waterfront with the City

- For 50 years the Central Waterfront has been cut-off from the economic life and traffic pattern of the City. Baltimore's Inner Harbor and National Aquarium illustrate the powerful impact an integrated waterfront can make on the City, especially the downtown businesses, property owners, and tourism. New Orleans offers another example of a positive waterfront redevelopment on city growth and vitality, again featuring a national caliber aquarium as a key feature.

3. Effective Restoration of the Seawall

- The Seattle Aquarium, on Piers 59 and 60, sits adjacent to the Seawall. The survival and structural integrity of the Aquarium depend upon early replacement of the Seawall in a manner that protects the piers' structural integrity.

4. A Visitor-friendly Environment

- As an attendance-supported institution, the Seattle Aquarium depends upon an overall waterfront environment that is safe, welcoming to local residents and attractive to visitors from the State, United States and foreign nations. The Port of Seattle has enhanced the northern part of the waterfront in the past decade, with positive economic and aesthetic results. Much remains to be done for the waterfront to achieve its potential and to become a world class environment, bringing with it substantial economic and social returns. The pedestrian experience on the Central Waterfront should receive high priority, with an emphasis on the creation of a widened promenade along the waterfront, creating a new sense of public space to which the Seattle Aquarium will contribute.

C-013-004

5. Marine Conservation Learning Opportunities

- We believe there may be opportunities in the construction process and new shoreline design to extend our marine conservation mission. We offer this up as a resource to the City, State, Port and other property owners, in developing ways to enhance public understanding of Elliott Bay, Puget Sound and our connection to the oceans.

C-013-002

The lead agencies have taken this information and these needs into consideration as part of our construction and mitigation planning effort. Additional information related to construction effects and proposed mitigation is discussed in the Final EIS. In addition, we will continue discussing construction details and issues with the Aquarium and other affected landowners and tenants throughout project construction. Access will be maintained during viaduct removal. Primary pedestrian routes would have signage, directional arrows, lighting, and other amenities. All pedestrian routes would provide safe and clean access through the construction zone.

C-013-003

If the preferred alternative is selected, the City of Seattle would be responsible for the development of the central waterfront under a separate project. Likewise, if the preferred alternative is selected, the City of Seattle would replace the seawall under a separate project. There will continue to be opportunities for the public to participate in that planning effort and to help determine the future of their waterfront as the City moves forward with its projects.

If either the Elevated Structure Alternative or Cut-and-Cover Tunnel Alternative is selected, the seawall replacement and design of the Alaskan Way surface street would be part of those alternatives.

C-013-004

Thank you for your offer. The Bored Tunnel Alternative (the preferred alternative) does not include the seawall as a project component. However, if an alternative is selected that incorporates replacement of the seawall, we will consult with you at that time.

Ms. Allison Ray
Alaskan Way Viaduct and Seawall Replacement Project Office
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Mitigation Impact

C-013-005

We are concerned about the following issues during the construction process, and look to detailed discussion regarding mitigation. The parking question extends beyond the construction period and must be accommodated in the post-construction framework as well:

1. Access during construction, pedestrian and vehicular. Ability of the Seattle Aquarium to maintain its \$7 million annual operating budget with minimal City operating subsidy. To the extent there is a significant revenue shortfall, mitigation should make up the difference. The Aquarium's operations are funded primarily through:
 - Admittance (660,000 visitors in 2003),
 - Membership fees (20,000 active member families)
 - Facilities rentals (events ranging from weddings and school proms to business receptions and conferences), and
 - Concessions revenues (Steamer's Seafood Cafe, IMAX Theater, Seattle Aquarium Store).
2. Parking Availability. A majority of Aquarium visitors arrive, as family groups, in private automobiles. They must perceive that they can get to the Aquarium by car, and park within reasonable walking proximity to the facility.
3. Operational Disruption. Ability of the Seattle Aquarium to continue its 24 hour/day, 365 day/year operation for visitors and for its unique (and fragile) living animal collection. The health and safety of our visitors and animals are our foremost concern.
4. Construction Staging. We understand that some of the plans contemplate staging areas directly across from the Aquarium. We are concerned about the implications of this plan for the safe and successful operation of the Aquarium.

Comments on Alternatives

C-013-006

1. Preferred Alternative: Tunnel. Strongly support. We urge that the tunnel rise to the surface beyond the northern sight-lines of the Aquarium in order to minimize traffic noise and also provide for potential public open space adjacent to or across from the Aquarium.
2. Other Alternatives.
 - Rebuild and Aerial: Strongly oppose both aerial alternatives because of their enormous negative impact on the City, the Aquarium and all activities on the Central Waterfront. The City has a once-in-a-century opportunity to correct a major error - we must take it.
 - Bypass Tunnel: Oppose; but prefer over both aerial options and Surface Option. Less damaging to Central Waterfront than these options, but fails to optimize the opportunity for the Central Waterfront. Serious traffic flow and access problems for the Aquarium.
 - Surface: Oppose. Separates the Aquarium and Central Waterfront from the City with a vast vista of concrete, traffic and noise. Major access problems for vehicular and pedestrian traffic; safety issues for school children and families with young children, who comprise a large portion of the Aquarium's audience.

C-013-005

The lead agencies plan to maintain access to businesses throughout construction. Temporary limitations and any required changes to access during construction will be mitigated to the extent practicable. The lead agencies recognize that businesses along the central waterfront rely on the short-term parking in the area. Mitigation measures for parking, pedestrian and vehicle access, and business assistance are discussed in Chapter 8 of the Final EIS. No long-term staging is proposed for the Bored Tunnel Alternative in the vicinity of the Aquarium. There may be temporary staging within the City of Seattle right-of-way during viaduct demolition and removal.

C-013-006

FHWA, WSDOT, and the City of Seattle appreciate receiving your comments on the 2004 Cut-and-Cover Tunnel Alternative. The alignment for the Cut-and-Cover Tunnel Alternative has been refined in the Final EIS. The lead agencies have identified the Bored Tunnel Alternative as the preferred alternative due to its ability to best meet the project's identified purposes and needs 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.

Ms. Allison Ray
Alaskan Way Viaduct and Seawall Replacement Project Office
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The Viaduct/Seawall project offers the opportunity not only to solve safety and transportation problems, but to return the Central Waterfront of Seattle to its historic importance. The Seattle Aquarium physically occupies the center of the Waterfront, and symbolically represents the City's connection to the sea. We are enthusiastic partners with you in this challenging process.

Sincerely,



Paul Kundtz, President
Board of Directors



Gary T. Smith
Vice President, Public Partnerships



Robert W. Davidson
Chief Executive Officer

cc: Hon. Gary Locke, Governor, State of Washington
Hon. Greg Nickels, Mayor, City of Seattle
Seattle City Council
King County Council
Ken Bounds, Seattle Superintendent of Parks
Bill Arntz, Seattle Aquarium Director