

Dear Mayor Murray, Council President Burgess and Council Member Rasmussen:

The West Seattle Transportation Coalition (WSTC) is a peninsula-wide organization working to address transportation and mobility issues for Seattle's largest constituency. Representing more than 100,000 people living and working in the 10 square mile area between the Duwamish River and Puget Sound, we are community leaders, advocates, business owners, residents and workers focused on addressing the transportation and commuting challenges of West Seattle.

Since our founding in September 2013 the WSTC has met with representatives from Seattle Mayor Ed Murray's office; with the Chair of the City Council's Transportation Committee, Councilmember Tom Rasmussen; representatives from King County Executive Dow Constantine's office; the Seattle Department of Transportation, both with their policy and administrative staff and with their engineering and planning staff; and the Washington State Department of Transportation, with State Transportation Secretary Lynn Peterson, and their management overseeing the SR-99/Viaduct Replacement Project.

We have also engaged in extensive and repeated outreach with the residents of our peninsula at numerous events and functions in addition to our membership organizations; to learn what transportation issues are currently of greatest and most immediate concern to them. Some of these issues, in some form or another, have been looked into by the responsible agencies, but all remain unresolved at this time.

On behalf of our membership, the WSTC requests that the City of Seattle take action to move forward and principally drive solutions to each of these five pressing transportation issues. They have been identified as the most critical matters that affect the West Seattle peninsula as a whole. We believe they can be reasonably resolved to the satisfaction of all stakeholders.

The issues we are writing about are the following:

1. Expand vehicle capacity from the West Seattle Bridge to SR-99.
2. Develop a "West Seattle Peninsula" emergency relief plan.
3. Increase access to the westbound Spokane St. Viaduct from SODO.
4. Complete the Lander Street Overpass.
5. Immediate mitigation of traffic events to West Seattle peninsula chokepoints.



Issue #1: Expand vehicle capacity from the West Seattle Bridge to SR-99.

SDOT engineers believe it may be possible to at least double the number of lanes from the eastbound West Seattle Bridge and Spokane Street Viaduct to SR-99 north, and that it may be possible to add an additional lane to directly connect the eastbound roadway to SR-99 south.

We ask the City to fund a full study to examine and report on the feasibility of such a roadway change, and to determine the cost to implement it. The expectation is that at least one new lane of access from the roadway to SR-99 north would be intended for exclusive transit access (“bus only”) and possibly later for dedicated, grade-separated BRT (“bus rapid transit”) access.

Issue #2: Develop a “West Seattle Peninsula” emergency relief plan.

Unlike all other areas of Seattle, a major disaster such as a severe earthquake *will* leave the communities of West Seattle and South Park completely cut off. The only access from Seattle proper to the peninsula is through one of our four bridges: West Seattle Bridge, Spokane Street Bridge, 1st Avenue South Bridge, and the South Park Bridge. In the case of a major disaster situation, it is expected that all three could be shut down for days at a minimum until they can be certified as safe. While some other areas of the city do rely heavily upon bridge access, such as Magnolia with the Magnolia and Dravus Bridges, it remains possible to access such areas of the city even if those bridges were closed.

West Seattle, however, would be cut off from the rest of Seattle. The general assumption, as we are often reminded, is that we will need to fend for ourselves. Our nearest hospital, the Highline facility in Burien (their emergency room is located at 16251 Sylvester Rd SW, Burien, WA 98166), is not considered capable of handling major disaster relief. A trip for the critically wounded from West Seattle to a facility like Harborview Medical Center on land would be infeasible, and there is no defined plan or protocol for anything else: no defined triage areas or facilities; no defined locations for helicopter retrieval of injured parties, or even plans to take over the King County Water Taxi as a medical shuttle.

We request planning sessions specific to this issue with relevant stakeholders in our area, the City’s Office of Emergency Management, the King County Office of Emergency Management, Seattle Police, Seattle Fire, and other appropriate stakeholders to identify the specific gaps in planning and protocol we have in place. Once that is established, funding needs to be apportioned to rectify these deficits.

Issue #3: Increase access to the westbound Spokane St. Viaduct from SODO.

Prior to construction of the current 1st Avenue South onramp to the westbound Spokane St. Viaduct, there was a similar but unsafe 4th Avenue South on-ramp. This was decommissioned and removed after a tragic accident. In conversations with SDOT engineers, it appears possible to safely design and implement either a new 4th Avenue South or 6th Avenue South onramp to the westbound Spokane St. Viaduct.

We ask the City to fund a full study to examine and report on the feasibility of the addition of the proposed ramps, and to determine the cost to implement each of these options. The feasibility study should include feedback from Sound Transit, for the feasibility of carrying Light Rail traffic on such ramps. SDOT engineering has indicated that both the West Seattle Bridge and the Spokane St. Viaduct may be capable of safely carrying Light Rail traffic, so this needs to be examined as an option as well.

It is assumed that a 4th Avenue South onramp would be either transit-only or a hybrid onramp for car and transit, with dedicated rail lanes if that is an option. It is assumed that a 6th Avenue South onramp from the closed Busway on 6th Avenue South would be transit-only.

Issue #4: Complete the Lander Street Overpass.

This is a longstanding and well-known project, first addressed in January 2007. We are asking for an apportionment of funding to complete this project. The benefits of completing this project to West Seattle, the Port of Seattle, and local SODO businesses cannot be understated.

Here is the SDOT Project URL:

<http://www.seattle.gov/transportation/southlanderdraft.htm>

Issue #5: Immediate mitigation of traffic events to West Seattle peninsula chokepoints, with funding and protocols.

The Peninsula has seen repeatedly over the years that a single traffic accident has the capability to completely stop the total flow of traffic across the West Seattle Bridge, the primary access bridge. The core issue is that almost all West Seattle traffic has to flow through a handful of very limited choke points to reach the east side of the Duwamish River. For example, in some of these typical instances, it is literally impossible to cross the 2.5 miles from West Seattle on the bridge to SODO in less than an hour, depending on the location of an accident, or the availability of tow trucks to clear the accident. There are also “Black Swan” events such as the de-icing errors on several bridges in December 2013. These considerations apply as well to the 1st Avenue South Bridge, South Park Bridge, and the lower Spokane Street Bridge, which is also affected by events on both W Marginal Way and E Marginal Way.

This is compounded by the fact that the lower Spokane Street Bridge according to United States Coast Guard regulations must be allowed to open on-demand to allow maritime traffic through. Openings can run from 10 minutes to 30-plus minutes. This low bridge also does periodically malfunction, staying stuck in the open position for extended periods of time. Even a brief opening of the lower bridge when the upper bridge is backed up from an accident will – as we have seen repeatedly – cause all arterials leading to the West Seattle Bridge to back up. In some instances the local traffic jams have reached nearly back to the Morgan Junction, on the far southwest side of West Seattle, nearly all the way to the Vashon Island ferry (which all the while continues to add to car traffic during these events).

This is unacceptable. Statistically it is only a matter of time until an ambulance needs to take a critically injured or ill person to one of our hospitals on First Hill during one of these events. Someone will die on the bridge in traffic.

We request planning sessions specific to this issue with relevant stakeholders in our area: the Seattle Department of Transportation, the Washington State Department of Transportation, the City’s Office of Emergency Management, the King County Office of Emergency Management, Seattle Police, Seattle Fire, and other appropriate stakeholders to identify the specific gaps in planning and protocol we have in place. Once that is established, funding needs to be apportioned to rectify these deficits.

We look forward to your response by January 9, 2015, with details on who from the City of Seattle will be assigned to guiding the efforts to resolve each of these specific issues, and to begin the planning to organize initial meetings toward resolving all of these issues to the satisfaction of all parties and stakeholders

Thank you for your time and continued service.



Sincerely,

Joe Szilagyi, Chair
Amanda Kay Helmick, Co-Chair
West Seattle Transportation Coalition

CC:

Seattle City Councilmember, Jean Godden
Seattle City Councilmember, Kshama Sawant
Seattle City Councilmember, Bruce A. Harrell
Seattle City Councilmember, Sally Bagshaw
Seattle City Councilmember, Nick Licata
Seattle City Councilmember, Mike O'Brien
Seattle City Councilmember, Sally J. Clark
SDOT Director, Scott Kubly
Seattle Police Chief, Kathleen O'Toole
Seattle Fire Chief, Gregory Dean
Seattle Office of Emergency Management Director, Barb Graff
King County Executive, Dow Constantine
King County Metro General Manager, Kevin Desmond
King County Office of Emergency Management Director, Walt Hubbard
King County Ferries Board of Supervisors Chair, Joe McDermott
King County Ferries Board of Supervisors Vice Chair, Rod Dembowski
Sound Transit CEO, Joni Earl
Sound Transit Deputy CEO, Mike Harbour
Washington State Transportation Secretary, Lynn Peterson
Washington State Ferries Director, Lynne Griffith
WSDOT Incident Response Program Manager, Vince Fairhurst
Port of Seattle CEO, Ted Fick
WSTC Board member, Michael Taylor-Judd
WSTC Board member, Deb Barker
WSTC Board member, Vicki Nelson
WSTC Board member, Tod Rodman
WSTC Board member, Martin Westerman
WSTC Board member, Marci Carpenter
WSTC Board member, Ray Krueger
Delridge Neighborhood District Council
Southwest District Council
Admiral Neighborhood Association
Alki Community Council
Fauntleroy Community Association
Genesee-Schmitz Neighborhood Council
Highland Park Action Committee
Morgan Community Association
North Delridge Neighborhood Council
North Highline Unincorporated Area Council
Pigeon Point Community Council
Puget Ridge Community Council
South Park Neighborhood Association
West Seattle Chamber of Commerce
West Seattle Junction Association
West Seattle Junction Neighborhood Organization
White Center Community Development Association

