

## Editorial

# Stop grumbling, move ahead on S. Lake Union

The populist grumbles about the city of Seattle's support of Paul Allen are unwarranted.

The objectors say that building a biotechnology district in South **Lake Union** is too risky — that the city will not get the growth it seeks. In the same breath they grumble that the city *will* get the growth it seeks. Most of all, they grumble about favoring the rich.

Actually, Seattle is favoring itself, seizing an opportunity it is lucky to have.

Allen has been busily erecting high-quality mid-rise medical-research labs, with an eye to developing a whole new business district. Seattle needs that. We do not have a static economy here. Always, there is something shrinking: recently, Boeing and the dot-coms.

We need to have something new, an industry that is attracted to an urban setting, that fits our strengths and values, and that can afford our level of costs. Not many qualify, but biotechnology does.

South **Lake Union** would attract some 20,000 jobs over the next two decades, many for Ph.D.s. Retailers, service companies and other providers will benefit, as will landowners (including The Seattle Times Company) and taxing authorities. But the beneficiaries will far exceed the boundaries of the **lake**.

The infrastructure cost has been pegged at \$421 million over 20 years. But that includes \$181 million to provide electric service — an amount the new users will pay for through their City Light rates. It is not a subsidy.

Another \$170 million is for straightening out Mercer Street and adding two crossings to Aurora Avenue. That benefits everyone who suffers the "Mercer mess," a problem that has needed fixing for 40 years.

Another \$25 million would develop park property the city already owns, most of it on the **lake**. The neighborhood will need this, and everyone can use it.

Finally, there is \$45 million for a proposed streetcar. The need for that is questionable, but it could easily be replaced by good bus service.

By Seattle's reckoning, its one-time share in all these things would be \$30 million, only 7 percent of the total. The city calculates new tax revenues 20 years out at \$16 million a year — a better than fair deal.

Critics say this is not a solid number. They are right. It isn't. There are no solid numbers; we don't know how people in Seattle will be making a living 20 years from now.

But individuals, companies and cities have to do the best they can. The South **Lake Union** project is the most promising thing going, and the city would be foolish not to pursue it.

