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January 18, 2012

Peter Hahn, Director
Seattle Department of Transportation

Dear Director Hahn,

On October 22, 2011, seven members of the Seattle Bicycle Advisory Board (SBAB) – along with Councilmembers Mike O’Brien and Sally Bagshaw, Jamie Cheney and Jessica Szelag from Commute Seattle, and a Seattle resident – toured the corridors connecting the lower Queen Anne, Uptown, and Belltown neighborhoods with the downtown core of Seattle. This “Bikeability Tour” was conducted with the purpose of looking at the potential impacts of the Mercer West and North Portal projects on bicycling in lower Queen Anne and Uptown, as well as opportunities to provide safe and protected connections for bicycle riders heading from those neighborhoods into and through Downtown.

Our ride began at 5th Ave N and Aloha St and continued south on 5th Ave past Seattle Center and the EMP, to Denny Way via Thomas St and Taylor Ave N. We continued on the south-side sidewalk of Denny Way to 7th Ave, turned west on Bell St (the future site of Bell Street Park), and proceeded south along 5th Ave and 2nd Ave until Cherry St. We then looped around to ride north a short distance on 4th Ave, ending at the Seattle Public Library.

There were a number of observations made by the participants along the route, including:

- The 5th Ave corridor along the east side of Seattle Center is an important connection between Uptown, the Seattle Center, and surrounding destinations and connections. The intersection of Mercer St and 5th Ave is complex and presents significant challenges to the safety of nonmotorized users.
- Bicycle travel through the Seattle Center from Thomas St is a logical and direct east/west route between neighborhoods and – with the construction of the West Thomas Street Overpass – to the waterfront at Myrtle Edwards Park.
- The connection across Denny Way at 5th Ave or Taylor Ave is critical to the Downtown to Seattle Center and Uptown routes.
- The 7th Ave bike lane heading southeast from Denny Way conflicts with both bus and car traffic. Buses have been observed staying right, in the bike lane, rather than merging left as they pull away from the bus stop south of Denny.

The Seattle Bicycle Advisory Board shall advise the City Council, the Mayor, and all departments and offices of the city on matters related to bicycling, and the impacts which actions by the city may have upon bicycling; and shall have opportunity to contribute to all aspects of the city’s planning processes insofar as they relate to bicycling.

-City Council
Resolution 25534

- Installing several high-grade bicycle facilities along the north/south corridors in the Downtown core (the avenues and Alaskan Way) would facilitate connections to multiple destinations, attract new ridership, and help mitigate severe elevation issues in the south end of Downtown.

SBAB's recommendations based on the above observations include:

- Build a separated bicycle facility from Aloha St to Broad St, perhaps requiring the acquisition of additional right-of-way, or lane realignment to adjust for pedestrian traffic at the EMP.
- Construct a bikeway through the Seattle Center that connects Thomas St on both sides of the Seattle Center campus. Use "bicycle calming" treatments through Seattle Center to keep speeds low and avoid conflicts with pedestrians.
- Convert the right lane of 5th Ave into a protected bicycle facility heading southbound and move parking from the curb to under the monorail.
- Provide separated bike facilities on 2nd Ave and 4th Ave, to connect Uptown/Seattle Center with Downtown. While facilities are already in place, because of the parked cars, bus traffic, and left turns through the bike lanes, many bicycle riders have commented to SBAB that they do not consider this a viable connection through Downtown.
- SDOT should monitor all bicycle facilities after implementation to see if they are working as intended or if they need modifications for improved safety.

The detailed findings of the Bikeability Tour, complete with photos, can be found in the attached report. We hope that you and your department find these useful as you begin the update process of the Bicycle Master Plan this year. It is clear from this report that separated bicycle facilities are greatly needed as a way of ensuring bicycle connectivity within and between Uptown and Downtown as well as improving the safety of those trips made by bike.

We wish to emphasize that great attention be paid to the roadway design of Mercer St and the intersections of Mercer with the north/south streets within the Mercer West project area. Wide lane widths and large curb radii (as we understand are currently included in the designs) encourage high speeds and rapid turning movements and should be kept to a minimum to improve safety. As Mercer St intersects important bike corridors such as Dexter Ave N and 5th Ave N, careful intersection and roadway design will be essential for the safety of all travelers in the area.

If you have any questions about the contents of this letter or the attached report, we would be happy to meet with you and/or your staff.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Blake Trask
Chair, SBAB



Max Hepp-Buchanan
Vice Chair, SBAB

Attachment (1)

Cc: Seattle City Councilmembers
Goran Sparrman, SDOT
Charlie Bookman, SDOT
Eric Tweit, SDOT
Kevin O'Neill, SDOT
Sam Woods, SDOT
Terrance Plumb, SDOT
Doug Cox, SDOT

Bikability Tour: Uptown to Downtown Connections

Date: October 22, 2011

Purpose: Review the corridors and connections between Mercer West and south downtown, exploring bikeability and proposing potential solutions to a more bikeable Seattle.

Areas of Interest: (1) Mercer West/North Portal; (2) 7th Ave; (3) Bell St Park; (4) 5th Ave; (5) 2nd Ave corridor; (6) 4th Ave

Attendees:

- Seattle City Council: Sally Bagshaw, Mike O'Brien
- Commute Seattle: Jamie Cheney, Jessica Szelag
- Seattle Bicycle Advisory Board: Ann Boyd, Allegra Calder, Sean Cryan, Max Hepp-Buchanan, Kelsey Jones-Casey, Liz Nixon, Blake Trask
- Seattle Citizen: Gabe Grant



Mercer West to Seattle Center

Observations:

- The connection across Mercer St on 5th Ave is important to connecting Uptown to the Seattle Center. Design needs to consider the complexity of the intersection.



Looking west on Mercer from 5th



Looking north on 5th across Mercer



Looking east on Mercer across 5th



Looking south on 5th from Mercer



Looking south on 5th at Seattle Center



Looking north on 5th at Seattle Center

- 5th Ave along the east side of the Seattle Center is an important connection.
- Bicycle travel through the Seattle Center is a logical and direct east/west route, much desired by Uptown bicycle users and others coming from downtown to Seattle Center and environs.

Recommendations:

- Build a separated bicycle facility from Aloha St to the Broad St/Thomas St intersection, perhaps requiring the acquisition of additional right-of-way to adjust for pedestrian traffic at the EMP.

- Construct a bikeway through the Seattle Center that connects Thomas St on both sides of the Seattle Center campus. Use “bicycle calming” treatments through Seattle Center to keep speeds low and avoid conflicts with pedestrians.

Taylor Ave N and Denny Way

Observations:

- The connection across Denny Way is critical to the Downtown to Seattle Center and Uptown routes.



Looking east on Denny from Taylor



Looking southeast on Denny from Taylor



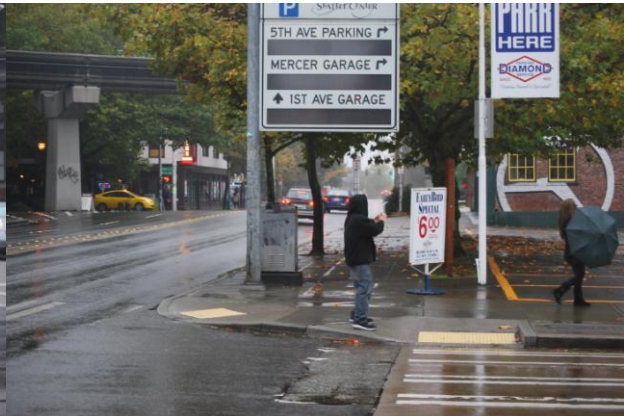
Looking south across Denny from Taylor



Looking south at Denny-Taylor crosswalk



Looking south on Taylor across Denny



Looking west at Denny-Taylor crosswalk

- Need multiple facilities heading north and south to facilitate multiple destinations in Downtown and severe elevation issues in the south end of Downtown.
- 6th Ave feels too far west to be the only connection.
- North/south connections get complicated when they cross Stewart St, as it is a major bus route.

Recommendations:

- Provide separated bike facilities on 2nd Ave, 4th Ave, and 5th Ave to connect Uptown/Seattle Center with Downtown.

7th Ave at Denny Way

Observations:

- 7th Ave bike lane heading southeast from Denny Way conflicts with both bus and car traffic. Buses have been observed staying right, in the bike lane, rather than merging left as they pull away from the bus stop south of Denny.



Looking south along 7th from Denny

Looking north along 7th across Denny

Recommendations:

- SDOT should review the bus merge at this stop and the right turn soon after at Bell that most buses execute.
- SDOT should review *all* bicycle facilities after implementation to see if they are working as intended or if they need modifications for improved safety.

North/South Downtown Routes

Observations:

- Multiple bicycle facilities are needed to support direct access to destinations at the north and south ends of downtown.



Looking north along 5th at Bell



Looking north along 2nd at Pine



Looking south along 2nd at Pine



Looking north along 4th at City Hall



Looking north along 4th at Spring



Taxis parked in the bicycle lane at Hotel Monaco

- Extreme grade at the south end of Downtown further prioritizes the need for bicycle facilities on multiple streets and at different elevations.

Recommendations:

- Convert the right lane of 5th Ave into a protected bicycle facility heading southbound. Move parking from the curb to under the monorail. Right turns can be made more safely by signal timing or restriction at some intersections.
- Install separated cycle track facilities on 2nd Ave and 4th Ave.