

April 2, 2024

TO: Mayor Bruce Harrell
SDOT Director Greg Spotts
Councilmember Rob Saka, Chair, Transportation Committee
Councilmember Joy Hollingsworth, Vice Chair, Transportation Committee

CC: Marco Lowe, Joanna Valencia, Johnathan Lewis, Adiam Emery, Lyle Bicknell
Seattle Planning Commission
Seattle Pedestrian Advisory Board
Seattle Bicycle Advisory Board

RE: Comment on Highway Mitigation Policies in the Seattle Transportation Plan

We are a coalition of advocates asking for stronger incorporation of our highway mitigation work into the Seattle Transportation Plan (STP). Our organizations represent the following civic initiatives:

- Lidding Interstate 5 in greater Downtown
- Lidding Interstate 5 between the University District and Wallingford
- Mitigating Highway 99 in South Park
- Redesigning Highway 99 in North Seattle

Collectively, we are addressing the social, environmental, and economic impacts of highways in all corners of Seattle. Almost every Seattle resident regularly travels through or across these freeway segments. All of our projects offer a citywide vision for a safer and well-maintained roadway network, creating better places for people to live in all kinds of housing, creating more parks and tree canopy, reducing pollution and climate-changing emissions, and bringing people together as One Seattle.



We would like to see these projects acknowledged in the draft STP. These projects are real and they are making good progress toward implementation. We have invested many years of volunteer hours, built tremendous public buy-in across all Council districts, and secured millions of dollars in funding for transportation planning, urban design, and community engagement.

The draft STP can help advance these efforts by adopting more direct policy support and listing these as capital projects (in addition to Aurora Avenue North). Clear support in the STP is essential to demonstrating Seattle's long-term commitments to our intergovernmental partners. Stronger policy support can also make Seattle more competitive for additional state and federal funding.

In particular, the STP should fulfill the direction given by [Council Resolution 32100](#), which directs SDOT to *"Integrate lidding concepts into transportation plans and plans for neighborhoods adjacent to and crossing Interstate 5, including the Seattle Transportation Plan..."* While the *"Examples of Effective Partnerships"* sidebar calls out Lid I-5 and Reconnect South Park, these are only brief illustrations and do not provide an indication of City commitments, policy support, or plan integration.



Interstate 5 and Highway 99 are owned by the Washington State Department of Transportation, and the Seattle Department of Transportation is a key leader in advancing these projects. Highways disrupt large portions of the local Seattle street network, causing east-west traffic and transit routes to be shunted to the few street connections that remain. All of these projects are in areas that include [census tracts identified by Seattle](#) as "Highest" and "Second Highest" priorities for achieving greater equity in planning and investment. Reconnections for streets and other community-based land uses over highways can improve the equity of mobility by making it easier to walk, bike, and roll, which are the most affordable, healthy, and sustainable modes of transportation available.

We make the following observations and recommendations to improve the Seattle Transportation Plan.

RECOMMENDATION #1: Add and update highway mitigation projects to the STP Large Capital Projects list under Implementation Strategy Chapter 5 and Appendix A. These projects are advancing in the development process, equal to or greater than some listed capital projects, and most have SDOT staff already assigned to them.

[Lidding I-5 in greater Downtown](#) is using new state and federal grant funding to advance planning and engagement work for reconnecting multiple streets, providing urban open space, and creating new economic development and housing opportunities. The STP should list this as a capital project at least between Thomas Street and Main Street; see an [example map here](#). The project has undergone an affirmative feasibility analysis, and there is significant policy support and public interest at the local, state, and federal levels. Council Resolution 32100 and the Comprehensive Plan document the City's endorsement.

[Lidding I-5 in North Seattle](#) between the University District and Wallingford is another opportunity on this major highway. The STP should align with community priorities by listing this as a capital project between NE 45th Street and NE 50th Street. The draft STP includes a proposed pedestrian-bicycle bridge at NE 47th Street as a possible project (Project #14). While east-west bike connections are needed, the rapid growth in the University District and surrounding neighborhoods calls for bigger thinking. A lid over I-5 could provide community connections, open space, and affordable housing for an area that lacks all three.

[Reconnect South Park](#) is leading a process to create more space for housing, habitat, youth, and local businesses in a vibrant, diverse community with strong connections to the Duwamish River and a rich history of connectedness to the land. This community-led initiative is envisioning the future of State Route 99. The City should list this as a capital project in the STP. While the design outcome is not yet determined (alternatives include rerouting, lidding/undergrounding, and partial removal), the project supports equity and environmental justice themes of the STP. Seattle OPCD is currently supporting community efforts with technical support and project funding from state and federal grants.

[Reimagining Aurora Avenue North](#) is an opportunity to improve one of the most dangerous streets in the city. In the STP, the planned multimodal improvements in the Aurora Ave N capital project should include a complete north-south bike route along or parallel to Aurora. Almost one in five traffic deaths in Seattle happens because of Aurora. The highway divides four urban villages, separating neighbors, schools, and nearly 100,000 people. With the city intending for tens of thousands more people to live along Aurora, the 100-year-old highway design will continue to be a danger to people walking, biking, busing, and driving along and across the corridor. With a \$50 million down payment from the state legislature, now is the time for the city to lead a coordinated effort to address housing, transportation, public safety, and green stormwater infrastructure along Aurora.

RECOMMENDATION #2: Integrate highway mitigation more directly into additional Key Moves (Chapter 3). The introduction to Key Move “Transportation Justice 2” acknowledges the opportunity to address highway divisions. This Key Move should go farther and identify these four projects. For example, add an additional bullet point:

x. Implement reconnection projects such as lids over Interstate 5 and redesigns of Highway 99, which can restore local street networks, improve options for walking, biking, and riding transit, create open space, and provide more access to housing options, particularly for BIPOC residents and vulnerable communities living near highways. (Supports TEF 12.1, 55.5, 56.1, 56.5)

Highway mitigation is also relevant to these other Key Moves.

- Under MM3 bullet (d), added new text (underlined): *Coordinate with relevant partner agencies on projects of regional and statewide significance within the City of Seattle, such as the I-5 Master Plan, Lid I-5 efforts citywide, Reconnect South Park, or high-speed rail corridors*
- Mobility PG2. Example bullet point: *x. Create new street connections and enhance existing connections over highways, including with lids and highway redesigns.*
- Livability PP3. Example bullet point: *x. Partner with WSDOT to create new public spaces within or over highway right-of-way.*

Together, we are creating pivotal projects and building a brighter future for Seattle's next generations. These projects help the rubber meet the road on our shared values of safety, equity, sustainability, mobility, and livability. We are willing and eager to meet and discuss how we can shape a forward-looking and inclusive transportation strategy for our city. Thank you.

Sincerely,



The Aurora Reimagined Coalition



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