



March 2, 2024

TO: Mayor Bruce Harrell  
SDOT Director Greg Spotts

CC: Councilmember Rob Saka, Chair, Transportation Committee  
Councilmember Joy Hollingsworth, Vice Chair, Transportation Committee  
Marco Lowe, Joanna Valencia, Johnathan Lewis, Adiam Emery, Lyle Bicknell  
Seattle Planning Commission  
Seattle Pedestrian Advisory Board  
Seattle Bicycle Advisory Board

**RE: Comment on Lid Policies in the Seattle Transportation Plan**

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Mayor Harrell and Director Spotts,

We are writing to comment on the Seattle Transportation Plan which is due for adoption in 2024. After omissions in the August 2023 draft, we are encouraged to see the February 2024 version includes lidding I-5 under “Maintenance and Modernization” (page 71) and “Leveraging Partnerships for Success” (page 114). However, these statements lack context, details, and urgency, and they should be reinforced with stronger policy support in the Transportation Plan.

In February 2023 SDOT staff held a listening session with our team. Dozens of public comments in [phase 1](#) and [phase 2](#) of plan development support lidding I-5 and associated improvements to nearby streets. Further, [Council Resolution 32100](#) establishes a clear directive for SDOT:

*Section 1. The City of Seattle supports efforts to lid Interstate 5, where feasible within the city limits, including but not limited to the area between South Dearborn Street and Thomas Street, and the area between NE 45th Street and NE 50th Street.*

*Section 2. The City Council supports the intent of the Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) and the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) to work with the Washington State Department of Transportation, the Federal Highway Administration, Federal and State elected officials, and Lid I-5 to:*

*A. Integrate lidding concepts into transportation plans and plans for neighborhoods adjacent to and crossing Interstate 5, including the Seattle Transportation Plan...*

These are our recommendations to follow through on Resolution 32100 and public support.

**1) Add lidding I-5 as a STP Large Capital Project “new connection” in both greater Downtown and the University District (Implementation Strategy Chapter 5 and Appendix A).**

[Lidding I-5 in greater Downtown](#) is the next major civic project after the Waterfront is completed and we reimagine the role of Downtown. Lids will reconnect multiple streets, provide urban open space, and create new economic development and housing opportunities. The project is advanced in the project development process, equal to or greater than many of the other transportation capital projects. The project has gone through an affirmative feasibility study, it

has been allocated local and state funding, and there is significant policy support and public interest in the local neighborhoods, citywide, and statewide. The Appendix A illustrative map should extend at least between Thomas Street and Main Street; see an [example map here](#).

[Lidding I-5 in the University District](#) is likewise an opportunity. The draft STP includes a proposed pedestrian-bicycle bridge at NE 47th Street as a possible project (Project #14). Let's take a moment to think bigger. While east-west bike connections are needed, the rapid growth in the University and surrounding neighborhoods calls for additional considerations at this time. A lid over I-5 could provide community connections, open space, and affordable housing for an area that lacks all three. A community-led effort is currently underway to raise awareness and funding for a feasibility study. The City should align with community priorities by listing this as a capital project. The Appendix A illustrative map should extend at least between NE 45<sup>th</sup> Street and NE 50<sup>th</sup> Street.

The projects should be evaluated using the project prioritization framework. Notable funding sources include the \$4 billion federal Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhood Access and Equity programs. The current "effective partnership" sidebar should mention that lidding I-5 is also an opportunity to reconnect streets for multimodal mobility.

## **2) Integrate lidding I-5 into additional Key Move policies (Chapter 3), building off**

**Comprehensive Plan policy T 3.12.** Recognizing that lidding I-5 is a significant opportunity, the Comprehensive Plan has also contained lid-supportive policies for many years, including [Growth Strategy Policy 3.13](#), [Parks Policy 1.17](#), and [Transportation Policy 3.12](#) (copied below):

*T 3.12. Look for opportunities to reestablish or improve connections across I-5 and State Highways by creating new crossings, enhancing streets where State Highways cross overhead, or constructing lids, especially where these can also enhance opportunities for development or open space, affordable housing, and neighborhood cohesion.*

Based on T 3.12, lidding I-5 most relates to these Key Move policies and should be incorporated:

- *[Equity TJ2](#): Address inequities in the transportation system by prioritizing investments for impacted communities.* [The City's [Racial and Social Equity Composite Index](#) identifies many areas near I-5 as "Highest" and "Second Highest" priorities for achieving greater equity in planning and investment. In greater Downtown, of the people within one-quarter mile of the freeway 54% are people of color (39% citywide), 88% of households are renters (54% citywide), and 49% of households own no vehicle (17% citywide).]
- *[Mobility PG1](#): Create seamless travel connections.* [Lidding I-5 can reconnect many streets that are disrupted by I-5, creating new opportunities for seamless mobility connections with all modes of transportation, especially walking and biking.]
- *[Livability PP3](#): Co-create and enhance public spaces for playing and gathering to improve community health.* [Lidding I-5 can enhance the use of our shared public right-of-way by co-creating public spaces for playing, gathering, commerce, housing, and mobility.]

Lidding I-5 also supports these Key Move policies:

- *[Safety S4](#): Provide safer routes to schools, parks, transit, community gathering spaces, and other common destinations.*
- *[Sustainability CA2](#): Green city streets with landscaping and street trees to better handle changing climate.*

**3) Add a special section (i.e. one page) on lidding I-5 in in one or more of these Part II Technical Report functional elements: Bicycle and E-Mobility, Pedestrian, and People Streets and Public Spaces.**

This special section will explain the benefits of freeway lids for mobility and public space, summarize the results of OPCD's 2020 [feasibility study](#) for greater Downtown, and map the location of existing freeway lids in the city and identify long-term candidate locations for new lids. Candidate locations include at least [greater Downtown](#), Chinatown International District/Yesler Terrace, the [University District/Wallingford](#), Green Lake/Roosevelt ([Lake City Way interchange](#)), and Jackson Park ([130th Street Station](#)). See our own [citywide map](#).

The People Streets and Public Spaces element shows there is a strong desire for people streets and public space around I-5 in greater Downtown and the University District.

Figure 3: Frequency of PSPS-related Supportive Comments (Phase 1 Engagement)

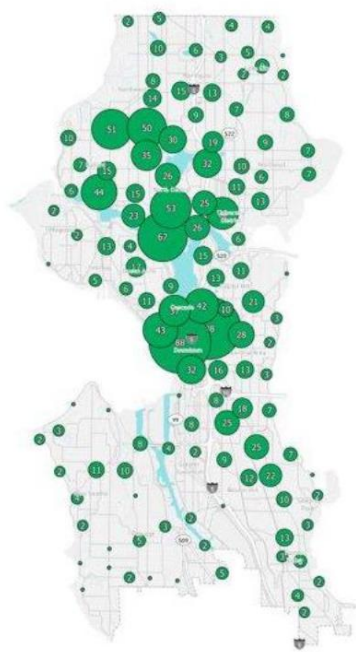


Figure 4: Heat Map of Where People Would Like to See a People Street or Public Space (Phase 2 Engagement)



**Plan for Lidding I-5 to Build a More Connected, Sustainable, and Equitable Seattle**

Lidding I-5 is supported by the voters ([more than 60 percent](#) for the Downtown project). The City's [legislative agenda](#) has already led to securement of state funding.

A supportive plan helps Seattle remain competitive for state and federal funding and will align with the [Downtown Activation Plan](#) and the earlier [Imagine Greater Downtown](#) plan. The greater Downtown neighborhoods are targeted for growth in housing and employment by city, county, and regional growth management policies. Similar conditions exist in the University District and other multifamily-zoned districts near I-5, particularly where there are schools and light rail stations next to I-5.

Over 20 streets, thousands of residents, and many businesses were removed when I-5 was constructed in the 1960's. The freeway disrupts the citywide street grid with dead-ended streets,

unconventional freeway on- and off-ramps, missing sidewalks, and too few and unsafe crosswalks. In greater Downtown alone from 2014 to 2019, cars collided with people walking or biking a reported 76 times at intersections above I-5 or at its on-ramps and off-ramps, while many more non-injury collisions and minor collisions and near misses are likely unreported. Seattle's Vision Zero goal seeks to eliminate traffic deaths by the year 2030, and provides a blueprint for creating safe streets in the lid study areas.

In the greater Downtown study area, 49% of households do not own a vehicle and many people walk to work. Walking is the form of commute for approximately 40% of people in the study area, yet the SDOT [walking map](#) does not have any preferred routes that cross over I-5 except at Freeway Park. There is only one fully separated, bi-directional bicycle route across I-5 in the study area. Furthermore, lidding can reconnect at least streets that were removed when I-5 was built, and overpasses can be transformed into proper streets with sidewalks, crosswalks, and bike lanes, mitigating much of the deplorable damage that was done to Seattle's street grid. Open spaces would have the room needed for ADA routes, allowing the elderly and disabled to navigate the areas' steep topography. The proximity of the lid and the improved connectivity it provides to the city's major hospitals and clinics would be a boon for all Seattleites, including the many elderly residents who live on First Hill.



*Conceptual renderings of what lidding I-5 could look like in greater Downtown with a mix of parks and development*

In the spirit of collaboration, we are willing and eager to meet and discuss how we can collectively and collaboratively shape a forward-looking, inclusive transportation strategy for our city. Together, we can revise the Seattle Transportation Plan to incorporate the Lid I-5 project and ensure that it reflects our shared commitment to safety, equity, sustainability, mobility, and livability.

Thank you for considering this pivotal project. We look forward to the opportunity to contribute further to its success and to the broader goals of our city.

Sincerely,

**Lid I-5 Steering Committee**

Natalie Bicknell

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Jim Castanes

Michael Connolly

Isaac Curtis

Liz Dunn

John Feit, co-chair

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**Lid I-5 Coalition Partner Organizations**

Seattle Parks Foundation (fiscal sponsor)  
Allied Arts  
American Institute of Architects – Seattle  
Capitol Hill Ecodistrict  
Central Seattle Greenways  
Community Roots Housing  
Downtown Seattle Association  
First Hill Improvement Association  
Futurewise

Freeway Park Association  
Melrose Promenade  
Meridian Condominium Homeowners  
Association  
Northwest Progressive Institute  
Parents for a Better Downtown Seattle  
Pike/Pine Urban Neighborhood Council  
The Urbanist

**Lid I-5 Advisory Council**

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