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Sept. 8, 2016

Hon. Ed Murray, Mayor
601 Fifth Ave., Floor 7, P.O. 94749
Seattle, WA 98124-4749

Scott Kubly, SDOT Director
P.O. Box 34996
Seattle, WA 98124-4996

Levy to Move Seattle Oversight
Committee, c/o SDOT
P.O. Box 34996
Seattle, WA 98124-4996

Hon. Sally Bagshaw, Lorena Gonzalez, Rob
Johnson, Mike O'Brien, and Kshama Sawant
Seattle City Council, P.O. Box 34025
Seattle, WA 98124-4025

To Mayor Murray, Councilmembers, Director Kubly, and the Oversight Committee:

In response to our [August 9 letter](#) that went to many of you, raising concerns about the Fairview Avenue North bridge project, we received a [Sept. 2 letter](#) from SDOT Director Kubly. While his letter is appreciated, it raises new questions that we hope will be answered fully and publicly before any irreversible commitments are made. The Move Seattle levy funds are too precious to be spent on a project whose current scope may not be needed for safety and may not meet multimodal needs.

Why should the Fairview bridge continue to have only one traffic lane southbound but two lanes northbound? The 2013 [Time, Size, and Location \(TS&L\) report](#) states on page 13 regarding the alternatives SDOT examined that “All alternative sections included two northbound lanes and one southbound lane.” So far as we can ascertain, all other studies of the Fairview bridge replacement have also assumed that, as at present, the bridge should have two lanes northbound but just one lane southbound. But nowhere can we find any analysis by SDOT or its consultants of whether that is a wise assumption.

We suggest that for the Fairview bridge project to leave us with just one rather than two southbound traffic lanes, could seriously constrict buses and other vehicles just when they will be increasing and when more capacity is needed. SDOT’s own Roosevelt to Downtown High Capacity Transit Study found almost two years ago that along the entire corridor, Fairview Avenue North and the “Mercer Mess” impose the worst delays for the route 70 buses and (assuming just one southbound Fairview Bridge lane) will continue to do so for the “rapid ride” buses that are to come. The same delays are and will be encountered by other

motor vehicles, including trucks. It is urgent for SDOT to go back to the drawing board and give full, public consideration to having two lanes on the bridge in each direction.

What SDOT seems to have forgotten is that the Fairview Avenue bridge long had two traffic lanes in each direction, but that in about 1990 (with the support of the Eastlake Community Council) the outer southbound lane was converted to become a bicycle-pedestrian lane. This of course was a period when South Lake Union was undeveloped and generated little traffic; and when few Metro buses used Fairview Avenue North, preferring Eastlake Avenue and I-5.

Having just one traffic lane southbound on the bridge made sense at the time, but the future is another matter entirely. SDOT must not assume that this same lane format will work for the future. And yet that is what SDOT has done. With the help of a public records request going back to Jan. 1, 2012, we have examined all the documents, and find that the obvious option of having two lanes in each direction was never seriously considered or even brought up by SDOT or its consultants.

Why replace the concrete and steel east Fairview bridge when the Move Seattle levy ordinance calls only for replacing the timbered west Fairview bridge? The “Move Seattle” transportation levy proposal that Mayor Murray sent to the City Council in May 2015 included in its funded projects to “Replace Seattle’s last timber vehicle bridge (Fairview Avenue).” The City Council passed and the Mayor signed the July ordinance 124796 which put the levy before the voters and which they approved in November 2015. The ordinance’s Attachment A uses this exact same language in setting aside \$27 million to “Replace Seattle’s last timber vehicle bridge (Fairview Avenue).”

But the documents we reviewed under the state Public Records Act show that during the very time when the Mayor and SDOT were proposing to the City Council this language for Attachment A to the levy ordinance, SDOT was planning to spend levy dollars to replace not just Fairview’s timber bridge, but also the concrete and steel bridge that parallels it just to the east. The SDOT web page about the Fairview bridge project stated during the levy campaign, and still does, that “The current bridge, built more than 65 years ago, needs to be replaced. The timber-supported (west) bridge is structurally deficient and seismically vulnerable.” Unfortunately, SDOT has been using this statement to camouflage its plans for a very expensive demolition and replacement of the concrete and steel (east) bridge that does not need to be replaced, only rehabilitated.

SDOT continues to misportray the east bridge as needing replacement. It is regrettable that SDOT ignored the advice of outside experts who produced for it the October 2014 [Value Engineering study](#). They found that the east “bridge’s condition may not warrant replacement” and that a number of straightforward structural reinforcements would be sufficient to extend the life of the bridge and to prevent collapse during a seismic event. In answer to a specific question in our Aug. 9 letter, SDOT Director Kubly in his Sept. 2 letter is forced to admit that after receiving the outside advice of the value engineering team to rehabilitate rather than replace the east bridge, SDOT “did not commission any further

constructability, seismic, or cost analyses regarding rehabilitating the east bridge.” This decision unfortunately prevented SDOT from examining reasonable measures for rehabilitating the east bridge that it had not considered in the original decision to junk the east bridge entirely. In the Sept. 2 letter Kubly states that rehabilitation is “no longer an option.” That is a short-sighted and potentially very wasteful decision to make at this stage.

Because SDOT became prematurely committed to demolishing rather than rehabilitating the east bridge, it failed to fully consider the value engineering study’s finding that “The condition of the bridge is good in general. ... It is in much better load-carrying and seismic condition than many of the City’s bridge structures. ... This proposal would change the scope of the project, but open up opportunities for alternate use of funding.” Indeed, there are many competing needs for levy funds. It is hard to understand why SDOT is so quick to spend tens of millions of scarce levy funds on destroying a bridge that its own outside experts say is worth saving.

We are troubled by the dramatically lower sufficiency rating that SDOT assigned to the east bridge after deciding to demolish it. Appendix C of the [Time, Size, and Location \(TS&L\) report](#) has the then-current bridge inspection reports for both bridges. The west (timber) bridge is rated very low, only 24 (out of 100). But the east (concrete and steel) bridge receives is rated very high, 85 (out of 100), among the handful of the safest and most structurally sound bridges in Seattle. But once the TS&L report had recommended scrapping the east bridge, SDOT slashed its rating of that bridge, all the way down to a current 41 (out of 100), putting it among Seattle bridges that are least safe and structurally sound. [For the full list, click [here](#).] We ask the City Council and the Move Seattle Oversight Committee to investigate whether SDOT’s dramatic downgrading of this bridge’s rating was legitimate or was an effort to boost its case for demolishing the bridge.

Securing a rehabilitated east bridge laterally to a new west bridge would save levy dollars, avoid damage to the Steam Plant building (ZymoGenetics), and keep Fairview open to buses, cars, trucks, bikes, and pedestrians. The value engineering team observes: “A seismic strategy to design the new west bridge to help laterally support the east bridge could be employed. This should also improve the seismic resistivity of the east bridge by reducing the demand displacements.” The team particularly urged this lateral strategy because SDOT had given so little consideration to it (as SDOT continues to do).

The value engineering report states that “Another big advantage of forgoing the east bridge replacement is to minimize impacts to the ZymoGenetics Building.” SDOT’s plan is to demolish the east bridge and build a new one, within just two feet of the landmarked and architecturally distinguished Steam Plant that now houses the important biotechnology firm ZymoGenetics. To build a single new bridge, SDOT would drive very deep new pilings quite close to the ZymoGenetics building. SDOT has failed to give adequate weight to the need to avoid damage and disturbance to this important adjacent property. The value engineering team’s approach would move the pile-driving away from the ZymoGenetics building.

SDOT's rush to demolish not just the west (timber) bridge, but also the east (concrete and steel) bridge was made easy by its failure to consider the huge problems its doing so will pose for buses, bicyclists, pedestrians, motorists, and trucks; and for the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center as most of this traffic has to detours onto E. Aloha Street through its formerly peaceful campus. We urge the City Council and the Move Seattle Oversight Committee to advocate for these stakeholders as SDOT has not.

Need for improved transparency. SDOT seems to have suppressed and misrepresented the 2014 value engineering study in its communications with the Mayor's office, the City Council, the public, affected businesses, and King County Metro. The Fairview bridge project web site cites the study as if it backs up SDOT's plans to demolish both the east and west bridges, not mentioning the study's recommendation against demolishing the east bridge.

The SDOT Fairview bridge staff rebuffed requests from the Eastlake Community Council for the value engineering study beginning in December 2015. ECC obtained the study in March 2016 only by filing a public records request two months earlier whereby SDOT was forced by state law to provide it.

An unfortunate consequence of SDOT's suppression of the value engineering study was to keep it from the public until after the February 23, 2016 deadline for filing an appeal under the State Environmental Policy Act of SDOT's determination that the full bridge replacement will not have a probable significant adverse impact on the environment and that an environmental impact statement (EIS) is not required. Were an EIS being done, the alternative of rehabilitating rather than destroying the east bridge would be studied, with consideration for impacts on buses, cars, trucks, bikes, and pedestrians—impacts that SDOT continues to undervalue.

Conclusion. For SDOT to be an effective and credible agency, it must be trusted to be a responsible steward of public funds. SDOT must also carry out infrastructure projects in ways that reduce unnecessary burdens on the traveling public and on adjacent property owners. Without further detailed consideration of a rehabilitation option for the east bridge, SDOT will have failed on both of these counts.

My colleague, ECC Vice President Eric Suni, is currently on a camping trip and unavailable. Upon his return we will welcome the opportunity for further dialogue toward a wise outcome on the Fairview Avenue North bridge in the use of levy dollars and in the imposition of social costs.

Sincerely,



Chris Leman, President
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