



117 E. Louisa St. #1
Seattle, WA 98102-3278

January 29, 2016

Alison Townsend, Strategic Advisor
Seattle Department of Transportation
P.O. Box 34996
Seattle, WA 98124-4996

Dear Ms. Townsend:

The Eastlake Community Council (ECC) appreciates very much that the Roosevelt-to-Downtown High-Capacity Transit (RDHCT) study team took part in our public meeting on January 12. As a result of that meeting and continuing discussions among the ECC board of directors, this letter serves as additional follow-up to our prior two letters and submits additional questions and concerns about the street design for Eastlake Ave.

Parking

Many community members expressed concern during our January 12 public meeting about the potential loss of on-street parking as a result of this project's implementation. On-street parking is important to the Eastlake community for a number of reasons.

1. **Business access:** Many businesses rely on customers arriving by car. This includes businesses of all types including restaurants and retail stores. Many businesses, especially small businesses, have limited access to off-street parking of any kind and would be adversely affected if customers choose not to visit because of an inability to park.
2. **Access for people with limited mobility:** While ECC supports efforts to enhance walking, bicycling, and mass transit, it must be recognized that some individuals are either permanently or temporarily unable to utilize these transportation modes. There are various reasons why a person may be of limited mobility, and many of these individuals rely on the ability to park near their residences and/or near businesses.
3. **Quality of life:** Parking also affects quality of life for many residents. For those who drive – either out of necessity or preference – finding a parking space close to their home is extremely valuable. Regular activities such as grocery shopping become considerably more difficult if the closest available space is many blocks from someone's home. The inability to find parking may also limit the ability for guests to visit. In general, a lack of available parking can make a neighborhood less desirable both to live in and to visit.

The existing lack of parking in Eastlake is identified both in public comments and in the Existing Conditions Report.

1. Many residents have complained about a lack of available on-street parking in response to projects and policies of SDOT and other City agencies over the past several years.
2. Demands for parking have also risen along with an increase in neighborhood density. As Eastlake is an Urban Village along a bus route, new developments here are currently exempt from off-street parking requirements. While not every resident in these new developments owns a car, many (including in microhousing projects) do and have no option for parking besides on streets, which are already near capacity.
3. Parking is further strained by “hide and ride” commuters who take advantage of Eastlake’s proximity to large employment centers and its areas of unrestricted parking. These individuals may work in downtown, South Lake Union, or at the University of Washington (or are students there) where off-street parking is expensive. Rather than pay to park at their office, they drive and park in Eastlake and then use Metro to reach their final destination. As off-street garages can cost \$100-200 per month, this “hide and ride” approach is worth well over a thousand dollars annually to these individuals. Improved bus service to downtown and UW through BRT that comes without further parking restrictions would only encourage this type of activity.
4. Unrestricted on-street parking encourages car commuting. Especially in the southern part of Eastlake where there are a number of large employers and office buildings (e.g., the Alexandria properties, Zymo Genetics, Fred Hutch, etc.), unrestricted parking or parking with long permitted time windows provides de facto free parking to those driving to Eastlake for work. The City should not be incentivizing employees to drive by providing what is in effect a subsidy.
5. Section 4 (“Findings) of Appendix B of the Existing Conditions Report states on page 7, “Along Eastlake Avenue NE [sic], in the Eastlake neighborhood, there are no paid parking spaces. Approximately 22% of the spaces are time-limited and 26% of the time-limited are within an RPZ. The remaining spaces are unrestricted. **A high parking utilization was observed.**” [emphasis ours]
6. While the Existing Conditions Report focused on parking along Eastlake Avenue, it did not, despite ECC’s requests, address parking on side streets. Numerous comments from residents of Eastlake have noted that on-street parking on the neighborhood’s side streets is extremely limited.

Appendix B of the Existing Conditions report identifies 327 on-street parking spaces along Eastlake Avenue between Galer Street and the University Bridge. 18 of these are 30-minute load zones or 3-minute passenger load zones, 57 are time-limited, 15 are RPZ, and 237 are unrestricted parking spaces. Many of the proposals for a new Eastlake street design would involve the loss of some or all of these parking spaces, and the ECC has considerable concerns about the ability of Eastlake’s side streets to meet the neighborhood’s parking needs should parking along Eastlake Avenue be reduced.

ECC repeats its request that SDOT conduct a parking study for the Eastlake neighborhood that evaluates the availability of parking, both on- and off-street, throughout the neighborhood, not just on Eastlake Avenue. While the Existing Conditions Report provides useful information about Eastlake Avenue, it is woefully inadequate for understanding the full existing conditions for parking in Eastlake. More data would allow for a more thorough evaluation of alternatives for HCT in this corridor and would also help to identify the most effective mitigation strategies if the final design includes the loss of existing parking.

If any parking is removed from Eastlake Avenue as part of the implementation of HCT in this corridor, ECC believes that measures must be taken to reduce the impact of this parking loss on the Eastlake neighborhood. High-use bicycle facilities and mass public transportation may create new clientele for local businesses as they make it easier than before for some people to get to and from Eastlake. However, it is still reasonable to expect a period of disruption as new business is fostered. In addition, certain businesses are less likely to benefit from potential new customers arriving by bus and more likely to be hurt by the loss of nearby on-street parking. There are a number of ways in which the project team could help to address these concerns:

1. SDOT could conduct intercept studies in which customers at local businesses would be asked about the transportation mode that they used to arrive at that business. This data would provide more information about the risk of parking loss to business and could help to identify businesses most at-risk from the loss of parking. ECC would be open to collaborating with SDOT to develop a proper methodology and to conduct this type of study in order to produce the most relevant data.
2. SDOT and other City departments should consider programs to provide support to small businesses to help them manage a transition to a new Eastlake Avenue format. These programs could include initiatives such as marketing assistance (to reach potential customers who commute by walking, biking, or riding the bus), tax relief, or other supportive measures.
3. In order for bicycle commuters to stop and patronize local businesses, they need a place to safely lock-up their bike. As part of its corridor analysis, SDOT should identify viable options for bike parking, especially near the business district and other areas of higher economic activity.

The parking situation in the Eastlake neighborhood could potentially be improved through changes in the restricted parking zone (RPZ) program. Another branch of SDOT is beginning a review of the RPZ program, and ECC will be participating in that review. While some possibilities (such as to increase the price of RPZ permits and limit the number available per household) will be very controversial in Eastlake, there will be little controversy to expanding the RPZ to more of the blocks that are eligible.

To aid in our review, ECC requests more data from SDOT about the RPZ permit program. In particular, we would like to receive data about

- a. The number of eligible RPZ households in Eastlake

- b. The number of active RPZ permits
- c. The number of households with more than one RPZ permit
- d. The concentration of RPZ permits by block.
- e. A comparison of the number of RPZ permits in buildings with on-site parking vs. in buildings without on-site parking
- f. A comparison of the number of RPZ permits in microhousing projects vs. non-microhousing projects

ECC would like to work with SDOT to investigate programs that would help to more effectively utilize the available off-street parking in Eastlake. Many off-street parking lots or garages have very high occupancy only during certain times of day and can be virtually empty of parked cars at other times when the owner could be making some additional revenue by charging for this use. Such programs may best be facilitated as a type of public-private partnership coordinated by SDOT.

Cut-through Traffic

Traffic congestion on Eastlake Avenue already motivates some drivers to use side streets as a way to try to avoid traffic. As drivers taking these routes are focused on reducing their commute time, they often travel at high speeds (relative to posted limits) and with less regard for people walking or biking in the area. ECC is concerned that the reduction of general purpose traffic lanes could increase the amount of cut-through traffic in Eastlake. Some locations of particular concern with regard to cut-through traffic include

1. E. Boston Street between Boylston Ave. E. and Eastlake Avenue (because it provides a means of reaching the on-ramp for I-5 South while avoiding E Lynn Street, this is a common site of cut-through traffic).
2. E. Hamlin Street and E. Edgar Street between Boylston Avenue East and Eastlake Avenue (this provides a means of accessing I-5 North without using E Lynn Street).
3. Fairview Avenue East between Fuhrman Avenue East and E. Hamlin St.; and between Roanoke Street and Fairview Avenue North.
4. Minor Avenue E. between E. Roanoke St. and E Newton Street
5. Yale Avenue East between E. Edgar St. and Eastlake Avenue
6. Many residents also report that various alleys (such as the alley between Franklin Ave. E and Eastlake Ave. and the alley between Eastlake Ave and Yale Avenue E.) are commonly-used for cut-through traffic.

In light of these concerns, ECC has a number of questions for the RDHCT project team:

1. Has SDOT done any origin and destination studies that would help to identify the current extent of cut-through traffic and model the possible increases in the future? If not, we request that SDOT conduct such studies soon.
2. Does the modeling for the different RDHCT street design alternatives include any accounting for cut-through traffic, and if so, how?

3. What steps would SDOT recommend to reduce the amount of cut-through traffic in existing hotspots?

Walking Time Methodology

The proposed Roosevelt-to-Downtown BRT line is intended to be a part of the City's BRT network. The goal of this network, as outlined in SDOT presentations, is by 2025 to have 72% of City residents with 10-minute or better all-day transit service within a 10-minute walk from their home. ECC requests more information about the methodology for calculating a 10-minute walk for the purposes of this metric. If this is calculated simply based on distance, it may give an inaccurate description of actual walk-times as some Seattle neighborhoods (certainly Eastlake) have significant hills adjoining transit routes that will slow walking speed to and from the bus. This issue takes on added importance because the BRT proposal includes the elimination of several bus stops in Eastlake, so that RDHCT could conceivably increase rather than reduce the walking time for many Eastlake residents to and from the bus.

ECC looks forward to the project team's response to our concerns and to continuing dialogue about the key issues involved in this corridor study.

Sincerely,

Eric Suni, Vice President
eric.a.sun@gmail.com



Chris Leman, President
cleman@u.oo.net