

Magnolia Bridge Replacement Project Speakers Bureau

Group/Organization: Seattle Design Commission
Date: April 17, 2003
Location: Key Tower, Room 2750
Team Members: Kirk Jones, Teresa Platt, Lee Holloway, Lesley Bain,
Steve Johnson, Peter Smith, Hadley Greene, Sarah
Brandt, Lee Holloway, Lamar Scott

Overview

The design team briefed the Seattle Design Commission for the second time, discussing the project's status and the decision to complete an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Kirk Jones introduced the project, explained how the team had narrowed the field to three final routes, and discussed the reasoning behind eliminating Alternative B. Lesley Bain presented information about key urban design considerations, and Lamar Scott provided technical information about primary engineering constraints for the bridge. The team then opened the floor for questions and comments.

Notes

Questions raised by the Commissioners:

- What happens along the bluff area? Is there public land and access to the beach, or does the bluff simply plunge into the water?
- What's the Port thinking in terms of land use in the Interbay area?
- How wide would the actual bridge be (in both lanes and structure width)?
- Have you considered ways to "break out" different pieces of the routes, for example using the north part of Alternative H along with Alternative D? Could spreading out the facility and creating capacity in different areas limit the size of a structure? That may increase construction costs, but could also be a better design.
- What's the best solution for getting pedestrians and bikes to the shoreline?
- Regarding providing access to the waterfront from Galer, it seems that whatever you select will be a huge structure. Can Alternative B be developed as a smaller pedestrian/bike trail to the waterfront?
- Can accessibility to the waterfront be ameliorated through a solution that extends, for example, Smith Cove Park (creating a pedestrian connection through the park)?

Comments made by the Commissioners:

- When comparing Alternatives A and D, the shoreline is precious. Today there is a tendency to look at transportation infrastructure before land use, but the reverse should be true in terms of planning for long-term usage. What the Port decides to do really isn't that crucial (they seem to be moving away from operating as a Port, and working more as a land developer). In terms of long-term development and the future development of Piers 90/91, Alternative A looks like it could be another viaduct, while Alternative D offers the potential for more fruitful land use options in the future. Avoid a project that creates more infrastructure that will soon be considered an obstacle.
- The Commission fears "520 Syndrome," or the creation of a very wide structure that really doesn't provide additional capacity. The attraction of the northern part of Alternative H is that it could get some traffic up north, reduce the vertical climb needed, and reduce the width of the southern structure.
- It's not the Commission's job to identify the preferred alternative, but rather to highlight the principles that the design team should be considering as they move forward. Some of these principles include:
 - Responding to the topography of the area
 - Utilizing existing infrastructure creatively, such as the diagonal street of Thorndyke (which points to using Alternative H)
 - Focusing on getting the majority of people where they want to go; the southern part of Alternative H looks like it's working very hard to get people to places through circuitous routes (and most would not want to use it). The north part of Alternative H, however, is very desirable.
- The southern portion of Alternative H that heads up the toe of the bluff doesn't look like an attractive option for most trying to get to downtown Seattle from Magnolia. Perceptually it looks to be too indirect, and the cost/benefits aren't sufficient to create such an indirect route. Alternative H(2) is better than H(1); (H(1) won't serve many people, looks expensive, and is unnecessary).
- Considering the Olmsted Plan is good. Many times project teams seek to satisfy neighborhood issues without looking at the larger region or context. The Commission encourages the team to continue emphasizing throughout the EIS the need for access to the waterfront from Magnolia vs. from Seattle as a whole. Magnolia's needs shouldn't have precedence over the entire Seattle area.
- The EIS should address the fact that Magnolia's population loves the seclusion of being on the hill. Also, consider the paradox that while the neighborhood wants seclusion, they also want increased access. (As one Commissioner put it, "People who live on top of hills should not have easy access to the waterfront.")

- Commissioners like the idea of the surface connection to 21st Ave.
- Investigate the possibility of connecting the existing route to Thorndyke, even though the neighborhood will fight a perceived change in the transportation route.
- Consult the Alaska Way Viaduct EIS for an example of how pedestrian and public access to the waterfront should be studied separately from transportation needs. Make public realm access to the waterfront an explicit study area separate from transportation.
- It would be helpful to see where pedestrian connections exist in relation to proposed routes on the poster boards (perhaps with an acetate overlay).

Action Items

The Commission thanked the team for providing continued briefings on the project, and made the following recommendations:

- The Commission supports the broad evaluation of the regional factors shaping the bridge project.
- The Commission encourages the design team to create and maintain a comprehensive and cohesive vision for the project in light of unknown future development.
- The Commission is concerned with the potential width and visual and physical intrusion that the new bridge could create.
- Use existing topography in the final design.
- The Commission complements the team's analysis of and sensitivity toward the Olmsted Plan.
- Investigate connecting West Galer to Thorndyke.
- Include enhancement of pedestrian and bike routes in the final design.
- Optimize intermodal connections (including monorail and the Sounder).
- Provide information produced by the Port as it comes forward, and attempt to create the bridge in a synergistic manner in conjunction with the Port's plans for Interbay.

Briefing Materials

- Poster boards of the alignments and design features
- Model of Galer Flyover area