

Magnolia Bridge Replacement Project Speakers Bureau

Group/Organization: Seattle Design Commission
Date: July 15, 2004, 3:00 PM
Location: Seattle City Hall, Boards & Commissions Room
Team Members: Kirk Jones, Katharine Hough, Mark Brower, Anthony Katsaros, Lesley Bain

Overview

Kirk Jones and Lesley Bain provided a project update to the Design Commission, the first in approximately 15 months. Kirk provided a brief history of the project and described how the final alignments have changed over time. He then described the final alternatives being carried forward into the EIS, Alternatives A, C, and D. Lesley then identified some of the key issues and challenges associated with the public realm in the project area. She introduced the concept of building a “balcony,” or raised edge, along a new bridge structure or future development that would allow pedestrians and cyclists to have an elevated pathway along the waterfront.

Questions/Comments from the Commission

- What is the current EIS schedule?
We anticipate completing the Draft EIS in Spring 2005.
- It seems strange to put a signalized “T” intersection in the middle of a highway.
- I still don’t understand why Alternative H is not viable. It seems counterintuitive to not use the Galer Flyover to bring people to the waterfront and Port property, and some northern connection tying into Thorndyke to get people to Magnolia.
The Amgen garage will put many more cars on the Galer Flyover, so capacity might not be adequate. We also presented similar alternatives to the community, and many residents disliked the idea of connecting most of the traffic to Thorndyke due to potential cut-through traffic impacts on neighboring streets and the higher traffic volumes that would use the street.
- Alternative A seems to be the most attractive because it doesn’t impact the greenbelt along the Magnolia hillside.
- Alternative C would be a great project to run out of money – Complete the eastern bridge to get people over the railroad tracks to the Port property, and let those trying to get to Magnolia use one of the other connections or connect them to Thorndyke.

- It seems that there's a problem of perception among Magnolian residents – they want to live on an “island” of sorts, but also have great connections. They can't have their cake and eat it, too.
- I'm really struggling with the idea of building another viaduct-like roadway. Why would we advocate building a structure that violates our own city policies?
- The alternative you pick shouldn't wiggle. The city needs to build a clean, elegant, straight shot. Alternative A seems to be the best, with a simple, clean design.
- The ramp proposed under Alternative C would significantly change the serene pedestrian/bike path along the bluff by introducing a huge structure. Also, landslides would be a serious threat.
- The structure should be clean and simple – conceptually maybe like a building with a road on top.
- The final alternative has to keep closer to the surface if it wants to be beneficial and flexible in the long term. Once you elevate the structure, no future roads can easily connect. The City needs to have some backbone and say sorry to Magnolia residents.
- Alternative C is the worst of both worlds, building two structures and calling for a non-elegant line.
- What about connecting to Thorndike to the north?
Again, residents were worried about cut-through traffic.
- Drivers will learn the first time they try to cut through the street grid that it is slower than taking Thorndyke.
- The expense of this structure seems inordinate for the number of people it will serve, as compared to other crucial transportation projects in the city. It doesn't seem to be realistic, based on accessibility or infrastructure.
- Thorndyke is so underutilized! It has a great deal of promise.
- How is the public being involved?
We've had three open houses, a variety of individual and small group meetings, and sent out two newsletters. We'll send out a third newsletter in late summer or early fall, and have a fourth open house in late September or early October.
- Where are you in terms of acquiring funding?
We've secured \$9M in federal funds, and hope to get our design to the point where we can aggressively pursue funding in the next couple of years.

- So what does the Commission need to do today? Either accept an elevated structure or suggest that existing routes be used? Changing traffic patterns in the project area doesn't seem to be a horrible trade-off.
- The dollar figures for major transportation projects in Seattle are astounding. What dollar figures are you attaching to these alternatives, and will that information be a part of the DEIS?
Yes. We're estimating a cost of \$90-\$100M for Alternatives A and D, with an additional cost of approximately \$30M for right-of-way acquisition. Alternative C will likely be similar, though the right-of-way costs could be higher.
- What about building a huge retaining wall along the hillside?
Federal 4(f) regulations won't allow us to do that. Much of the greenbelt is park property, and 4(f) says that if another reasonable alternative exists, we can't impact the park property. Because other reasonable alternatives do exist, a retaining wall wouldn't be allowed.
- How does this project rank in terms of city priorities? What is the likelihood that you'll be able to complete it?
We recognize compared to other major city projects that this project is down there, but if we have the design ready to go, the city can start to pursue grant money.
- I vote for Alternative A.
- Do you have to be far enough along in the EIS process to secure federal emergency funding if another seismic event makes the bridge unusable?
No, that's not a requirement.
- If you choose A, use the ramps and not the "T" intersection to make the design cleaner and less obtrusive.
- If you choose A, will the existing bridge be out of commission for the entire construction period?
No, Alternative A will be slightly south of the existing bridge, so we'd only need to shut down the bridge when we connected the new structure at both ends.
- You should maximize the amount of surface road you use.
- Our recommendations on this project as you move forward are the following:
 - We are concerned that you are replacing a viaduct with a viaduct due to the likely physical and visual impacts.
 - We are convinced that the maximum use of surface routing, including the use of Thorndyke, would be a preferred solution.
 - We recommend a direct, simple design with the least visual impact on the water's edge.

- We recommend using the ramp options instead of the “T” intersections.
- We appreciate the concept of developing a public “edge” or “balcony,” but are concerned about your ability to actually implement this feature.