

## MEMORANDUM

To: Seattle Department of Transportation, City Council, and Seattle Mayor's Office  
From: Capitol Hill Community Council  
Date: January 21, 2010  
Re: Capitol Hill segment of the First Hill Streetcar

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After broad outreach and discussion, the Capitol Hill Community Council has come to three key recommendations for the northern segment of the First Hill streetcar:

- 1.) **Plan to extend to Aloha St.** The Aloha extension has been a consistent priority for Capitol Hill ever since the streetcar was first proposed. Even though funding for Aloha St is not yet secured, the extension should be fully designed and brought to a point of being "shovel ready" as part of this project, and the rest of the line should be designed in such a way as to maximize the feasibility of extending to Aloha.
- 2.) **Keep the streetcar on Broadway north of Union St.** This keeps the energy and focus on the retail corridor and makes the system simpler and easier to understand, a key factor in attracting new riders. The Cal Anderson Park loop raises safety and running time concerns and interferes with the community's plans for the redevelopment of Sound Transit's light rail station properties, particularly the plan to move the Farmer's Market to Denny Way and Nagle Place.
- 3.) **Reclaim the Street.** Make the streetcar a catalyst for reclaiming the use of the right of way on Broadway. Specifically, consider eliminating the center turning lane on Broadway except at the major intersections and repurposing this space for bicycle and pedestrian use.

Capitol Hill Community Council has chosen to remain neutral on the alignment of the streetcar south of Union St. Our proposed alignment for the northern segment is compatible with all four of the alternatives currently being studied for the central segment. Once the streetcar gets to Union St, it can turn west for the Boren-Seneca or Boylston alignments, east for the 12<sup>th</sup> Ave loop or continue straight south on Broadway to Yesler.

Attachment A shows a map highlighting points 1 and 2. Attachment B shows a sketch up of what Broadway could look like under point 3.

This streetcar is not just another addition to the menu of transit options on Capitol Hill. It is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to bring about an urban renaissance to Broadway and reclaim the heart of our historic and vibrant neighborhood. The decisions made about the streetcar this April will shape the future of our neighborhood for the next hundred years. We ask that the Seattle Department of Transportation and the City Council take these decisions and our suggestions very seriously.

## ***Why streetcars?***

One of the key differences between streetcars and buses is the unique ability of streetcars to attract tourists and retail customers as riders. They are able to do this because:

1. They are simple and easy to understand; the tracks in the street present a powerful visual cue as to where the streetcar is going.
2. They are smooth, comfortable and enjoyable to ride.
3. They are different, fun and cool.

Commuters have a higher tolerance for more complicated routes because their trips are not discretionary and because they make the trip regularly, thus they have more opportunity to learn the route. Retail customers, on the other hand, do not have to make the trip at all and do not make it regularly, especially new customers who are just discovering the Broadway retail corridor. Retail customers in general and tourists in particular are much more sensitive to subtle differences in comfort, simplicity, ease of use and overall 'cool' factor.

Only 20% of trips are commute trips; the vast majority of trips are retail and recreational. If the city is going to be successful in achieving its sustainability goals, we must focus more on attracting that other 80%. This means focusing on the unique needs of casual riders making discretionary trips, i.e. retail customers. All three of the Community Council's priorities incorporate this principle.

### ***1.) Extend to Aloha***

#### ***Planning History***

All public planning documents about this project have included the Aloha extension. Sound Transit's 2007 study that first recommended the streetcar included a discussion of the Aloha extension. The City's Streetcar Network Plan, adopted in 2008, specifically identifies Aloha Street as the optimal terminus for the Capitol Hill / First Hill streetcar line. The Capitol Hill Chamber of Commerce and other community stakeholders have repeatedly communicated this priority to City Council and SDOT over the last 2 years. The Capitol Hill Stewardship Council was told in 2009 that one of the reasons the city was lobbying to take over the streetcar project was that the resulting cost savings could be used to fund the Aloha extension.

The interlocal agreement between the City and Sound Transit defines the minimum scope of work to be connecting the First Hill employment centers to light rail stations in the International District and Capitol Hill. The operative word is minimum. This is not a maximum scope. The streetcar presents an opportunity to do much more in addition to connecting First Hill to light rail.

For these reasons, the Capitol Hill community had believed that the Aloha extension would be studied and designed as part of the initial segment and would be funded if the initial segment came in under budget. It was a surprise to discover that SDOT is not seriously considering the Aloha extension in its scope of work.

## ***Benefits of the Aloha extension***

The Aloha extension:

4. Unifies the Broadway retail district and creates a powerful opportunity to reclaim the entire street.
5. Brings the thousands of residents and workers on First Hill to the northern end of Broadway to enjoy restaurants and retail destinations.
6. Connects the thousands of residents of north Capitol Hill to the hospitals on First Hill, to Seattle University and to the Pike-Pine retail district.
7. Avoids the technical difficulties associated with turning around at Denny St.

Broadway is a major retail destination for the residents of First Hill and 12<sup>th</sup> Ave. These neighborhoods do not have the robust retail opportunities that Broadway offers. We all hope that new retail will emerge in these neighborhoods, but in the near term, Broadway will remain a vital retail and service destination for the thousands of transit-dependent residents of First Hill and 12<sup>th</sup> Ave. The Aloha extension increases the value of the entire streetcar system, especially for those living south of Union St.

## ***2.) Stay on Broadway north of Union St.***

### ***Advantages to staying on Broadway***

The key to attracting casual riders (retail customers) is to have a streetcar route that is simple and easy to understand. The best way to achieve this is to run the streetcar in both directions on Broadway north of Union St. Retail customers are extremely sensitive, so anything that can be done to make the streetcar simpler and easier to understand will make a big difference.

Activity follows the streetcar and we want to bring that activity to Broadway. If the stops are located on Broadway, then as a rider is walking to the stop, they pass by the retail storefronts and may choose to check out a new establishment he or she had not noticed before. Even while riding the streetcar, the rider will pass by the various storefronts and may be intrigued and choose to get off and explore.

If the streetcar loops around Cal Anderson Park, this potential customer will only pass by the storefront in one direction, cutting the advertising benefit in half. Worse, under 3 of the 4 current alternatives, the streetcar will only travel southbound on Broadway, yet between Pine and Denny all of the retail is located on the east side of the street adjacent to the northbound lane. A First Hill commuter is also much less likely to stop and explore a new store on their way to work than they would be on their way home. These concerns may sound subtle, but successful retailers know that little things make a big difference.

### ***Denny Way and TOD***

For the past year, a group of dedicated community stakeholders has been working with Sound Transit to conduct extensive outreach and formulate a community plan for the redevelopment of Sound Transit's surplus property above the light rail station once construction is complete. The top priority for the community has been to incorporate a

permanent home for the Broadway Farmer's Market into the redevelopment. Sound Transit has committed to do this.

One of the likely design solutions proposes would transform Nagle Place and Denny Way between Broadway and 10<sup>th</sup> Ave into festival streets. These streets would also be closed to traffic during the Sunday Farmer's market. If the streetcar runs on Denny, it will interfere with this alternative use of the street. One cannot set up tents in the middle of the street if there is a streetcar running by every 10 minutes. There are also safety concerns, especially if young children are present. Streetcar planning should be consistent with planning for transit-oriented development, an effort to which the City and the community have already dedicated significant time and effort.

### ***Concerns with 11<sup>th</sup> Ave***

Between Pine and Denny, 11<sup>th</sup> Ave is a quiet residential street. It is also a very dark at night, and in the winter, "night" includes the p.m. peak. People will not be expecting a multi-ton streetcar to be traveling down a quiet residential street at night. As such, they may walk in front of the streetcar unsuspectingly. This issue is exacerbated by the fact that the streetcar is very quiet. Due to inertia and the low coefficient of friction between steel wheels and steel rails, streetcars cannot stop as quickly as automobiles can and impact is likely to be more devastating.

The only reasonable solution to this concern would be to run the streetcar very slowly down 11<sup>th</sup> Ave, increasing running time. The streetcar would also need to shine bright headlights and likely ring bells to alert people to its presence, which would be a nuisance to the nearby residents. There are concerns about a loss of parking on 11<sup>th</sup> Ave near Cal Anderson Park and in Pike-Pine.

### ***Portland Streetcar Analogy***

It has been argued that the Portland Streetcar runs on separate parallel streets, for example 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Aves in the Pearl District and Lovejoy and Northrup (two blocks apart) in the Northwest neighborhood. These situations are not analogous to Broadway and 11<sup>th</sup>. In the Pearl District, both 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> are one-way retailing streets. On the other hand, Lovejoy and Northrup are both residential arterials similar to 12<sup>th</sup> Ave or Bellevue Ave on Capitol Hill. Nowhere does the Portland streetcar run on a non-arterial residential street and nowhere does the Portland streetcar follow a major retail artery in one direction and travel on a quiet residential street in the other.

Portland's Blue/Red Max line on Naito Parkway has been offered as an example of a Light Rail line that runs through a Farmer's Market, suggesting that running the streetcar through Capitol Hill's future farmers market will have no negative impact. Again, the analogy does not apply. Portland's Saturday Market takes place entirely to the west of Naito Parkway under the Burnside Bridge, not *on* Naito Parkway. The Max runs *past* the Saturday Market, not through it. Unlike the proposed idea for Denny Way, Naito Parkway remains open to both light rail and vehicle traffic at all times.

## ***There is no good reason to put the streetcar on 11<sup>th</sup>***

SDOT has cited three reasons they are recommending the Cal Anderson Loop:

1. The difficulty of turning around at Denny
2. Concerns about bicycle impacts on Broadway
3. Concerns about traffic congestion on Broadway

The first two concerns are made moot with the implementation of Community Council's preferred plan. With the Aloha extension, there is no need to turn around at Denny, and by reconfiguring the right of way, we can provide a far better bicycle solution. Even if the Aloha extension is not feasible immediately, it almost certainly will be eventually. The streetcar route will need to end at Pine Street until the completion of the Capitol Hill light rail station in 2016. This will allow time for funds to be sought. Alternatively, a simple pull-out onto Denny St with a switchback would be a short-term solution that remains consistent with the long-term goal of extending to Aloha.

With respect to traffic congestion, the need to travel very slowly down 11<sup>th</sup> likely outweighs any congestion savings. Even if the 11<sup>th</sup> Ave alignment were to be slightly faster, we should not be planning a piece of infrastructure designed to fundamentally transform urban space and reclaim the streets for people around concerns over minor congestion delays during the peak period.

## ***3.) Reclaim the Street***

### ***The vision***

1. Remove the center turning lane except at major intersections like John and Pine.
2. Add a two-way bicycle track on one side between the sidewalk and the parking lane.
3. Consolidate streetcar and metro bus stops. The bicycle track allows the streetcar to use curbside stations without interfering with bicycle travel.
4. Build intersection bulbs to minimize pedestrian crossing distances.
5. Consider other ideas and partner with the community to develop the final plan.

### ***The time is right***

In spring of 2009, Mike McGinn, then executive director of the Seattle Great City Initiative, kicked off Great City's Streets for People Campaign. Many Capitol Hill residents were inspired by this bold vision and began to discuss how we might apply these visionary concepts to Broadway. As one of Seattle's most vibrant pedestrian-oriented retail streets at the heart of one of Seattle's densest neighborhood, Broadway is the ideal place to push the boundaries with this bold vision.

The City also recently funded a \$30,000 consultant report as part of the community's ongoing planning effort around the redevelopment of Sound Transit's light rail station sites. One of the key policy recommendations of this report was to "reclaim the streets". The report specifically identifies pedestrian and bicycle improvements to Broadway as a vital part of making any transit-oriented development plan successful.

## ***Now or never***

Once we lay the tracks in the street, we cannot pick them up and move them later; if we are to re-envision our priorities for the right of way on Broadway, we must do so now. We also cannot wait until the alignment has been chosen to begin to consider these ideas because these ideas may affect the alignment decision. Under Broadway's current configuration, there is a significant bicycle/streetcar conflict, which could undermine the Aloha extension and the community's goal of keeping the streetcar on Broadway in both directions. However, by re-envisioning the right of way, we can accommodate both interests.

## ***Benefits of the Plan***

The plan offers the ability to:

1. Calm Traffic
2. Maintain existing levels of on-street parking
3. Provide narrow pedestrian crossings
4. Provide world-class bike infrastructure
5. Keep the streetcar on Broadway in both directions
6. Consolidate streetcar and metro bus stops saving resources and making the system easier to understand and use.
7. Decrease costs and construction impacts by doing streetscape improvements and streetcar construction at the same time.

## ***Precedent***

The idea of removing the center turn lane may raise concerns about increases in traffic congestion. However, there is ample precedent for streets adopting just this configuration and remaining quite functional for traffic. John Street, Olive Way, 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Aves all operate without center turn lanes. Pine Street was recently reconfigured in exactly the manner proposed here with no ill effects on traffic. So long as turning lanes are maintained at the major intersections, the impact on traffic flow should be minimal.

If left turn delays do increase congestion, a simple solution would be to prohibit left turns during rush hour. Given Capitol Hill's interconnected street pattern, someone turning left could easily turn right and loop around the block or simply travel east west along the arterials: Olive, John, Pine, Roy and Aloha, rather than turning off Broadway.

Broadway should be a destination, not a thoroughfare. Making great urban places requires having the courage to make small sacrifices in vehicle speed in exchange for big gains for pedestrians and bicyclists.

## ***Conclusion***

This project will fundamentally transform the character of Capitol Hill. The Community Council welcomes this change and believes this project can make a significant contribution to Capitol Hill's long-standing neighborhood goals and values. It is critical that do not miss this once-in-a-generation opportunity to bring a transformative change to one of Seattle's largest, densest and most vibrant urban neighborhoods.