Rainier Ave S Bus Lanes
October 25, 2022, Public Meeting Summary

On October 25, 2022, SDOT and King County Metro hosted a virtual public meeting for the Rainier Ave S bus lane project. The purpose of the meeting was to share information about the project, answer questions, and collect feedback. About 20 people attended the meeting. Below is a summary of questions asked during the meeting and responses. Questions are organized into key topic areas.

TRAFFIC AND IMPACTS TO PEOPLE DRIVING

There were several questions and concerns about increased traffic on Rainier Ave S and residential streets, including increased speeding since bus lanes were added in July 2022. People asked what SDOT is doing to mitigate these traffic impacts and address these safety concerns.

- We're monitoring traffic volumes and speeds on Rainier Ave S and other nearby streets including Martin Luther King Blvd, S Genessee St, and Lake Washington Blvd.
- Traffic volumes on Rainier Ave S are increasing but are not yet at pre-pandemic levels. We understand that congestion feels worse as traffic volumes continue to increase toward pre-pandemic levels and as people continue to adjust to the new bus lanes.
- At this time, we're not seeing significant cut-through traffic on residential streets. We understand that some people driving will choose to take alternative routes through residential neighborhoods to avoid congested streets.
- We will continue to monitor traffic volumes and speeds. As we review the traffic data, we will consider if additional traffic calming or design changes to promote safety are warranted. Our annual traffic reports are available online.
- We're making or evaluating changes in the following areas:
    - Evaluating making the southbound left turn at S Andover St and Rainier Ave S into a protected left turn lane and installing raised pavement markers through this intersection to improve visibility of the lane alignment.
    - Constructing traffic calming measures east of Rainier Ave S to reduce the appeal of cut-through traffic. To learn more about our other work in the Rainier Valley, please visit the What's Happening in SE Seattle webpage.

Can diverters be installed on streets parallel to Rainier Ave S, particularly on the Rainier Valley Greenway? There was a suggestion that doing so could help with cut-through traffic.

- Street diverters are a tool that discourages cut-through traffic but also impacts access for residents and emergency response. Through our ongoing traffic monitoring, if data indicates there is in increase in cut-through traffic, we can explore additional traffic calming measures.

The bus lanes are causing significant impacts to people driving. Did SDOT evaluate the cumulative impact (in terms of added minutes) to people driving on Rainier Ave S? How does this project consider the impacts to the many people who need to get around by car?

- SDOT's mission is to deliver a transportation system that provides safe and affordable access to places and opportunities. Making transit a more appealing and reliable transportation option helps us get closer to achieving this mission.
- SDOT conducted a traffic analysis using pre-pandemic traffic levels. Based on that analysis, we estimate that Option 1 could add 5 minutes for people driving, and Option 2 could add 9 minutes for people driving.

- There are many options for people who drive through the Rainier Valley, including arterials such as Martin Luther King Blvd. The Route 7 bus, which travels on Rainier Ave S, is the second most used bus route in Seattle. This project is focused on creating a reliable transportation option for the many people who rely on the bus now and in the future. As population continues to grow and there is more pressure on our limited road space, we are investing in transportation options that can move more people such as transit. Once more people switch more trips to transit, the roads will be less congested for trips that need to be taken by car.

Is the estimated 5-minute delay for drivers based on the increase in population?

- This estimate is based on pre-pandemic traffic volumes.

Cars need to get on I-90, which is already a challenge. Are you considering this with this project?

- Option 2 keeps two northbound travel lanes from S College St to S Grand St as cars approach I-90. This is one way we're considering access to I-90.

SAFETY

Attendees expressed concerns that since bus lanes were installed in July 2022, there has been an increase in unsafe driving, including people illegally using and speeding in the bus lanes. How is this safety concern being addressed?

- Bus lanes are one way that we're redesigning our streets to help address safety and calm traffic. We're designing our streets in ways aimed at changing behaviors to promote safety.
- We know that some people are choosing to illegally drive and speed in bus lanes. We've been conducting a bus lane compliance study and gathering data on bus lane usage/violations. This study will help us identify design solutions that can further discourage people from illegally using bus lanes.

Attendees expressed safety concerns about people speeding on residential streets to avoid congestion on Rainier Ave S.

- SDOT's Home Zones program is one potential option to holistically address these types of concerns and develop the most appropriate traffic calming solutions. Establishing a new home zone is something that SDOT will continue to evaluate and consider. Implementation of a future home zone will depend on available funding.

What is the average speed of cars on Rainier Ave S? Have the bus lanes led to safer speeds?

- In November 2022, we collected speed data on Rainier Ave S north of S Genesee St. Data shows that on average, most people are driving 35 MPH.

How is SDOT addressing the immediate safety needs of people walking on and crossing Rainier Ave S? Will the project decrease pedestrian crashes and deaths?

- We're currently building several safety improvements for people walking and biking on Rainier Ave S with the Route 7 Transit-Plus Multimodal Corridor Project. This project is focused on improving safety near bus stops and for people crossing the street.
- We'll soon begin the next round of safety improvements on Rainier Ave S with the Rainier Improvements project. These safety improvements are largely located in the Rainier Beach area, with some smaller "spot" improvements further north on Rainier Ave.

Safety for people using the bus and for people at bus stops is a key concern. What are you doing to improve safety?

- King County Metro's Safety, Security, and Fare Enforcement (SaFE) Reform initiative is focused on creating a new vision for Metro's safety and security functions. Metro's goal is to eliminate disproportionately negative outcomes of related policies and practices on customers and employees, especially for Black, Indigenous, and other people of color.
- SaFE is a community driven effort. Metro worked with diverse community-based organizations and engaged with roughly 8,000 individuals including community members, customers, and Metro and Metro Transit Police employees.
- What we heard was a strong desire for a visible customer support and safety presence on our system, and a timely response if a potentially dangerous situation develops. Public input also made clear how important it is that Metro and our partners show up in the right way.
- Metro has responded to increased concerns aboard buses by:
    - Expanding our transit security officer services geographically to cover a broader range of routes and transit hubs. We also expanded their service hours to provide 24/7 coverage.
    - Increasing the number of transit security officers. Metro currently has about 70 transit security officers across our system, and we've expanded their geography and hours during the past year. The King County Executive's adopted 2023-2024 budget included $21 million to support 140 Metro transit security officers providing support and visibility on Metro buses, transit centers, and stops.

BUS RIDERSHIP AND TRAVEL TIMES

Have bus travel times and reliability for the Route 7 improved since the bus lanes were installed in July? Does travel time savings account for time spent at the stop? Has the Route 7 been on schedule more often since the lanes were implemented?

- Compared to September 2021, we recently observed an average travel time savings of about 10 seconds (about 5% improvement) in this area throughout most of the day. This represents travel time between bus stops that doesn't include the time spent at the bus stop. This savings means that the bus can travel through the area more quickly than it had in the past, even as 14% more people are riding the Route 7 compared to last year.
- We expect this time savings to increase as traffic volumes continue to grow toward pre-pandemic levels. We did see a time savings for buses even as general traffic increased since July, which indicates that the bus lanes are working.
- Metro's on-time performance level for Route 7 is 76% as of November 2022, which is an improvement of 4% from 2019.

Is there data for the time of day that people are riding the bus? Is the ridership data available or can it be viewed by the public?

- Metro's Rider Dashboard has data on every Metro route. Data includes average weekday boardings, on-time performance, and other operations metrics. Under "Page Navigation" there is "My Route" where you can view detailed data by route, direction, time period, and month. Data is provided for the current year and the past several years for historic comparison. The dashboard can be found online.

Does King County Metro plan to improve headways for the Route 7 after this project?

- Adjustments to the frequency of Metro routes is handled through the Service Change process and is based on Metro's Service Guidelines. Any changes to service must be approved by the King County Council.

What percentage of people in SE Seattle rides the bus?

- Several bus routes travel through the project area. Below is a list of these routes and the average weekday ridership (data is from Fall 2022):
    - **Route 7**: 9,150 average weekday riders
    - **Route 9X**: 200 average weekday riders
    - **Route 36**: 6,200 average weekday riders
    - **Route 50**: 2,264 average weekday riders
    - **Route 60**: 4,700 average weekday riders
    - **Route 106**: 4,200 average weekday riders
    - **Route 107**: 1,800 average weekday riders
    - Total: 28,600 average weekday riders (about 12% of Metro's total daily ridership)

Are there new bus lanes in other parts of the city, and if so, how are they working?

- There are currently around 40 miles of bus lanes throughout Seattle. Bus lanes have improved reliability on many high ridership routes and improved the performance of buses. Some bus lanes are small segments to address a very specific traffic choke point, and others run the length of a corridor to provide a consistent level of service from buses.
- King County Metro has data from August 2022 regarding recently installed bus lanes in Seattle:
    - **NE 45th St:** In May 2022, an eastbound bus lane was installed on NE 45th St between Roosevelt Way NE and 15th Ave NE. Initial reports show bus travel times have improved by 13-14% during the midday and afternoon peak periods.
    - **15th Ave NE:** In August 2021, a southbound bus lane was installed on 15th Ave NE. Between NE 45th St and NE 43rd St, the lane is restricted to buses only from 7-9 AM and 3-7 PM. Between NE 43rd St and NE 40th St/Campus Parkway, the lane is restricted to buses 24/7. The bus lane has improved travel times by 4-9% during the morning and midday time periods.
    - **Rainier Ave S**: In July 2022, a northbound bus lane was installed between S Edmunds St and S Walden St, and a southbound bus lane was installed between S Oregon St and S Alaska St. Early reports indicate the bus travel times have improved 2-6% in the morning and afternoon.

BARRIERS TO TAKING THE BUS

People noted several reasons that prevent them from riding the bus including: traveling with children or dropping off/picking up children; safety concerns on the bus; rain; hills; carrying goods; and the amount of time it takes to reach places traveling by the bus.

- Part of this project is understanding the barriers that people experience to taking to bus so that the City and our partners like King County Metro can invest in solutions to address these barriers.
- We understand that riding the bus is not a preferred option all of the time or for all types of trips.

OTHER PROJECTS IN SOUTHEAST SEATTLE

Attendees had several questions and concerns about other projects happening in the area (particularly on Lake Washington Blvd and Martin Luther King Blvd) and how the impacts of those projects are being considered with the Rainier Bus Lanes project.

- SDOT staff work across divisions and with other city departments on projects at all stages (planning, design, and construction). SDOT uses the Complete Streets Checklist to collect data and information to develop a project and identify opportunities to coordinate with other projects to help balance the needs of all users.
- Specific projects people asked about include:
    - **Grand Street Commons Development**: The Rainier Bus Lanes project team coordinates with the developer for the Grand Street Commons, and we've reviewed their scope through the Street Improvement Permit (SIP) process. We also share the scope and schedule of the bus lane project with the developer to ensure that the bus stop and traffic signal improvements are coordinated.
    - **Lake Washington Blvd:** A permanent closure of Lake Washington Blvd to people driving is not under consideration. More information can be found on the project webpage.
    - **Martin Luther King Blvd:** There are not currently plans to add a bus lane on MLK Blvd in the Rainier Valley. In 2023, we plan to build protected bike lanes on MLK from Rainier Ave to Judkins St. To build the protected bike lane, we will convert travel lanes and parking lanes in various locations. More information can be found on the project webpage.

If bikes can use the bus lane on Rainier Ave S, why consider closing Lake Washington Blvd to vehicles?

- We are not considering permanently closing Lake Washington Blvd to people driving.
- People biking are allowed to travel in the lane where they feel most safe, which is often the curbside lane. Therefore, people biking are allowed to use curbside bus lanes.

Near Judkins Park Station, there is a section of bus lanes that are not in use. Buses frequently get backed up in this area and there are questions about why this portion of bus lanes are not in use.

- This section of bus lanes was installed by a private developer, and they are currently blocked off while construction of the private development is underway. We are following up with the private developer to let them know that they need to sign this closure better.

Safety Seattle has recently released maps where they closed some roads in the south end to vehicles. There is a concern that this will shift more traffic to Rainier and/or MLK. Will SDOT be monitoring the impact of those road closures?

- SDOT regularly monitors traffic and reviews the data to inform our work. Annual traffic reports can be found online.

PROJECT PURPOSE

Why is SDOT prioritizing bus lanes on Rainier Ave S when most people drive? Why would you not direct people to Martin Luther King Blvd to access the light rail?

- We are prioritizing bus lanes on Rainier Ave S to help improve bus travel times and reliability in an area where many people depend on the bus. The Route 7 bus has the second highest ridership of all bus routes in Seattle. Ridership on the Route 7 remained high throughout the

pandemic, which indicates that many people rely on this route. We know that many people use the Route 7 to access places on Rainier Ave S and not just commute downtown.

What happens when the Route 7 meets the light rail at Judkins Park Station? Is the purpose of this project to connect Seattle's transit system?

- Yes, this project will make progress toward creating a more connected, efficient transit system. Bus lanes on Rainier Ave S will help people taking the bus connect to the new light rail station at Judkins Park more reliably.

PROJECT DESIGN

Why does this project not include southbound bus lanes? Does Option 2 make implementing a southbound bus lane more difficult in the future?

- We built southbound lanes between S Oregon St and S Edmunds St in July 2022. In September 2022, we also added southbound bus lanes between S Forest St and S Bayview St as part of the Route 7 Transit-Plus Multimodal Corridor Project.
- We're primarily focusing on building northbound bus lanes because our analysis showed that northbound buses experience greater delays and longer travel times as compared to southbound buses on this portion of Rainier Ave S. Adding northbound bus lanes now allows us to improve transit service and reliability while balancing other uses and needs for the street.
- Adding a southbound bus lane in the future is feasible with either option.

A signal is needed at Walker St so that people can safely cross the street and access the southbound bus stop. If new traffic signals are too expensive, is it possible to install hawk beacons or protected center medians to help cross the street?

- SDOT conducted an analysis to determine if a signal is warranted at Walker St and Rainier Ave. Through that analysis we determined that this intersection did not meet the necessary criteria for a signal, including a pedestrian signal.

Option 1 includes a new signal at S Grand St while Option 2 includes a new signal at S Grand St and S College St. Why not include a new signal at S College St with Option 1 as well? People crossing the street need a signalized crossing at this location.

- Based on this feedback, we completed an internal analysis to determine if a signal at S College St is warranted with Option 1. We determined that a signal is warranted at this location and can be incorporated into the Option 1 design.

Grand St needs a signalized crossing. Can it be implemented sooner?

- Adding the new signal at Grand St as part of the bus lanes project is the most efficient way that we can fund and implement the new signal.

Why is there not an option to not add bus lanes on Rainier Ave S?

- We're prioritizing bus lanes on Rainier Ave S to improve travel times and reliability for frequently used buses like the Route 7. The Route 7 bus has the second highest ridership in Seattle and ridership remained high throughout the pandemic. This project will make the bus a more reliable transportation option for the many people who rely on the Route 7.
- This project is just one part of an ongoing series of investments to improve safety and the experience of people traveling on Rainier Ave S. We know that Rainier Ave S serves all types of

travelers. As part of our outreach, we're asking people to share their needs and how they use Rainier Ave S, which will help inform the future phase of investments.

The absence of a turn lane in some locations causes issues in the single general travel lane. People can't turn into Walgreens or Ezell's anymore. People also cannot merge in the single lane of traffic that backs up from Genesee St to Alaska St on weekends.

- People driving can enter bus lanes to make right turns at intersections and driveways, including the driveway to Walgreens and Ezell's. Signage is placed throughout the corridor indicating that people driving can enter bus lanes to make turns at intersections and into driveways.
- It usually takes people a few months to adjust to changes in the street. Some people will change their driving habits, including choosing to use nearby signalized intersections rather than turning mid-block to avoid congested streets.

Are you considering peak hour bus lanes, and has there been a cost benefit analysis for 24/7 bus lanes vs peak hour bus lanes? Can the bus lanes be open to cars on weekends?

- Bus ridership is high at all times of the day, and buses get delayed in traffic throughout the day on Rainier Ave. This is true on weekdays and weekends. Therefore, we are not currently considering peak hour or weekday only bus lanes on Rainier Ave S. 24/7 red bus lanes are also consistent with the other existing bus lanes on Rainier Ave S.

There is a concern about restricting road space for buses when the infrastructure to support people relying on transit isn't there. Why not add more efficient hopper buses to connect neighborhoods to arterials?

- One way we are working to build the infrastructure for a more connected, efficient transit system is by expanding our network of bus lanes. As part of this project, we are also learning what barriers people still experience to taking the bus and potential investments that can address those barriers. This feedback will help inform future investments to further support people relying on transit.

OUTREACH

What outreach was conducted to inform this project and its design? What data or documentation is available for previous outreach?

- This project builds on previous outreach and planning to improve safety and transit reliability on Rainier Ave S. From 2017-2020, SDOT and King County Metro conducted outreach to gather community input on transportation needs and priorities on Rainier Ave S as part of the RapidRide program.
- More information about previous RapidRide outreach can be found in a 2019 RapidRide outreach report. Through that outreach, we heard:
    - People want reliable transit to reach destinations and essential services along Rainer Ave S and not just commute to downtown Seattle
    - Support for bus trips that take less time and connect people to other transit options
    - Desire for safer access for people walking, biking, and rolling to bus stops (particularly at crossings near bus stops)
    - Support for a bus lane between Chinatown-ID and Mt Baker Link Light Rail Station
    - Most people support the proposal to remove on-street parking in favor of adding bus-only lanes, but there are concerns about potential impacts to small businesses

What outreach happened to let people know about the Phase 1 project? What outreach was done to let people know about the current feedback opportunities including this public meeting?

- **Phase 1:** We sent a mailer to approximately 12,000 homes and businesses in the Rainier Valley, launched a project webpage in multiple languages, went door to door to businesses in the project area, posted yard signs, tabled at community events and pop-ups during the summer, sent email updates, blog posts, and travel and media advisories.
- **Phase 2:** We sent a mailer to over 20,000 homes and businesses in the Rainier Valley and Rainier Beach, continued to attend pop-up and community events, worked with community liaisons to engage with people who speak a language other than English, reached out to businesses that could be impacted by the removal of the center turn lane, conducted several media interviews and posted digital ads on ethnic media sources, distributed a flyer to schools and parents, posted signs at the 25 most used bus stops, and continue to send email and web updates. All of these outreach activities included mention of the feedback opportunities including the public meeting.

How much weight do the survey responses have? If many people state that they don't like the bus lanes, will they not be implemented? Has the decision already been made?

- The survey is one of many ways we're collecting feedback about this project and people's needs for Rainier Ave S. We will review all of the feedback received including feedback shared in the survey, emails, phone calls, and conversations.
- We will share more information about next steps for this project in early 2023. Design and outreach will continue through next year. Final decisions have not yet been made.

How are bike groups involved in the new bus lane design?

- We've heard from several bike groups through our outreach. Feedback from bike groups is being reviewed along with all of the other feedback received throughout our outreach.

OTHER

Do any of the staff working on this project live in the project area?

- SDOT has a diverse workforce that lives throughout the region and throughout Seattle. Staff live and work in every neighborhood in our city. Sometimes staff live in the communities they work in and sometimes they do not. Staff regularly visit the communities they work in and talk with the people living in these communities to hear their experiences firsthand.

The added congestion from adding the bus lanes leads to more idling traffic, which results in more air pollution and added gas costs for people who need to rely on cars. This is an equity concern.

- We understand that it will take people time to adjust to the new street design. People may choose to change how they travel, including taking less congested streets, changing the time of day for certain trips, or changing transportation modes for certain trips.
- This project helps gets us closer to our city-wide climate goals by building a more efficient, reliable, and accessible transit network.
- We are undergoing a comprehensive Racial Equity Toolkit process for this project where we will further review and consider equity impacts.