

August 26, 2015

AWPOW- Draft EIS Comments
c/o Mark Mazzola, Environmental Manager
Seattle Department of Transportation
PO Box 34996
Seattle, WA 98124-4996

Dear Seattle Department of Transportation,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft EIS for the Alaskan Way, Promenade, and Overlook Walk (AWPOW) for the Waterfront Seattle project. This project offers critical opportunities for the successful evolution of Seattle's urban core, and will affect the City of Seattle for many decades.

Our organization, the Seattle chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA Seattle), is comprised of over 2000 architects and urban designers with a strong interest in the future of our city. Our members have been deeply involved for more than a decade in the community process which has generated this AWPOW recommendation, and offer significant expertise relevant to this work.

Summary

AIA Seattle agrees with the recommended alternative and the importance of all 4 projects included in the recommendation. The recommended alternative includes 4 projects -- Main Corridor, Promenade, Overlook Walk, and East-West Connections -- that are holistically integrated. Each is an effective solution to the individual program needs it serves, and each is a critical component of an efficient and synergistic whole solution to the complex set of issues to be addressed by this project.

Develop an Alternative Implementation Schedule

The AWPOW will form an essential urban framework for mobility, urban development, public space, and the shoreline in Seattle's urban core. The successful implementation of this recommendation will establish a sustainable future for downtown Seattle. With the continued delays in the WSDOT Highway 99 tunnel project and the potential life safety risk caused by the seismic instability of the existing Highway 99 viaduct, it is important that Seattle be prepared to implement the AWPOW ASAP if the viaduct were to become unusable. The proposal should include an alternative implementation schedule in which the AWPOW could be completed before the Highway 99 tunnel is completed should that become necessary.

Maintain Integrated Mobility Systems

The balanced approach to mobility that integrates functionality for vehicles, transit, pedestrians, and bicycles and forms the basis for the recommendation is essential. Specifically, the distributed placement of parking spaces as proposed, along with enhanced accommodations for transit, pedestrians, and bicycles, increases the accessibility of the waterfront for all visitors. The proposed mode diversity is important to increase the carrying capacity of the mobility systems, connecting the various downtown neighborhoods. This integrated mobility strategy makes the thousands of available parking spaces in downtown more accessible to waterfront visitors, effectively increasing the number of parking spaces serving the waterfront.

Refine the Roadway Design South of Colman Dock

The new Alaskan Way south of Colman Dock serves multiple vehicular needs, including vehicles traveling into or through downtown, transit, and ferry traffic. In order to meet these needs, the proposed design creates a very wide street which disrupts the quality of the pedestrian experience connecting Pioneer Square to the waterfront. In order to mitigate these impacts the street should include urban street design strategies such as minimizing the number of lanes through shared use (example- eliminate portions of the ferry queuing lanes and serve the peak ferry queuing with shared lanes when needed); minimizing lane widths by implementing the most progressive urban street design standards; enhancing the pedestrian crossings by including curb bulbs, tabled intersections, and special paving; and breaking down the perceived scale of the street with substantial street tree plantings. The street design should also include provisions for reducing the number of lanes as future needs change.

Prioritize The Overlook Walk and East-West Connections

The new waterfront will be a significant amenity which will impact the entire downtown core. Its success will depend on strong east-west connections as proposed in the recommendation. The Overlook Walk is the primary east-west public space connection. Located adjacent to Pike Place Market, the Overlook Walk connects the downtown retail district, Pike Place Market, the Seattle Aquarium, and the waterfront. It provides much needed ADA accessibility on the significant topography between 1st Avenue and the waterfront, gathering spaces for children and families, elevated views accessible for the public, and an important grade separated connection allowing pedestrians to get to the waterfront without crossing vehicular traffic. It is the distinctive signature space that anchors the urban framework vision of the recommendation. It is important that the Overlook Walk continue to be developed as a top priority in the project in order to leverage the investments in other project elements as well as the investments by the Pike Place Market in the PC1 site and the Seattle Aquarium in its expansion plans.

The Seattle Aquarium is developing an expansion plan to occupy Building C of the Overlook Walk. This will allow the Aquarium to expand its facilities as needed without taking overwater coverage or blocking visual access to the water from public spaces. Please include a more refined analysis of the potential for integrating the Aquarium into the Overlook Walk design.



Conclusion

The AWPOW will be a transformative project for our region. The recommended proposal has been developed through many years of broad community efforts involving thousands of Seattle citizens and millions of dollars in costs. AIA Seattle strongly supports the continued development and implementation of this critical project including the Main Corridor, Promenade, Overlook Walk, and East-West Connections. Each project is a viable, well-conceived solution, and each is absolutely vital to the whole solution. If you would like further information regarding AIA Seattle comments for this recommendation, please contact AIA Seattle Executive Director Lisa Richmond at LisaR@aiaseattle.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sam Miller', written over a light grey rectangular background.

Sam Miller AIA
President
AIA Seattle