

# **BALLARD-INTERBAY REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM**

**Monday, February 3, 2020 | 6:00 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. | Magnolia United Church of Christ**

## **Meeting Notes**

### **Welcome and Attendee Introductions**

Diane Wiatr, the Ballard-Interbay Regional Transportation (BIRT) System project manager at the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT), welcomed meeting attendees. A show of hands revealed that many attendees were long-time Magnolia residents. City of Seattle Council member Andrew J. Lewis of District 7 (Pioneer Square to Magnolia) was also in attendance at this meeting.

Diane Wiatr introduced the project team in attendance including Chisaki Muraki-Valdovinos, Jonathan Lewis, Matt Donahue and Andres Arjona from SDOT; Samantha Stork from the City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods (DON); and Jennifer Wieland, Tom Brennan, and Michael Randolph from Nelson\Nygaard. Geri Poor, an Interagency Team (IAT) member representing the Port of Seattle was in attendance. IAT member Chris Rule from Sound Transit was also at the meeting and together with Samantha Stork, gave a presentation on the West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions light rail project.

Diane gave an overview of the BIRT project, including legislative language authorizing the project, the planned technical study, and a description of agency partners.

### **SDOT Presentation**

Tom Brennan of Nelson\Nygaard presented on the BIRT work program and schedule. He discussed the project area's context and neighborhood growth, coordination with other projects happening in the study area such as new Sound Transit 3 (ST3) light rail investments, the technical scope elements, and a project timeline. Matt Donahue, Roadway Structures Manager at SDOT, also gave a presentation on Magnolia and Ballard bridge maintenance and how studies of the bridges factored into the BIRT project. Diane Wiatr of SDOT then wrapped up by discussing the project team's plan for stakeholder outreach and engagement, how the public can get involved and stay informed, and next steps in the project process.

### **Q&A**

Roughly 20 minutes were available for questions from the audience and responses from the project team:

- Is the Magnolia bridge maintainable? Does the bridge need to be replaced at all?
  - If the bridge was not safe for operations it would be closed. Maintenance is ongoing. The real question is how long it will be maintainable and when will it be cheaper to replace the bridge than continue to maintain it. BIRT will help to define this timeline. As the bridge ages, it will take more money to maintain it. The BIRT project team wants to study how long the Magnolia bridge can be sustainably maintained before more serious capital investment is needed.
- About the Garfield St. Bridge: What part does the Port of Seattle play? Are they building a hotel for cruise ships?

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- Geri Poor, Port of Seattle, confirmed the Port is a partner in the BIRT study and that there are no plans to build a hotel on Port property. The Port is supportive of light industrial uses.
- On the Ballard Bridge, how is the balance between bridge height, need for a liftable span, and frequency of lifts determined?
  - In the bridge replacement study from last year, this was one of the first things studied. Alternatives included a “high-pass,” “mid-level”, and major retrofit. The overall question is how much the opening can be reduced and timing of the bridge raise while still following the maritime law. A longer span is required to create a high bridge, which has impacts on the landside integration with the community.
- There is a lot of planning already done in this area. How is BIRT different from previous planning? Why are the City and other agencies still doing planning?
  - Each of the previous plans of the past have had a different scope. For example, the bridge studies looked at connections between different roadways and neighborhoods, but they did not include a full system analysis. The BIRT project team is obtaining all past information to find what is still relevant. For example, ST3 will profoundly change how people in this area will move, and the population of this area is the largest it has ever been. Additionally, recent technological changes and the increase in e-commerce with online delivery systems such as Amazon need to be considered. If the bridges were to be replaced in the future, this would require an incredible amount of money and the city cannot do it alone. The BIRT study will set up potential future investments by WA state, such as inclusion in a future state transportation funding package.

Additional note: This study is different than previous studies because it culminates with a report for the WA legislature. That is an unusual outcome for a City of Seattle study.

- A lot of large entities are involved in this study, but small businesses are a huge part of this community as well. How will you reach out to the small business community?
  - One of the project partners is the Freight Mobility Strategic Investment Board (FMSIB), however the BIRT project team would be happy to talk about how small businesses are organized and how they can get involved in the study. Let’s connect on this.

The City has followed up and connected with the person who asked this question.

- On the assumption that the Ballard Bridge will someday be replaced, what are the alternatives for moving people if it is closed?
  - There is a study on this question coming out soon. For an option that relies on major maintenance or bridge rehabilitation, the bridge will remain open. With the “mid-level” or “high-pass” rehabilitation options, the bridge will remain open while a separate bridge is constructed. Previous studies did look at a tunnel alternative, but associated costs were high, and it is unlikely that it will be a viable alternative.
- Would those same options exist with Magnolia bridge? Would it be open during reconstruction?
  - Three of the alternatives rely on new street connections so would require closures to the current bridge during construction.
  - For the in-kind replacement options, a bridge would likely be constructed just south of the current bridge. Short closures would be needed to connect the new bridge to surface streets.

- Haven't heard you address the elevation that is required to build a higher bridge. Is this project looking at the development that is going on 15<sup>th</sup>? The PCC on other side of canal has one level below that is parking.
  - Part of the Mayor's Industrial and Maritime Strategy—which includes many stakeholders and advisors—is looking into how to utilize the land along 15<sup>th</sup> in the areas of the Armory, big box stores, and other large businesses that weren't there 10 years ago. The Mayor is interested in using those lands for higher wage jobs in the industrial, manufacturing, and maritime sectors. A report on this will be complete in June.
- After the study is given to the WA state legislature, what are the major milestones between then and project construction?
  - The timeline that far ahead lacks certainty. In November, the work will be presented to the State Transportation Committees and they will make a determination about how to proceed. This could be a new funding package, but with the passage of I-976, and far less funding for roads and transportation, there are a lot of unknowns at this time.
- The scope of study is access to Magnolia not just Magnolia Bridge. Are you looking at just the Magnolia bridge, or these older structures that are in bad shape?
  - The Dravus Street bridge and Emerson bridge were addressed in the Magnolia Bridge study as both of these structures are impacted by bridge replacement options.
- What was the conclusion of the Magnolia Bridge Replacement study? Or was it just data collection? I've been listening to this for so many years; they even settled on a design, but this is now a long time ago. We've been doing this for a long time. The BIRT legislation mentions bridge replacement, but does that include studying capacity replacement?
  - The intent of the study was not to recommend a preferred alternative but rather to look at the most viable alternatives. BIRT will include multiple multimodal transportation system scenarios, one of which includes an in-kind replacement of the Magnolia Bridge.
  - BIRT is required to have a phasing and implementation plan as a core component of any bridge or capacity replacement.

## **Sound Transit Presentation**

Sam Stork of the City of Seattle's Department of Neighborhoods and Chris Rule of Sound Transit gave a presentation on Sound Transit 3 Light Rail developments for Ballard. The presentation discussed system expansion, the Ballard Link extension, project timelines, a brief description of alignment alternatives, the City of Seattle's guiding principles for light rail development (dependable transit, vibrant communities, climate action, equity), and the community outreach timeline for the next year.

## **Q&A**

- Could there be a Sound Transit Sounder station in Magnolia, and could it be a transfer point for Light Rail in either Smith Cove or Interbay?
  - The Everett to Downtown line has only 4 roundtrips during the weekday. Sound Transit leases railroad space from BNSF and the Sound Transit Board studied other options for a Sounder station in Ballard or Interbay, but funding was prioritized to expand light rail service to these neighborhoods.
- Comment: All the infrastructure and transportation plans should be integrated together.

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- Where is the preferred Station Location for Interbay?
  - The preferred Interbay Station location is near Thorndyke and 17th, north of Dravus and, east of railroad tracks.
- Transit has gone beyond a want and is more of a need. What about acceleration of the project?
  - The project schedule is already on an accelerated timeline. Sound Transit wants to deliver this project as fast as possible and is looking at ways to streamline permitting. Sound Transit is working with the City of Seattle to see what can happen in parallel instead of in sequence given many areas of collaboration.
- Is the preferred alternative for the Ballard line elevated over 15<sup>th</sup>?
  - The preferred alternative is elevated but generally not within the 15<sup>th</sup> Ave W roadway. It travels alongside Elliott Ave W south of W Galer St, then crosses to the west side of 15<sup>th</sup> Ave and travels in the area between the railroad tracks and the golf course. It then crosses over 15<sup>th</sup> to a high-level fixed bridge aligned with 14<sup>th</sup> Ave NW.
- At Mercer, will it extend north into the Queen Anne Greenbelt?
  - There are alternatives that pass along the base of the Queen Anne Greenbelt. The preferred alternative does not pass along the Greenbelt.
- Parking; consider putting in park-and-rides. I am already seeing people parking in neighborhoods to get on the bus.
  - Sound Transit is evaluating multimodal access to each station, so people can arrive to stations in a variety of ways.
- Is Sound Transit looking at future technology? Self-driving vehicles?
  - Yes, Sound Transit is considering this and multi-modal connections.
- Access – what about that last mile? Not everyone can walk/ride/or take transit to these stations. I don't feel the Metro/light rail system is robust enough for people.
  - Sound Transit is focused on accessibility for individuals at all ages and abilities and is working with King County Metro to see how local transit service to planned stations can be enhanced.
- Are you looking at existing stations that don't have parking? These challenges happen at existing stations.
  - The WSBLE project is looking at access by various modes to stations along the extension. As part of the Draft EIS analysis, Sound Transit will be looking at potential impacts to existing parking in neighborhoods around the new stations.
- I feel that the driving time on Magnolia has doubled since bike lanes and traffic light changes were put in. I do not see any bicyclists. Most people that are in Magnolia are not biking.
  - The BIRT will study specific traffic issues.
- Comment: It was difficult when they closed the Garfield Bridge in the past during the earthquake. Traffic is also difficult with the bike lanes on Fisherman's Terminal.
- Dravus is an access point, but only a two-lane bridge. Will it be widened?
  - This can be examined in the BIRT study.

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- Would the WSBLE alternatives be elevated over the Dravus Street bridge? Could you share this evaluation with the community? What about underneath the bridge – is that off the table?
  - The preferred alternative is elevated over Dravus Street. The preferred alternative with third-party funding goes under Dravus Street. The evaluation of alternatives will be included in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, which will be published in early 2021.

**Figure 1** Boards from the Community Meeting

### Welcome to the Ballard-Interbay Regional Transportation System (BIRT) Public Meeting #1

**Agenda**

- 6:00 PM - Welcome and Sign-in
- 6:15 PM - BIRT Presentation
- 6:35 PM - BIRT Q&A
- 7:00 PM - Sound Transit 3 Presentation
- 7:15 PM - Sound Transit 3 Q&A
- 7:25 PM - Closing and Next Steps

**Project Summary**

The Washington State Legislature asked SDOT to develop a report on how to improve travel for people and goods in Ballard-Interbay. BIRT is a technical transportation study. BIRT will:

- Evaluate and recommend future improvements for a reliable transportation system to serve the Ballard, Magnolia, and Interbay neighborhoods
- Address all types of travel, considering movement of people and goods
- Develop a timeline for the replacement of the Ballard and Magnolia Bridges

Project partners include the City of Seattle, the Port of Seattle, Sound Transit, King County, the Washington State Military, and Washington State Department of Transportation.

**Project Timeline**

To stay updated sign-up on our listserv at [seattle.gov/transportation/birt](http://seattle.gov/transportation/birt)

### Where did you come from and how did you get here today?

Select a sticker to indicate how you traveled here today and place it where you live.

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**Figure 2 Stickers Representing Attendee Origins and Travel Modes on February 3, 2020**

