



Advisory Group 5th Avenue Workshop Summary (DRAFT)

May 16, 2017

5:00 – 7:00 PM

Seattle Municipal Tower – Room 3832

Summary:

Nine One Center City Advisory Group members met on May 16, 2017 from 5 to 7 PM to discuss details of North/South Option D's two-way 5th Avenue transit spine and pedestrian realm. Consultants Nelson\Nygaard and VIA presented design strategies. Discussion followed on the opportunities and challenges for two options for 5th Avenue. The takeaways included:

- There are great transit streets. Does 5th Avenue has the potential to be one?
- 5th Avenue cannot be done well within the near-term time line.
- In depth analysis was helpful and there is interest in doing similar analysis with other downtown streets.

Welcome and Introductions:

Meghan Shepard, Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT), welcomed members of the One Center City Advisory Group and led a round of introductions. Tom Brennan, Nelson\Nygaard and facilitator, walked through the purpose and intent of the workshop, which is specific to the potential near-term strategy Option D, including the operation of 5th Avenue as a two-way transit spine.

Background on Option D:

Tom reminded attendees that:

- Initial modeling of Option D showed it was effective from the standpoint of speed and reliability for transit. It also worked well for bike and auto systems because it reduced conflict from turning movements and, by consolidating transit service onto 5th Avenue, created additional spaces for bicycle and vehicle movement on 2nd and 4th Avenues.
- Public outreach and engagement on the strategy generated a polarized response, consistent with feedback received from the Advisory Group. Many people were excited about the opportunity and the space it created for other modes. The most common concern was about possible public realm impacts; especially inadequate sidewalk space and impacts to the retail district.
- The One Center City team decided that this is an idea that needed more exploration, so the technical team has been looking at potential bus operations and volumes and working with VIA,

the project public realm consultants, to understand how many people could be waiting on the sidewalk and how that might impact other pedestrian movements.

Tom also shared that the project team has been working to answer the question of whether a two-way 5th Avenue transit spine can be implemented in the short timeframe before the end of joint bus/rail operations in the Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel. He reported that the need to do the project well is high, the viability of getting the project done in 2018-2019 is low, and there are significant construction conflicts in the 5th Avenue corridor during that time frame. The Rainier Tower/Metropolitan Tract project will close lanes on 4th and 5th Avenues and we want to avoid putting additional transit on a street that will be significantly diminished during the critical timeframe. The Denny-Massachusetts Transmission line may also impact 5th Avenue with trenching at the south end, and Sound Transit's planning work to identify the location for a second downtown transit tunnel will begin later this year. All of these impacts to 5th in combination suggest that 5th Avenue two-way transit operations is not a project to be delivered in the near-term. If we come out of this workshop thinking there is feasibility in the project, then it probably fits more in the mid- to long-term planning process. Tonight, we want to get thoughts and input on the new analysis that can be shared with the One Center City Executive Team.

Question: What segments of 5th Avenue are we talking about tonight?

Response: *5th Avenue from Stewart to Seattle Boulevard.*

Question: What if we feel this project should never happen, not even in the mid- or long-term?

Response: *Despite where we might be heading in the near-term, 5th Avenue as a two-way transit spine is a viable idea. Even if it's not implemented in full, the public realm considerations and conversation tonight can provide valuable input into the character of 5th and what we want to do on 5th or other downtown transit streets.*

Question: If 5th Avenue as a two-way transit spine isn't going to happen in the short-term, then what will happen in the short-term?

Response: *The project team is leaning towards the set of options that was encompassed in Option B – transit enhancements on 2nd and 4th and bike facilities. We will present and discuss that at the next Advisory Group meeting. If you look back at Option B, that is the primary direction with some refinements.*

Mahlon Clements, VIA, introduced the 5th Avenue public realm presentation, which covers:

- Goals of what we're trying to do for the street:
 - Reduce overall total street traffic
 - Increase public realm area, amenities, and quality
 - Locate transit stops to maximize benefit and minimize impact
 - Make 5th Avenue "the most beautiful street in the world"
- A summary of Advisory Group comments/concerns so far
- An examination of transit streets to see what we can learn from other places
- Analysis of what 5th Avenue actually is based on current vehicular use and character

- Two concepts which get to the questions, concerns, ideas and anxieties about what is being discussed

Question: In thinking about pedestrians walking next to traffic, cars making a turn creates a back-up. The cars can't go until the last pedestrian has crossed. To think about moving traffic we need to think about parallel pedestrians crossing the street and cars making turns.

Response: *Tonight's discussion will not delve into auto turning impacts specifically. However, 5th Avenue as a two-way transit spine could be a benefit for pedestrians because most transit traffic would move straight through the corridor and there will be fewer turns.*

Question: Would 5th Avenue be bus-only twenty-four hours/seven days a week?

Response: *No, just during the peak period.*

Mahlon shared examples of Peer Transit Streets including Granville in Vancouver, the Portland Transit Mall; Madison, Wisconsin and Nicollet Mall in Minneapolis.

Question: In the Portland Transit Mall, are cars now allowed in the right-hand lane?

Response: *Yes. It was historically transit-only. After a design process, it was decided to add back a general-purpose lane. The decision was driven by the business community. The issue of allowing some traffic through the 5th Avenue corridor can also be discussed here.*

5TH AVENUE TODAY

Mahlon shared the three different character districts along 5th Avenue today: Retail (from Olive to Spring Streets), Office Core/Government (from Spring to Yesler Streets) and the Chinatown/International District (from Yesler to Dearborn Streets).

The Retail District is primarily three travel lanes with a 66' wide right-of-way and 33' wide road. The sidewalks are 16-17' wide. There are loading zones in cut-outs and no curbspace parking. The street is characterized by a lot of retail storefronts, high quality amenities and mid-block crossings.

Question: What is the history of the mid-block crossings?

Response: *Some of them date back to the 1940s. Others were added in a repaving project that also added street lights and newspaper boxes.*

The Office Core/Government District is further south. It has a 66' wide right-of-way, four lanes of traffic, narrower sidewalks but many locations have a plaza or private property setback. It doesn't have the same "street-wall" character you find in the Retail District.

In the Chinatown/International District of 5th Avenue, the sidewalks range from 12 to 13' and narrower. The edge conditions are different here, with a number of parking lots adjacent to the sidewalk. 5th Avenue operating as a two-way transit spine could be an opportunity to improve 5th Avenue here.

Mahlon shared the following data that informed the analysis:

- Vehicles on 5th Avenue now: 858 cars per hour
- 3rd Avenue current peak transit volume 250 buses per hour in each direction
- 5th Avenue current peak transit volume: 10-12 buses per hour
- 5th Avenue Options A and B assume: 124 buses per peak total (this amount assumes some transit service maintained on 2nd and 4th). This is the high-end number towards the center of the corridor; there are lower volumes in the retail district.

We are interested in the pedestrian space, such as how many people would be waiting for buses, at what time of day and how much space and at what time, and how much space is available for queuing.

Building on the existing character, VIA developed two options for review tonight. Mahlon began with a review of 5th Avenue Option A, which:

- Minimizes impacts to the retail core area by having only two lanes of traffic (as compared to three today) and converting a lane of roadway to pedestrian space
- Avoids locating any bus stops in the Retail Core, but does require that high-demand bus stops be located at either end
- Can create additional pedestrian space in the Chinatown/International District area

Question: On First Hill along the Madison BRT alignment there are very narrow sidewalks and the project is considering a permeable pavement at tree pits. Have you considered something similar in this area?

Response: *This analysis does not assume tree pit covers to create additional pedestrian space.*

Mahlon continued with a review of Option B, which:

- Makes all of 5th Avenue three lanes which allows buses to pass each other
- Requires bus stops in the retail district

VIA created sample 3-D views at three locations to project what the pedestrian areas look like today and could look like in both options.

Location 1 – Between Pike-Union (US Bank Centre):

- Option A: No bus stops; can reclaim 10-11' of pavement for another use
- Option B: Adds a bus stop in this location because the frontage has the potential to be accommodating:
 - There are two existing curb cuts and loading zones which could be an opportunity to put bus waiting areas in the loading zone location
 - There are no storefronts along the main piece

Question: What is the criteria for evaluating which load zones can be removed? We are discussing peak times but what about non-peak?

Response: *This diagram shows non-peak times. Strategies would be need to continue to allow access for goods to the site.*

Mahlon then showed the PM peak with estimates of pedestrian volumes, including cross-section of the numbers of anticipated pedestrians.

Question: The hotel across the street from the US Bank Centre has Uber/taxi/drop-off/pick-up. Would access to the hotel still be permitted?

Response: *The street would be operated like 3rd Avenue; allowing local access at any time of the day, even during the peak.*

Location 2 – Between Madison and Marion (Madison Centre)

- Option A – has four lanes in this zone (which allows two lanes of transit through the retail core without bus stops)
 - Shows the same width of sidewalk as exists today
 - Passenger loading during the peak would be level of service C
- Option B –all of 5th Avenue operates with three lanes
 - Yellow band in the image shows where the design maintains an 8' through zone for people not riding the bus
 - Red areas are where people have to board – these areas need to be clear for wheelchairs

Question: Are we looking at an elevated bus bulb/raised boarding to create a separated area between bus passengers and pedestrian through-areas? It could speed zoning and clearly distinguishes the two areas.

Response: *We could consider in some specific areas.*

Location 3 – Between University and Seneca (Olympia Hotel)

- Option A – Two lanes – no stops and more pedestrian space
- Option B - Real challenge here is the restricted ROW and there would have to be bus stops
- Some of those stops would have level of service D for pedestrians

Question: When you show crowded sidewalks for one to two hours a day, is that today's population or projected growth?

Response: *Passenger volumes projected are based on current ridership of the transit service we assumed operated in this corridor in these scenarios. These services operate with a high passenger capacity.*

Mahlon asked for follow-up questions:

Question: What cities besides Seattle have 124 buses per hour on their streets?

Response: *A half dozen including New York and Honolulu. Seattle has high traffic volumes because of the water/street constraints. 3rd Avenue moves the most buses per hour in the US.*

Question: Given the feedback we've heard about 3rd Avenue, are we planning to do anything for that street?

Response: *There is a 3rd Avenue project from Marion to Pike. Improvements will include new street furniture and materials. One idea likely moving forward is off-board fare payment and all-door boarding that we hope to get implemented by 2018. That shows a lot of potential benefits.*

Question: Have any of these concepts been shared with businesses on 5th Avenue?

Response: *No, these concepts are being shared with the advisory group first. Based on your feedback we will modify and adjust and then continue to share.*

Mahlon then shared larger plots of the streets to allow great examination of the options.

Question: Can you get more buses through the corridor than 124 per peak hour?

Response: *A single transit lane with no stops can carry 80-100 buses per hour. Some of the peer facilities, like Granville Street, have 60 plus buses per hour with in-lane stops. Buses run for about 6-8 blocks without stops. Option A has 14 blocks without a stop, but we could move the stops closer together.*

Mahlon described how 5th Avenue between Pike and Pine is one of the most sensitive blocks in the street. They wanted to get that configuration down to two lanes to expand the sidewalk. The block under the monorail, given the column spacing, works well for transit and would allow for two stops, then a transition zone to the south.

Bus stop placement is also influenced by bus stops on the cross streets. Option B for 5th Avenue provides important connections – especially at Madison BRT.

Question: How would mid-block crossings be regulated?

Response: *They would probably operate as they do today.*

Question: Are you keeping the mid-block crossings?

Response: *We have not gotten to that level of detail in design or modeling. Where you have bus stops on either side of the crosswalk, it becomes problematic from a driver visibility standpoint.*

Tom described how Granville Street in Vancouver was rebuilt over a cut-and-cover transit tunnel. After a design process, the city selected a low-curb design to create more of a woonerf style transit mall.

Question: Is 5th the destined location for the second Sound Transit tunnel?

Response: *It is the representative alignment and will be the starting point for alternatives analysis. That work will start later this year.*

VIA and Nelson/Nygaard then asked about attendees' reactions to the presented analysis and design.

Comment: I fail to see how either one is a great street. Maybe we don't have enough detail, but both seem horrible with so much congestion around the bus stops. A congested bus stop really kills retail flow and pedestrian flow. The picture of Madison-Marion at peak does not look like a place that I would want to be. Great streets should be great 24-7.

Comment: Option A is my preference because it improves the character and quality of the street. Creating a pleasant walking experience for people not waiting for the bus is the challenge here and on 3rd Avenue. Wider sidewalks give opportunity for sidewalk cafes.

Comment: How will the business feel about the bus shelters? When people aren't waiting for the bus, those shelters are being used to provide shelter for people experiencing homeless. Also, if you go down to two lanes, there's often an ambulance, police, broken bus. The third lane gives you the flexibility to move into that lane.

Comment: Currently there are essentially no street facing restaurants along 5th Avenue. Are there any sidewalk cafes?

Comment: We can't forget about cars on 5th Avenue. The existing traffic is not all commuters and a lot of it is heading to I-5.

Response: *One strategy being considered in conjunction with 5th Avenue is allowing two-way traffic on 6th Avenue to help move vehicles to I-5.*

Comment: For people whose buses currently operate on 2nd Avenue, moving up to 5th seems like a long distance to walk.

Response: *Buses on 2nd today also run on 4th Avenue when they travel in the other direction. So, it's moving one more block to 5th.*

Question: What is the success of retail on peer transit network streets?

Response: *In Portland, there has been significant investment in some portions of the long corridor. The Old Town area was very run-down with empty businesses prior to the mall revitalization and has now it has taken off.*

Question: Portland made significant pedestrian improvements and added a general-purpose traffic lane. What part of the improvements made the difference?

Response: *The redesign of the Portland Transit Mall included a significant process to get the business community on-board and paying into a community fund for security, cleanliness and monitoring. Granville is another good example. It has a successful retail environment with high retail sales.*

Tom summarized that most of the feedback is about the spatial constraints of the street for pedestrians and constraints during off-peak times for delivery access. One strategy to address deliveries could be to construct areas with a mountable curb, like what currently exists on 3rd Avenue. Attendees continued to discuss concerns and ideas about the concept including:

- Interest in this strategy because it offers the best option to move the most people and free up space on 2nd and 4th Avenues for vehicles and bikers.
- Concern that we are designing streets to move people through, not to destinations in downtown.
- Concern that attendees still do not know if 5th Avenue as two-way transit spine is a good solution for today or even for 10-20 years from now when there will be more people and new travel patterns.
- Interest in how this design work has showed how bus stops can be added in thoughtful places with a minimum of impact to retail uses.
- A desire to know more about Third Avenue and how the operations of that street affect businesses, safety and mobility before replicating it on another street. Concern that we need to learn from our current experiences, including that a two-way protected bike lane on 2nd Avenue doesn't work and there are too many buses on 3rd Avenue.
- Support for Option B (maintains three lanes along 5th and includes bus stops in the Retail Core) because it would work best for people with limited mobility
- Concern that 5th Avenue might not be the right location for the most beautiful street in the country, which should have outdoor cafes. Maybe 4th Avenue has better sidewalk width for those activities.
- Appreciation for the activity, which has helped to highlight the options and the potential for how people would use the street, how crowded it would feel and how safe it might feel.

In summary, Tom and Mahlon shared that:

- There are great transit only streets all over the world when cities invest in both transit and the public realm
- 5th Avenue today experiences 850 cars per peak hour and in these scenarios, would experience 120 buses. The cars are mainly going through the area, but they are smaller and easier to see through. 3rd Avenue experiences both the pedestrian crowding and the larger vehicles.

Mahlon asked what else attendees would want to see in future analysis. Responses included:

- More information about 3rd Avenue and how it operates today

- Similar analysis for 2nd and 4th Avenues to show those options and benefits to those streets when paired with a 5th Avenue two-way transit spine

Tom added that what we were hoping to come out of tonight with is attendees' initial reaction to the work that's been done. An update will be provided at the June meeting regarding how this is moving forward. He thanked the attendees for coming and for their insights.

ATTENDEES:

Advisory Group Attendees:

- Staci Haber
- Jim Erickson
- Jeff Myrter
- Amalia Martino
- Erin Goodman
- Michael Davis
- Tom Graff
- Holly Hauser
- Rico Quirindongo

Staff Attendees:

- Susan McLaughlin, SDOT
- Paul Roybal, King County Metro
- Jonathan Hopkins, Commute Seattle
- Mahlon Clements, VIA
- Lyle Bicknell, Office of Planning and Community Development
- Justin Panganiban, VIA
- Tom Brennan, Nelson/Nygaard
- Eric Tweit, SDOT
- Meghan Shepard, SDOT