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July 9, 2010

Dear Mayor McGinn and Seattle City Councilmembers:

Feet First, the state's only pedestrian advocacy organization, has been promoting walkable communities in the Puget Sound region and across the state since 1995. Feet First promotes walkable communities for health, transportation, environment and enjoyment; helping people take steps that create better places to live, learn, shop, work and play.

Given our mission and the insight we provide to projects, we would like to share with you our concerns over the Washington Department of Transportation's Alaskan Way Viaduct Central Waterfront tunnel project. To this end, we are compelled to share our concerns how this project will have serious negative impacts on pedestrian life, specifically in Pioneer Square.

We know Pioneer Square well; our office is located in the neighborhood. This is our beloved historic district and we look to you to stand up for the people of this area and its streets and sidewalks in your negotiations with WSDOT regarding this tunnel project.

Pioneer Square is a beautiful and cherished neighborhood by locals and visitors alike. They recognize that spending time here is a fundamental part of the Seattle experience. Our buildings bring Seattle's 19th century history to life, and host an enviable mix of entrepreneurial and recreational businesses. This neighborhood's vitality is dependent on a few assets: our great streets, our historic buildings, street grid, sidewalks, and alleys and our local economy. Even a casual appraisal of the neighborhood whether it is a summer day busy with visitors, during a First Thursday Art Walk, or on Mariner's or Sounders' game day, it is clear that the very well being of the neighborhood is dependent on the pedestrian environment.

Preserving this asset has not been easy. Every generation of stewards has devoted significant attention to protecting our wonderful streetscape, whether by saving the majestic trees on First Avenue South or carefully guiding facade renovations or doing the hard work to ensure ferry traffic is routed away from our neighborhood streets.

As you know, WSDOT is proposing to replace the viaduct with a highway that includes on and off ramps at Main and Washington. These ramps will serve as the primary route between SR-99 and downtown Seattle, attracting a high volume of car traffic. Preliminary estimates from WSDOT suggest that about 59,000 additional cars will use either our neighborhood streets or the new Alaskan Way each day to access these ramps. The actual volume could be higher, depending on possible toll diversion rates (currently both First Ave South and Alaskan Way have about 12,000 trips a day in our area). This is a nearly 80 percent increase in trips through the area daily. This increase in traffic is a major concern not only on pedestrian safety, but for the vitality of the Pioneer Square neighborhood.

When asked by Feet First what WSDOT propose to do to our city streets to make room for this daily flood of highway-orientated traffic, WSDOT did not address improvements to make pedestrian and bike access or safety better, rather they only addressed traffic capacity. They failed to answer the question from a multi-modal perspective. Their answer to our question was:

“Although the configuration for the proposed bored tunnel’s south portal is still early in design, we do expect to **significantly improve** the functionality of the street grid in that vicinity. Capacity on Alaskan Way will be improved to accommodate the additional vehicles that would use it to access downtown. “

If mitigation to the south portal is done poorly, this could ruin our fragile neighborhood and our connection to the new waterfront. We urge you to get clarity immediately on exactly how WSDOT intends to “improve” our street grid, while there is still time and budget to get it right, before the contracts are signed. While the tunnel is a WSDOT project, it is our collective responsibility to protect the pedestrian environment and physical fabric of the historic district. More specifically, we request that the Mayor and Seattle City Council take the following actions:

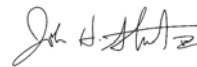
1. For SDOT and WSDOT, to identify in detail what volume of cars plan to accommodate on which streets. Specify any special conditions such as peak hour, during events and during ferry loading and unloading.
2. For SDOT and WSDOT to provide drawings that show engineering changes to neighborhood traffic patterns and detailed design of any proposed physical changes to streets. SDOT and King County Metro should identify in detail where buses will be permanently rerouted, and where they will be rerouted during construction of the southern segment and construction of the south portal, and in the final configuration.
3. Before the contracts are signed, enlist your newly hired panel of experts to work with stewards of the historic district to define benchmarks for our streets and evaluate the proposals in light of these standards. There are many questions to consider in evaluating the impacts to the Pioneer Square neighborhood, including:
 - How will these street changes affect the pedestrian environment?
 - How will they affect access to local businesses and residences?
 - Are there other alternative solutions that might work better for Pioneer Square’s interests?
 - Will this additional traffic degrade or threaten the delicate infrastructure of our underground and areaways?
 - Will tunneling and constant dewatering in our unstable soils threaten our historic buildings during construction?
 - Is WSDOT providing adequate protection of historic resources throughout the historic district, and is there enough funding to prevent or mitigate damage?

Pioneer Square is struggling. We are determined to save our neighborhood, and are grateful for the City’s new commitment to a revitalization effort to get us back on our feet. We need you to stand up for Pioneer Square against what might be a bigger threat. We are counting on you to ensure highway-orientated traffic is not routed through our streets, to negotiate excellent design for local streets that must be altered, and to secure adequate funding for successful completion. Pioneer Square must not only survive the WSDOT tunnel project, but emerge on the other side a stronger, more vibrant neighborhood.

Sincerely yours,



Lisa Quinn
Executive Director



John Stewart
Board President