

SOUTH LAKE UNION – TRANSIT ACCESS & RIDERSHIP re+walk – AUGUST 30, 2006



The South Lake Union neighborhood (SLU) in Seattle is an up-and-coming neighborhood. In the past its industrial character precluded the development of much residential or mixed-use development. A recent revival of SLU has incorporated dense residential development, several new companies that draw more people working in the neighborhood, and new shops, restaurants and cafes. **STREETS WALKED:** Westlake Avenue North, Thomas Street, Harrison Street, Dexter Avenue North, Mercer Street, Fairview Avenue North, and John Street.

re+walk [v. ree-wawk; n. ree-wawk]: to walk through a place you have walked before, seeing it in a different light. –*Synonyms:* reimagining, reviewing, rediscovering.

Participants:

Feet First, King County Metro, Vulcan, Inc, Seattle Department of Transportation, South Lake Union Chamber of Commerce, Children’s Hospital, Group Health, Fred Hutchinson, UW Medicine, Anne Vernez-Moudon (University of Washington), Lynne Faulk (Wayworks)

TOP OBSERVATIONS:

- South Lake Union is an area that will be affected by construction for some time period, either due to new building construction, streetcar construction, or for future Mercer Street Improvements.
- South Lake Union, for the most part, has very wide streets which could be an opportunity in the future to expand sidewalks and make room for sidewalk activity.
- Many streets visited by pedestrians are run-down and uninviting, or abut building walls with blank faces.
- Currently the bus shelter or bus stop environment is less appealing because the human scale is less supported on these arterials. This is due to wide streets, distance from crosswalks, narrow sidewalks, traffic noise, and traffic volume.
- Denny Way, bordering SLU to the South, is a particularly intimidating street for pedestrians, with high traffic speed and volume. Mercer Street, also with high volume and lack of crossings, needs many improvements in order to connect with the future Lake Union Park.
- The most pedestrian-friendly streetscapes in SLU currently exist because of choices made by private developers.

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TOP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR KING COUNTY METRO:

1. Visibility of bus stops should be enhanced by using several possible methods: wayfinding, signage, shelter design, placement, collocation with street furniture (such as waste receptacles, bike racks, or newspaper vending boxes)
2. Because construction is a disruption that will likely occur in SLU for quite some time, it is important that bus stop location during construction be clearly marked, and every attempt should be made to keep stops open for the duration of construction.
3. Working with development companies in SLU to engage with them on pedestrian-oriented design near bus shelters and bus stops is high priority for securing an environment that supports a vibrant and walkable South Lake Union.
4. Continued expansion of service will be needed as more people come to work in South Lake Union.
5. Location of bus stops should be placed adjacent to where crosswalks are already placed

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SOUTH LAKE UNION:

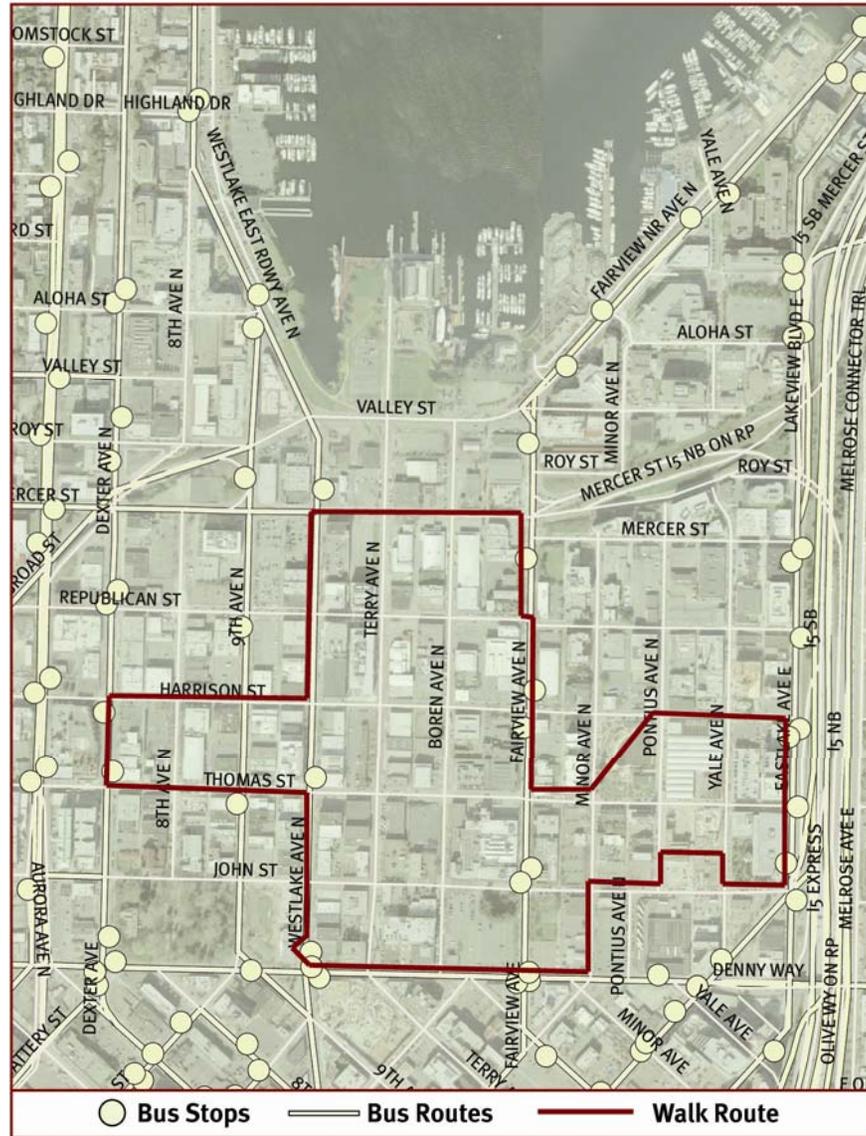
1. Explore the possibility of expansion of the sidewalk environment with future developers/SDOT for non-arterial streets with narrow sidewalks and wide right-of-way for vehicles. For arterials, consider traffic calming mechanisms for non-rush hour.
2. Reconsider policies in Seattle’s Right-of-Way Manual for allowing pedestrian access during construction.



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Aerial Photo of re+walk Route: developing office, retail, residential and industrial areas.



Item Key

Issues and action items are labeled with four color-coded icons that identify what action is recommended to make improvements. Additionally, as most of the action recommended is in the public domain, each item includes a specification for the category area that can facilitate coordination with or by the appropriate local or state agency.

- ★ - citizen or business initiative could solve this problem
- 📞 - existing programs can be tapped to make improvements
- 📄 - policy change or new funding may be required to implement changes, or King County Metro should consider a change
- ⌘ - informational item, action may not be necessary, but opportunities for cultural emphasis or public information may exist

Issues and Action Items

Item	Location	Description	Photo
1 ⌘	Westlake Ave N and Thomas St	Pedestrian environment is greatly enhanced by bench, awnings, brick pavers, new plantings, and screen artwork, as well as windows that interface well with the sidewalk. Tree wells do not intrude into sidewalk space. This is a great example of how new development can enhance the pedestrian environment	

Item	Location	Description	Photo
2 	Westlake Ave N	Bus stop (#17) is invisible because of construction activity, even though temporary signage has been placed	
3  	Harrison St, Thomas St, Westlake Ave N	Bus stops (even outside of places where construction is currently happening) not noticeable—e.g., bus stops should consist of more than just one pole w/sign. Other street furniture located around the bus stop could enhance the environment.	
4  	Thomas St and 9th Ave N	Dumpsters on sidewalks, uneven sidewalk, and graffiti erode the pedestrian environment	
5  	9th Ave N between John St and Thomas St	Chain Link, rusted, with barbed wires creates atmosphere of decay, and deters pedestrian activity. Next door, though, an open garage with workers inside the Iron Works promotes interface with sidewalk and makes the block more inviting and interesting (while giving the neighborhood character)	
6 	9th Ave N between John St and Thomas St	Jones Soda is a good example of making the most of a building with paint	
7 	Dexter Ave N and Thomas St	More dumpsters on the sidewalk	

Item	Location	Description	Photo
8   	Westlake Ave N	Even though sidewalks may be accessible during construction it may deter people from using the sidewalk	
9 	Westlake Ave N between Harrison St and Republican St	East side of street consists of Firestone, which contributes to the character of this portion of the street, due to architecture of building as well as garage interface with the street and employees inside, adding activity	
10  	Westlake Ave N and Mercer St	Utilities poles (and construction signs) create competition/unsafe conditions for pedestrians and cyclists at corners	
11  	Mercer St	Mercer Street is unwalkable, loud, there are not enough crossings, existing crossings are not well-marked, wayfinding to local workplaces difficult, double left turns into crosswalks on Mercer/Fairview create less safe environment for pedestrians, and construction constricts access to remaining sidewalks; one suggestion for future crosswalks might be to have an on-demand push button for pedestrians (that turns green when pushed)	

Item	Location	Description	Photo
12  	Terry Ave N	Curb ramps are wide and promote good accessibility, though streetcar tracks (post-operational) could be a challenge for wheeled transportation	
13 	Fairview Ave N just south of Mercer	Chain link fence right next to bus shelter is not visually appealing	
14 	Fairview Ave N	Easy grade, viewshed to lake are all assets to the neighborhood, when designed for	
15  	Fairview Ave N, other streets (Harrison St)	Street Trees are an asset to the pedestrian environment, softening the effect that traffic and traffic noise has. Coupled with businesses providing banners, they add interest to the pedestrian environment, may calm traffic, and create a more neighborhood-friendly streetscape	
16  	Fairview-Westlake Ave N	More legible east-west connections between Westlake Ave N and Fairview are needed to promote routes	
17 	Fairview Ave N	Again, bus stops without shelters on Fairview lack visibility and do not provide much information	
18  	Boren Ave N	Boren is better to walk on than Fairview and should be made a more obvious pedestrian connection to increase its use	

Item	Location	Description	Photo
19  	Fairview Ave N	Blacktop between the sidewalk and street is broken and uneven especially around trees; mature trees are a great asset and care should be taken to preserve them as new construction comes to different areas	
20  	Harrison St	Construction signs are blocking sidewalk, again, on the South side	
21   	Thomas St and Minor St	The Cascade P-Patch is a wonderful neighborhood resource, providing one of the few green and open spaces along the re+walk route. Depending on interest, more spaces should be looked to in South Lake Union for creating another p-patch, and if there's not interest in another p-patch a pocket park, a plaza space, or any other type of open space should be pursued (or required) as part of future development	
22   	Thomas St and Minor St	Adjacent to the p-patch, the playfield and open space can be utilized for a number of community activities, and its adjacency to dense urban residential buildings should be replicated elsewhere in South Lake Union, when possible. Even traveling through a community space like this to/from work or transit provides a benefit	

Item	Location	Description	Photo
23 	Harrison St, Pontius Ave N	Alcyone and Paddy Coyne’s landscaping (dog art, new sidewalk, plantings, street trees, step-up from sidewalk to outdoor seating area) is a huge benefit to character of neighborhood	
24 	Thomas St and Harrison St	Step back of building after first floor contributes to pedestrian environment, adding to human scale, as does the presence of awnings	
25 	Behind Yale off of John Street	Placemaking activities such as embedded tiles in the concrete add to the neighborhood character	
26  	Boren St (new senior living development, Mirabella)	No curb ramps, uneven street and sidewalk causes inaccessibility to the park (shown to the right) one block away. This park is a great open space resource for seniors or anyone else, and attention should be paid to allow for access for people of all abilities	
27  	Pontius Street	Ends in building, blocking view to lake. New opportunities for development should consider viewshed to lake	

Item	Location	Description	Photo
28  	John Street	Uneven pavement needs to be fixed; this would especially affect those who are sight-impaired or in a wheelchair	
29   	John Street	Dead-end near Seattle Times building could be an opportunity for a pedestrian stairwell to be constructed, creating a pedestrian connection	
30   	Denny Street	Not comfortable despite wide sidewalks; in this area the sidewalk needs to be even wider because of traffic (amount) and traffic speed. Some sidewalks (such as those shown) are adjacent to parking lots; future development along these routes should take into consideration an enhancement of the bus stop and sidewalk environment. The location of the #8 bus stop near Whole Foods could be reconsidered to allow for a more convenient crossing	 
31  	General comment	South Lake Union seems to be plagued by street noise problems, probably due to more trucks using the area, construction noise, as well as high traffic volume on some streets	

Item	Location	Description	Photo
32  	General comment	Benches are a great asset, and could be placed by business/corporation owners adjacent to bus stops to provide more seating. Benches also invite more street activity, leading to a more vibrant neighborhood	
33  	General comment	More trash cans should be available for dog waste as more people move to live in South Lake Union	
34    	General comment	<p>Blank walls are detrimental to the pedestrian environment. Future development shouldn't include blank walls, and current temporary solutions could include planting boxes or murals.</p> <p>Additionally, many streets have a wide right-of-way for vehicles and narrow sidewalks. These locations should be considered during future development as opportunities for developers, King County Metro (where bus lines exist), the Seattle Department of Transportation and other city agencies to work together in enhancing the pedestrian environment</p>	

Item	Location	Description	Photo
35   	General comment	Addition of more bike lanes would support bike-to-work and bike-to-transit in the neighborhood.	
36  	General comment	4 foot long tree wells cut into sidewalk area too far in some instances	
37    	General Comment	Connections to areas West of South Lake Union and to the future Lake Union Park should be considered as well as view connections (the view to Lake Union is shown on the right). The view to the EMP and Seattle Center on Harrison not utilized since east-west connection is not possible (Aurora obstructs the connection). In the more distant future	
38 	General Comment	Street signs should be more visible when in bus	
39   	Wayfinding Suggestions	Experimenting with sidewalk paint that indicates bus route and bus route location from non-bus-route streets could be very artful, contributing to wayfinding but also to the unique character of the neighborhood that exists already. More standard wayfinding kiosks including bus info and public spaces should be included in area (similar to kiosks that exist in Downtown Seattle). Wayfinding landmarks include the Steeple of Orthodox Church at Yale Ave N and Harrison, the view to Lake Union, the view to St. Mark's on Capitol Hill, views to the Space Needle, etc. makes a good wayfinding device is the location. There is also a desire to turn "up" streets (to the South) because of downtown buildings and how they can be used in wayfinding as a landmark	

Next Steps and Priorities

At the end of the audit, citizen participants stated that they would like to follow up with the following actions:

- Get funding allocated to action on this issue.
- Make a personal commitment to walk more.
- Raise knowledge of local demand.
- Ask elected officials for help.

Additional recommended next steps:

- Identify and involve parent champions at Elementary and Middle schools.
- Arrange training focused on the new “Safe Routes to Schools” opportunities.
- Prioritize items on this list and keep track of accomplishments at neighborhood-level and within city departments.
- Establish a formal active living task force to expand these walking audit opportunities to other neighborhoods.

Contacts & Project Information

For more information about this report or Feet First, please contact:

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For information about pedestrian advocacy resources for communities outside of Washington State, we recommend that you contact the national coalition of pedestrian advocacy organizations, **America Walks** at:
 Web: www.americawalks.org
 Email: info@americawalks.org
 Tel: 617.367.1170 (Boston, MA)

Feet First is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Feet First works to build walkable communities through advocacy, community organizing, research, and education.

King County Metro Contacts:

King County Metro’s InMotion Program:
 King County Metro Transit is partnering with local communities to encourage residents to use healthier travel options like the bus, carpooling, bicycling and walking.
 Learn More:
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 XXXXXX
 XXXXXXXX

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Sponsor:

The South Lake Union re+walk was generously sponsored by King County Metro.

