

powered by feet first



# feet first policy

taking a stance to advance walkability

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## Walking, Sidewalks & Construction

### Policy

#### where we stand

Advocacy is a major component of the work Feet First does. These policy papers, prepared by our Policy Committee, convey Feet First's position on key issues of interest to increase safe and easy ways for people to choose to go by foot.



### background

In 2008 the Seattle City Council directed the Auditor's Office to conduct a review of whether the City was doing enough to:

Minimize the duration and impact of street and sidewalk closures on pedestrians and cyclists. They were particularly interested in alternative solutions for better pedestrian access, given the current high volume of construction activity in the City's downtown core. Our audit reviewed all aspects of the City's current street use permitting process.

The audit was driven by observations of Councilmembers and by complaints of citizens that new development was closing too many sidewalks, creating hazards for people trying to walk.

The recommendations from the review were largely focused on improving compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), improved communications of alternative routes for people walking, and the implementation of a program implemented by the City of Washington DC for more covered walkways to protect the mobility and

### Mission

#### who we are - what we do

Feet First promotes walkable communities and envisions people walking every day for their health, transportation, environment, community, and pleasure.



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safety of people walking.

It is unclear whether any of these recommendations were fully implemented. This lack of clarity is due to the fact that the Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) is largely silent on sidewalk closures save for SMC 15.22.024 that says in part:

It is City policy (1) to protect the public passage within the existing roadways and walks; if (1) is not practical, then (2) to authorize a detour around the work area on the same side of a street or boulevard within the right-of-way; and if (2) is not practical, then (3) to close the sidewalk, and as a last resort, the street. In determining the practicality of an alternative, an authorizing official may take into consideration the purpose of the proposed use, its hazard to the public and the user's need for control of adjoining right-of-way, traffic patterns (both pedestrian and vehicular), the terrain, the impact of a detour or closure on adjoining properties and businesses, the expense of the alternative, and its duration.

While this clearly states a hierarchical approach, putting public passage at the top, the key words here are "practical" and "authorizing official." The task of figuring out whether a sidewalk closure is the only "practical" method of dealing with construction impacts falls to inspectors and reviewers in the permitting process.

When a developer is seeking a permit they must submit a Traffic Control Plan (TCP) that must include a description of any Temporary Traffic Control Revisions. The TCP requires

the applicant to:

Draw footprint of work zone, with dimensions, and location to fixed points such as crosswalks...Note on the TCP where pedestrians are blocked or affected. Route pedestrians with a minimum of 4' width pathway (add 18" buffer from curb face) and use of ramps. Show revised traffic lane widths (one lane each way shall not be less than 11' when each lane is adjacent). Note problems of access to abutting property and show mitigation...Identify the type, number and location of signs, and channelizing devices, including any specially worded signs or other special devices which may be necessary. Note flaggers or Uniformed Police Officers.

Of course these specifications are not always "practical" which means alternatives like closing the sidewalk. However, different construction sites, applicants, and reviewers present a different set of variables for what is practical. As a result we still see sidewalks closed for extended periods requiring those walking to do the sidewalk weave, (<http://www.seattlepi.com/default/article/Fed-up-with-the-closed-sidewalk-weave-Reliefis-1292589.php>) the annoying job of having to cross to the other side of the street from the site or, worse, get into the flow of automobile traffic.

## recommendations

New development is a significant part of what makes for new, walkable, sustainable, and livable communities. The point of these recommendations is not to hobble growth or



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provide an opportunity to add excessive costs of permitting requirements. Instead, these are intended to support walkable neighborhoods staying walkable as they welcome new growth.

## 1. Revise the SMC—the code needs to be revised.

It is City policy (1) to protect the public pedestrian passage within the existing roadways and walks; if (1) is not practical, then (2) to by authorizing a detour around the work area on the same side of a street or boulevard within the right-of-way; and if (2) is not practical, then (3) to close the sidewalk, and as a last resort, the street. In determining the practicality of an alternative detour, an authorizing official may take into consideration the purpose of the proposed use, its hazard to the public and the user's need for control of adjoining right-of-way, traffic patterns (both pedestrian and vehicular), the terrain, the impact of a detour or closure on adjoining properties and businesses, the expense of the alternative, and its duration. Closure of the sidewalk can be authorized by approval of the City Council.

## 2. Revise the street use manual and the permitting process—The documents used by City staff reviewing, inspecting, and reviewing traffic control plans to include the following language:

Any pedestrian detour authorized by SMC 15.022.024 should favor pedestrian safety and access over that of vehicles using the right of way. If necessary this should include closing a lane of traffic or authorizing the

applicant to use flaggers or police to help stop traffic when pedestrians need passage.

## 3. Review liability and costs—the Council should review as part of this shift what additional costs might be added to new development based on a quantitative analysis and case study of the last five years of permitting projects. Staff should make review whether costs would be significant and suggest strategies to off set these costs. Staff should also review the effect of the policy change on liability for the City or applicants.

## resources

City of Seattle Report Highlights - Pedestrian and Cyclist Mobility Through and Around Construction Sites:

[http://www.seattle.gov/audit/docs/ROW\\_FinalReport\\_081308.pdf](http://www.seattle.gov/audit/docs/ROW_FinalReport_081308.pdf)

District Department of Transportation Pedestrian Safety and Work Zone Standards - Covered and Open Walkways:

<http://ddot.dc.gov/DC/DDOT/Projects+and+Planning/Standards+and+Guidelines/Pedestrian+Safety+and+Work+Zone+Standards/Pedestrian+Safety+and+Work+Zone+Standards+-+Covered+and+Open+Walkways>

Photo courtesy of the Seattle Department of Transportation



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