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The Seattle Freight Advisory Board shall advise the City Council, the Mayor, and all departments and offices of the City in development of a functional and efficient freight system and on all matters related to freight and the impact that actions by the City may have upon the freight environment.

City Council Resolution
31243

July 23, 2013

Ms. Moira Gray
Seattle Department Transportation
PO Box 34996
Seattle, WA 98124
Email: moira.gray@seattle.gov

Re: Seattle Freight Advisory Board Comments on the Proposed Vacation of Occidental Avenue South; Clerk File 312905

Dear Ms. Gray:

Seattle's Freight Advisory Board would like to submit the following comments on the proposed vacation of Occidental Avenue South. We trust that our input will be considered in the next stages of the decision process.

After review of the information provided by the applicant to date, we must conclude that the public benefits outlined by the proponent do not justify a street vacation due to the resulting loss of transportation, and in particular, freight capacity. Our conclusion is based on the following:

Occidental Avenue S, between SR 519 (Edgar Martinez Drive) and S Holgate Street, serves as a critical alternative connection to the region's freeways. It essentially functions as a relief valve for the 1st Avenue S and S Atlantic Street intersection, which is often overloaded. The 1st Avenue S and S Atlantic Street intersection is the primary gateway for traffic between the Duwamish Manufacturing Industrial Center (MIC) and Interstates 5 and 90 freeways. Occidental Ave also allows east-bound traffic on Holgate St. blocked by a train to get to reroute to the Atlantic St. overpass and avoid a long wait. Occidental Ave supports through traffic as well as access to adjacent properties. Losing Occidental Avenue's relief-valve function will divert traffic to adjacent streets, worsen congestion in the area, and negatively affect access to and from the interstates.

The analysis of the traffic impacts of street vacation in the proposal is limited and does not address the impacts of the loss of through-capacity. In one instance, the proposal even calls Occidental Avenue an "alley", which is patently incorrect considering its double relief-valve function. The vacation of Occidental Ave would worsen traffic in the Duwamish MIC in ways that the proponents have not sufficiently described or analyzed. Further evaluation is needed to understand the amount of traffic that would be diverted to other streets, and the impacts of that diversion.

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Further evaluation is also needed related to the proposal to reduce traffic lanes on 1st Avenue and operation of Occidental Avenue as a Festival Street. The proposal that 1st Avenue be reduced from three lanes in each direction (including parking) to 2 lanes (including parking) with a center turn lane is expected to reduce vehicle capacity. The proposed Festival Street operation on Occidental between Edgar Martinez Drive and Massachusetts, and on Massachusetts between 1st and Occidental would likewise constrain capacity in the area. Any decision on the street vacation must also consider the cumulative impacts of the entire proposal. We expect that the EIS analysis currently underway will address at least some of these questions and inform both your recommendation to Council and the Council's decision.

Our conclusion that the public benefits to be derived from the proposed street vacation do not outweigh the negative impacts is based on our knowledge of the area and its existing transportation infrastructure. We cannot see how its impacts can be mitigated given already existing congestion, the current street and rail network and other structures, the limited availability of land for additional transportation infrastructure, and a profound lack of funding. The value of this block of Occidental Avenue is difficult to assess, however it currently functions as an important relief-valve for freeway access and industrial area circulation. Effective mitigation measures must be identified, developed, funded, and built before any vacation of Occidental Avenue can occur, in order to maintain the critical balance of public mobility and function of the street network.

As representatives of the industrial community we are also concerned about the increasing land use pressures on the Duwamish MIC. Gentrification pressures are likely to follow the development of the proposed arena and its ancillary entertainment district. There is a limited amount of industrial land remaining within the City, and we should do everything we can to keep it viable for manufacturing, warehousing and other industrial uses. We fear that increasing congestion that makes deliveries more difficult, combined with increased pressure to up-zone close-by land, will pose a further threat to the remaining industrial base in the Duwamish MIC.

In closing we would like you to know that, while we have concerns about the proposal of a Seattle Arena in the Duwamish MIC, we support the concept of NBA basketball in the region and suggest selection of an alternate site. We look forward to more information becoming available in the future. Please do not hesitate to contact me at 206-783-0241 with any questions or concerns regarding this letter.

Sincerely,



Warren Aakervik
Chair, Seattle Freight Advisory Board