



# City of Seattle

Ed Murray, Mayor

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Seattle  
Freight  
Advisory  
Board

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August 12, 2015

The Honorable  
Edward Murray  
Mayor  
City of Seattle  
PO Box  
Seattle, WA 98124

Re: Freight Advisory Board's Function

Dear Mayor Murray:

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

We, the Seattle Freight Advisory Board, appreciate the opportunity to speak up for freight mobility throughout Seattle – it's a privilege to represent you and the residents of the City. As you know, the purpose of the board is to "advise the City Council, 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." (Resolution 31243). We take this responsibility very seriously – it is our mission, and we work hard to fulfill it.

The Freight Advisory Board has been in operation for the past five years. We are pleased with the completion of the Industrial Areas Freight Access Project and happy that the Freight Master Plan (FMP) effort is well underway. Together, these two documents will finally provide a more level playing field with other modes and support the development of a truly multimodal transportation system that balances the needs of all modes, including freight. We are particularly excited about the FMP's development of a proposed new system of truck streets, providing for much needed resiliency in the street network, and acknowledging the importance of last mile connections. The Board would like to commend SDOT staff working on these and other projects to maintain and improve freight mobility in the City. Much progress has been made since our inception.

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Unfortunately, though, that progress has not been universal. During our five years of existence, we have not always received the information necessary to help SDOT make good decisions, ensuring that projects protect and enhance freight mobility on Major Truck Streets, the arterial network and last mile connectors. Our ability to provide timely and useful feedback has, at times, been hampered by the stage at which they are presented to the Board (unfortunately, at times because we have to ask for information on the project—once we find out about it.)

We are concerned that SDOT's standard analysis approach for projects resulting in street network changes appears to lack careful consideration of the project's impacts on freight mobility. This is true with regard to both property access and freight mobility along Seattle's arterials and last mile connectors. Based on our interactions with staff, we think that this may be related to the fact that SDOT has not placed a priority on ensuring that there is appropriate staff with a good understanding of freight mobility needs in planning, design and operations. There are staff members who try to do what they can, but there are simply not enough time and resources to ensure that freight needs are met. If we did not have good technical expertise on the Board, we would be unable to fulfill our function. Yet, both Seattle's economy and quality of life depend on freight moving efficiently and safely on the arterial network and last mile connectors, 24/7. Efficient freight mobility is the foundation of a less car-dependent lifestyle.

Projects are brought before the Board for what almost feels like a rubber-stamp endorsement, often at the 90% design stage, when it is too late to make changes. Construction staging, sequencing and traffic control planning at times ignores the Board's concerns and input provided. From our perspective, this shows a lack of respect for the mission of the Board: To provide timely and meaningful input to these projects. We feel very strongly that it's our obligation to alert you to these issues and have to admit that we are increasingly frustrated with the situation. When the Board has to ask staff for information on projects affecting freight mobility, when it finds out about a project impacting freight mobility from a member of the public (who is asking us why we are not doing our job), when our input on a project is dismissed or ignored, we are unable to fulfill the SFAB charter, and we are failing you and the public we both serve.

To clarify these issues and concerns, four projects/programs are illustrative:

Rainier Avenue Projects – four projects are planned (or in implementation) that will change the character of this principal arterial, reducing number of lanes, and/or reducing lane width of the single through lane in each direction for long stretches of the corridor. After hearing about these projects from others, the Board asked SDOT for information on all projects on Rainier. After our request, we received information on two of them. We found out about the third one through a letter to the Board by a concerned resident, a registered engineer. We agree with his assessment that reducing lane width to 9-feet is ill advised for a principal arterial (and freight route). We are concerned that it may result in decreased safety and increased conflict between travel modes. We are still waiting for a presentation on the fourth project.

Holman Road Resurfacing Project – again, after a request for information on paving projects affecting Major Streets, the Board reviewed the resurfacing plans for multiple marked (and uncontrolled) crosswalks along this Major Truck Street. We provided staff with comments, safety concerns and recommendations for improved visibility and pedestrian access across the arterial. Fortunately, the project was able to re-think the pedestrian crossings and to resolve some of the safety issues and conflicts between modes; however, trees—impacting the ability of truck drivers to see pedestrians at crosswalks—were planted in the median, in direct conflict with Freight Board comments and recommendations.

Right of Way Improvement Manual – The current draft of the ROWIM has added eleven types of roadways, but there is no reference to freight routes, or the need to maintain critical freight access. This is disappointing because the last significant revision of the ROWIM in 2005 included a section related to ensuring freight mobility on Major Truck Streets, at the time at the request of our Board's predecessor, SDOT's Freight Mobility Advisory Committee. (These references have since been removed.) Today, we do not understand how the Freight Master Plan's recommendations will be incorporated in the current update, since the ROWIM is scheduled to be completed ahead of the FMP.

Comprehensive Plan Update – In April of 2014, the Board wrote a letter to provide input into the scope of the PEIS for the Plan Update. In that letter, we appreciated that staff assured us that freight, and the economic and job contributions of the two MICs, would be part of the technical analysis and policy review. We requested a thorough analysis of the of various growth scenarios on Major Truck Streets and arterials important to freight, in particular in the MICs. None of these topics appear to be addressed in the document.

We hope that these illustrative examples will help you understand our concerns regarding our difficulties in fulfilling the charge we have been given by Council. To be sure that we can do our job, the Board would like to request an adjustment in the way projects, plans and programs come to the Board for review. We envision a four step process:

- 1) Make sure that an SDOT freight expert is integrated into the project team from the start, to help the project team address freight needs and serve as connection between the project team and the Board;
- 2) Inform the Board early enough in the process to enable it to provide meaningful input (for roadway projects than means at the conceptual stage, with updates provided if design changes);
- 3) Gather Board comments and input to identify areas of modal conflicts on roadway projects, or plan and program areas where freight mobility might be affected; and
- 4) Incorporate Board comments and feedback as possible and inform the Board of the resolution of the conflicts or negative impacts for freight.

In this context, for any project on a Major Truck Street or over-legal route (and to be consistent with the FMP, also on projects on Minor Truck Streets and Last mile Connectors), the following project design components would justify a review by the Board:

A change in the number of travel lanes, a change in lane widths or turn radii, a change in traffic control and/or a change to the interface between travel modes, and the addition of trees and street furniture with the potential to affect truck movement and lines of sight.

We hope to improve our collaborative relationship with all City staff working on projects, plans and programs affecting freight mobility. We look forward to hearing from you in the resolution of these issues and concerns to the Board. We will continue to do our best to fulfill our charter of advocacy for freight access, movement and the effective delivery of goods throughout Seattle.

Sincerely,



Warren Aakervik  
Chairman, Seattle Freight Advisory Board  
And the Freight Advisory Board