
The Great Viaduct Debate Continues

by Jeremy M. Barker

Since the *Messenger* reported on the People's Waterfront Coalition's alternative to the crumbling Alaskan Way Viaduct in July, a lot has happened, but still not enough.

In terms of positive news, things have been looking up for the PWC since *the Stranger* reported preliminary findings of the Central City Access Strategy on July 1. The CCAS is a plan being researched by the Seattle Department of Transportation that explores ways of dealing with traffic in the event that the Viaduct becomes unusable (read "falls down"). Experts figure there's a 1 in 20 chance that will happen within the next decade due to seismic activity. But the CCAS is a boon to the PWC because it evaluates the minor road improvements that are the main part of their "no-highway" alternative.

SDOT has delayed the release of the plan indefinitely, but *the Stranger* got most of the preliminary findings released in late June. According to the CCAS, the cost of developing the rest of the road system to accommodate the 100,000 plus daily trips that the Viaduct currently provides is a paltry \$253 million. Combined with the cost of replacing the equally damaged seawall, estimated at \$750 million, the total cost of the PWC's plan comes in around \$1 billion, a savings of \$1.5 billion on the cheapest of SDOT's and WashDOT's plans, which range from \$2.5 to \$4.5 billion. Consequently, only a minuscule amount of funding has thus far been allocated.

So by all accounts, the PWC is doing pretty well. Their contention that a cheap alternative to a highway exists seems born out by SDOT's own research. But they're still being relegated to the sidelines, with WashDOT refusing to even acknowledge their plan. And

SDOT has not officially released the CCAS yet, maintaining that "more information and analysis" is needed.

But more problematic is that WashDOT is charged to "maintain or improve mobility along the existing Alaskan Way corridor," which would technically disqualify the PWC's plan. So despite the financial viability and growing public support for the no-highway solution, the PWC faces a continuing up-hill struggle.

On August 18, the PWC took part in a public forum at the Town Hall Center for Civic Life, where the PWC's plan was laid out for discussion. It remains to be seen how much impact the forum will have on



Bill Hogarth

WATERFRONT VIEW FROM THE MARKET: Cars, trucks and pavement.

WashDOT's deliberations, but increasingly it seems that the more people know about the no-highway solution, the more popular it becomes. The reasons are pretty simple—getting rid of the Viaduct improves the view, reconnects downtown to the waterfront, saves Belltown's businesses a decade long headache of construction problems, and saves the taxpayers a few billion dollars. If any or all of that is important to you, now would be a good time to get in touch with PWC (peopleswaterfront.org) and pitch in. ♦