

Creating Pedestrian Connections across the I-5 Barrier

The construction of I-5 in 1962 isolated Wallingford from the University District, leaving few access points to either neighborhood. In the absence of quantity, land use and zoning can be used to enhance the quality of these existing connections and create more pleasant, inviting pedestrian experiences.

We've chosen the 45th Street overpass across I-5 as an example of how connections across the freeways can be improved. This crossing was chosen due to its importance as a pedestrian connection to the University District, the University of Washington and the future U-District station of Link Light Rail. These connections make this the single most important freeway crossing in Wallingford or the University District.

To create a place that is more amenable to pedestrians crossing the freeway, it needs to be made more desirable. This desirability consists of several components: distance, the pleasantness or disagreeableness of the distance traveled, and the destination. This I-5 crossing presents a challenge to pedestrian travel, and interrupts a street with great pedestrian potential. On the south side of 45th Street, a pedestrian will cross on and off-ramps, walk over a major freeway, pass dead zones and parking lots until they finally encounter any sort of destination, 1,200 feet later. This is not an environment that encourages walking.

A general set of rules to create a better, more desirable pedestrian crossing here is:

- Reduce the width of the barrier by encouraging development at both ends of the crossing.
- Create destinations at each end of the crossing
 - * These destinations can be both a perception of destination, such as an archway or other monument that welcomes you to the neighborhood, or a real destination, such as a restaurant or cluster of businesses.
- Make the walk through the barrier more pleasant with landscaping, complete streets and amenities to protect pedestrians from weather and exposure as they cross the freeway.
- If possible, eliminate the barrier
 - * This doesn't necessarily mean the removal of the barrier, but creating an environment through the barrier that makes it irrelevant.

To reduce the width of the barrier:

There is a significant amount of unused land on the east side of the 45th Street Overpass. These fenced-off areas are rights-of-way administered by WSDOT, and are frequently trash-filled and used as campsites by the homeless. The City of Seattle should be encouraged to work with WSDOT to allow for commercial development of these properties to shorten the distance between used properties at the I-5 crossing.

To create destinations:

The zoning of these parcels should allow for buildings higher than 85', and specify street-level retail. This will create greater incentive for development and create a destination for pedestrians crossing I-5.

To make the passage more pleasant:

- Pedestrian barrier along the I-5 overpass
 - * This would create a safer environment for pedestrians, and eliminate the danger of puddle splashes from street vehicles.
- Wind/rain shelter for the length of the overpass
 - * The bridge is extremely exposed in bad weather. This would create a walkable environment in the rain.
- The following changes would eliminate the barrier:
 - * Allow the widening of the bridge to accommodate buildings to house small businesses along the length of the span. Think of a modern *Ponte Vecchio* that connects two vital neighborhoods.
- Additional changes to make to the streetscape:
 - * Where street traffic exits or enters freeway on or off-ramps, decrease the radius of the corners to slow down turning auto traffic.
 - * Move the crosswalk crossing 45th St at 7th Ave out of the middle of the intersection to connect the SE and NE corners. A pedestrian island should be created at the midpoint of this crossing.

These improvements will create a much more pedestrian-friendly environment by slowing down traffic, creating a greater sense of enclosure, establishing a solid destination on the University side, and reducing the distance traveled across an area exposed to the weather.



45th Street Overpass, Current Condition



45th Street Overpass with Improvements

2011, 2012—Jeffrey Linn

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