



**BURKE-GILMAN TRAIL MISSING LINK
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE REPORT
June 18, 2015**

Meeting Overview

A public open house was held on Thursday, June 18, 2015 in relation to the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process for the Missing Link of the Burke-Gilman Trail. The Missing Link is a proposed stretch of the Burke-Gilman Trail between the intersection of 11th Avenue NW /NW 45th Street and the Ballard Locks. It is the last uncompleted portion of a regional, multi-use trail that travels east from Golden Gardens Park in Seattle to Bothell. The EIS is being led by the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT).

The purpose of the public meeting was to bring people up-to-date on the overall EIS process, as well as introduce the alternatives that will be explored in the EIS. Approximately 165 people signed in at the meeting. Attendees were able to view information about the EIS and associated alternatives, as well as talk one-on-one with personnel from the SDOT and the EIS consulting firm, Environmental Science Associates (ESA).

Open house materials were available for review and discussion at 6:00 p.m. A brief presentation began at 6:30, which included a welcome from SDOT communications lead Art Brochet, who was joined by SDOT staff members Ron Scharf and Mark Mazzola in answering questions.

Mark Johnson, ESA project manager, provided an overview of the EIS process. Mark described the schedule and issues to be analyzed, the three alternative corridors under consideration, and the “no action” alternative, which would leave the Missing Link the same as it is today. The three corridors to be studied include

- Along NW 54th St, Shilshole Ave NW, and 45th St NW (this will include two alignment options, one on the south side and one on the north side.)
- Along 14th Ave NW, Leary Way, and Market St NW
- Along 15th Ave NW and Ballard Ave NW

The EIS will also evaluate a number of optional connectors that are shown on the maps on the handouts provided at the meeting. After the Draft EIS has been completed, SDOT will determine a “preferred alternative” for the project. The preferred alternative could include segments from one or more of the alternatives under consideration to form a final preferred alignment.

The issue areas and potential impacts to be studied include geology and soils, fish and wildlife, land use, utilities, transportation and parking, air quality and greenhouse gas, cultural resources, and recreation.

The EIS will also explore current land uses in the area, potential economic impacts to businesses adjacent to the trail, and the potential impacts of a proposed trail along the shoreline.

An Environmental Impact Statement is not a decision document, but an analysis designed to help elected officials and other community leaders make the most informed decisions possible. The EIS will evaluate all of the alternatives equally, describe potential adverse impacts and whether those impacts would be significant, and also describe proposed mitigation measures to reduce potential adverse impacts.

The Draft EIS is due to be released in late spring 2016. At that time a public hearing will be scheduled to allow for public comments on the Draft EIS.

After Mark Johnson's presentation, meeting participants were invited to ask questions about the EIS, and what follows is a summary of those questions and answers. Meeting attendees were also able to leave written questions at the meeting, and those have also been included as part of this report.

What follows is a summary of the questions asked and the answers given at the meeting, as well as a list of the written questions that were submitted at the meeting. Not all of the questions are completely answered in this report. Instead, SDOT is using these questions to help prepare a list of frequently asked questions and answers to post on the Burke-Gilman Missing Link website.

Questions Asked at the Meeting

Q: Given that the EIS is still a long way from being completed, are there any low-cost, more immediate solutions that could be put in place for this portion of the trail? For example, could you put in a three-way stop at Shilshole and 17th?

A: SDOT has made some safety improvements along the missing link portion of the trail, and will certainly consider other ideas if you have them. Send those ideas to the project email at [BGT_MissingLink Info@seattle.gov](mailto:Info@seattle.gov), and we will take them into consideration.

Q: Will the Burke-Gilman Trail Missing Link hook up to Light Rail?

A: Connections for bicycles and pedestrians will be made between the Burke-Gilman Trail and any light rail station that does get constructed in the Ballard area. However, the trail will not intersect directly with the station. This would be inappropriate due to congestion and traffic conflicts around the station.

Q: Will we get a more specific project schedule?

A: Yes, check often on the SDOT Burke Gilman website at www.Seattle.gov/transportation/BGT_Ballard.htm. As soon as we have a more detailed schedule, we will post it there.

Q: Why was the Burke-Gilman Trail sent back by the courts for preparation of an EIS?

A: The project has been under consideration for a long time, and there have been several appeals to the process along the way. In the latest round, the hearing examiner determined that an Environmental Impact Statement was necessary in order to evaluate whether the project could have significant negative environmental impacts, specifically because of the possible safety and traffic impacts at driveways that would intersect the trail.

Q: Why can't we pave over the railroad tracks to make the area safer? Who maintains the railroad tracks?

A: The tracks are owned and operated by the Ballard Terminal Railroad Company, which has maintained its license and operational permit with the City of Seattle since 1997. The City has granted a franchise to the railroad and can move the tracks within the right-of-way if it desires, but the City cannot obstruct the railroads' operation.

Q: Considering safety and the number of bicycle crashes, is any delay to fixing the trail acceptable? Isn't there a way to speed up this process? Is this the longest EIS you've ever been a part of?

A: No, unfortunately, there is no way to speed up the process. All of the environmental issues we are studying take time and have to be looked at very carefully. Part of the time needed is so that preliminary designs can be developed for the EIS. Also, a considerable amount of data must be collected, for example, traffic to and from the businesses in the area and the potential impacts of the trail on those businesses. It's important to complete the EIS correctly and with a great deal of thoroughness. And no, this is not the longest EIS we (ESA) have ever experienced.

Q: Will you study economic benefits in the EIS? Will you consider all businesses, not just those adjacent to the trail?

A: We will not be studying the potential economic benefits of the trail; that is highly speculative and would be very difficult to pinpoint. We will, however, look at those businesses that will be impacted by trail usage, and will evaluate whether or not trail operations could potentially put those businesses out of business, that is, have severe detrimental economic impacts. We are not studying all of the businesses in the area; we are concentrating on those that are adjacent to the trail, as these are the only business that we consider possibly at risk of significant impacts.

Q: Will the alternative routes be looked at as multi-use?

A: Yes, and that is an important point. It is easy to think of the Burke Gilman as just a bicycle trail, but in fact it is multi-use and multi-purpose for pedestrians and others. All of the alternatives under evaluation will be analyzed for their potential to create a safe trail experience for all users.

Q: Will you be bringing all alternatives up to the same level of design in the EIS?

A: No. The design for the alternative along the south side of Shilshole is already near final design, as that was the alternative that the City was prepared to construct. However, we will bring the other three alternatives up to the same level of preliminary design in order to make sure we have enough information to perform our analysis and that we are looking at all of the routes on an equal basis.

Q: What is the percent increase of bicyclists that use the BGT over the last eight years? What is the percent increase for future use (projections)?

A: We do not have those numbers right now, but they will be generated as part of the EIS.

Q: Are there any alternative routes without railroad crossings?

A: No, all alternatives must cross the railroad tracks. The tracks are on the south side of the trail near the existing eastern terminus by Fred Meyer, and they are on the north side of the trail near the Ballard Locks.

Q: Do we really have to do an EIS? How much will it cost, and what is the timeline for the appeal process?

A: Yes, the Hearing Examiner determined that a complete EIS is necessary before the trail can be constructed. The budget for consultants is approximately \$1.5 million, and another \$500,000 will be spent in-house at the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT). So the total budget is roughly \$2 million. Any timeline for appeals will be determined after the final EIS is issued.

Q: Will the EIS look at families and kids and the long-term benefits of bicycling/using the trail?

A: The EIS will evaluate each alternative's potential to provide safe cycling, pedestrian, and other trail uses; it will be a multi-use analysis. While more general health benefits will not be a part of the EIS analysis, those have been referred to in the project's "purpose and need" statement, which is posted on the website. This can be found on the project website. However, the more general health benefits of these activities will not be a part of the EIS analysis.

Written Questions and Comments Handed in at the Meeting

(except for one question redacted due to inappropriate language)

- 1) Will the north alignment of the Shilshole alternative take into account the number of garage doors that open directly onto Shilshole (compared to the relatively few interruptions on the south alignment)? Typically, EIS includes a No Action alternative. Will one be included in this EIS, to include safety issues, counts of bicyclists along Shilshole, and projections of continued growth in Shilshole usage over time? To have a complete story or picture of the best route a benefit analysis needs to be included with the impact study.
- 2) How will the EIS address truck traffic along Shilshole Ave – compared to similar commercial traffic along BGT in Fremont where commercial truck traffic doesn't seem to be a problem with trail users?
- 3) Can you clean the gravel regularly under the bridge by the tracks? Can you put in a crosswalk at 17th and Shilshole? Can you put in a 3-way stop sign at 17th and Shilshole?
- 4) Will the missing link portion that is eventually built be open to people that don't walk or bike? Will it be available for skaters, unicyclists and skateboarders? Is a cycle track only for bikes?
- 5) Please take a look at your pie chart of route preference. It is clear, very clear, that Shilshole is the preferred alternative. I will be very shocked and concerned if the EIS comes out any different. As a local business owner, I see the lack of a safe route to Ballard for cyclists and trail users extremely detrimental to my business and urge you to complete this multi-use trail along Shilshole ASAP.
- 6) Grade change is a significant factor in the use of a bicycle route. Seattle is a hilly site so bicyclists are always looking for the flattest routes. People will continue to ride on Shilshole even if the other routes are chosen. Another concern with the other non-Shilshole routes is the number of intersections and left turns.
- 7) No questions about the EIS. I believe that NW 56th Street is too indirect to prove a viable alternative for the EIS. I won't use it – and I doubt others will either.

- 8) Why do we still have parking on Shilshole Avenue? Allowing the unorganized is a tragedy ready to happen. It is crazy as a driver, biker, and pedestrian. Please limit or take the parking away all together.
- 9) A 4-way stop at 17th and Shilshole. Do this with or without a trail; it is a fundamental safety issue. Everyone stops – then takes turns going through that intersection.
- 10) The city has adopted Vision Zero. How will the Missing Link alternatives be evaluated against the goals of the vision zero?
- 11) Can we provide/rent portable bike racks for the next public meeting?
- 12) I trust in the process and hope you will do what needs to be done. Knowing bicyclists can ride any number of routes but marine based businesses need to be on a waterway. I support marine-based businesses in Ballard!!
- 13) Benefits as well as costs should be looked at. How much benefit will the completion bring to all the retail stores and restaurants on Ballard Avenue and Market? How many folks won't be injured on train track crossings? If it's only one business that is fighting this, is there a condo developer who could buy them out or pay enough that they move to Interbay? As a ten year Ballard resident, I've seen buildings torn down for dense housing. The trail's completion will help manage that.
- 14) What will be the minimum width of the trail? Will lighting at intersections/driveways be considered? Why doesn't SDOT have data on trail users? This is such a basic and critical part of any transportation planning!!
- 15) 1. The common perception is that the railroad is a "spite" right-of-way. That it is not a viable business. Will that be taken into account when determining the economic impacts? 2. Certainly such trails exist in other industrial/corridors—why do people feel that the trail and industrial corridor are mutually exclusive?
- 16) Why can't a safer alternative be implemented now? People are getting hurt daily and should opt/force a class-action lawsuit! Regarding the land the city now owns, why not at least take out the parking that is unsafe now and at least allow people/bikes onto it? This could also be a way for the city to proclaim that this is the people's land. Not the BBAs!
- 17) Please implement more short term (non-trail but vicinity) improvements such as stop sign at 17th and Shilshole, rail crossing safety at the "crash" crossing.
- 18) The Shilshole alternative will cross fewer roads, and be safer (and feel safer) for families and kids. Please consider that. And note that if it feels safer then more people will bike. That will cut traffic. And if kids get used to biking, they are more likely to keep biking, with long-term environmental and health benefits.
- 19) How much longer is this going to take?
- 20) Where, exactly, would the trail be on Shilshole? Which side?
- 21) Why is the EIS delayed another 6-9 months? This is unacceptable.
- 22) Safety is mentioned by both supporters and opponents of the obvious choice (the Shilshole option). We have documented evidence of hundreds of injuries caused by the lack of the Shilshole option (I have personal experience treating these injuries). We also have years of experience with the trail passing on industrial zone (6th – 8th NW along the BG trail). To my knowledge that has not been a safety problem. Is this simply a matter of real data (hundreds of crashes without the Shilshole option) being trumped by phony, statistically unsupported "safety concerns"?

- 23) Why is the EIS taking this long? Is there a way to move through this process more quickly? If the Missing Link has to continue to live alongside railroad tracks, can it please have flanges? I have 5 friends (Bob! Rogelio! Fred! Gracie! Tim!) who have broken collarbones in the last 6 months riding over railroad tracks. Ballard has blown up population projections. It takes 45 minutes to get from Fremont to SLU in a car. We're building a Westlake PBL. This is not the same conversation it was 15 years ago! We need to move more quickly! A multi-use rails-to-trails does not equal a PBL along Leary. We need that too!! Thank you for problem-solving on behalf of the thousands of people who will use this weekly.
- 24) Tired of getting injured. Have split my elbows open twice. Other routes are not the same, build it. Thanks.
- 25) If the mayor is truly interested in the Vision Zero initiative WHY CANT WE MOVE FASTER ON THIS!!!?
- 26) Why has the date of the Draft EIS slipped back?
- 27) Can the process be accelerated? If so, how (money, political pressure, both?)
- 28) How many businesses will benefit from using the Leary alternative?
- 29) Is there a way to expedite the EIS – people are getting hurt every day! Why are businesses along Shilshole being allowed to derail the desired route along the rail line to the detriment of and injury of people walking and biking?
- 30) Will the potential impact of a light rail extension be considered?
- 31) 1. Why is it taking so long? I gave my scoping comments in 2013! Please do everything possible to expedite the timeline going forward. 2. Why isn't there more background information available here? Things like graphic traffic volume maps, photos of alternative routes, existing and proposed connections (like the 17th and Dock Greenway), etc.? 3. Since you're planning to take another year, why not identify a preferred alternative in the Draft EIS? 4. SDOT said temporary improvements have been done, but aren't there more to come, like the ramp out to the sidewalk from Shilshole just south of Market? 5. Why do we need to analyze the NE side of Shilshole? It will require bringing the trail across 1000s of ADTs on Shilshole twice!
- 32) Once the EIS is in the final version, what will timeline look like? What route seems most likely to SDOT? What criteria for routes is most important to SDOT? What weight does public opinion carry? When will the Freight Master Plan be complete? Is draft available to the public currently? Does completion of the BG Trail depend on the timeliness of the Freight Master Plan?
- 33) No questions – one comment: Please complete it and make a decision as soon as possible. The present route is extremely dangerous for both bicyclists, pedestrians and injuries occur monthly. I would ask the City to proceed with construction of the original route (Shilshole Ave and 54th Street) as a trial, as it is the rest of the 20-mile trail.
- 34) Please look at all the safety concerns from the eyes of bicyclists. It seems that there would be a lot more cross traffic over the trail on Leary and Ballard Avenue than if the trail was on the south side of Shilshole Avenue. Please expedite the process as much as possible. Every week that goes by without a complete Missing Link it is more likely someone cycling the route will get hurt or killed.
- 35) Can ESA please give updates as to how the intermediate reviews are going? This would show the public that things are actually moving forward toward the completion of the draft EIS 8-10 months from now.

- 36) Will ride times be calculated for each option? Also elevation gain for each option? Will the study look at current and future development along each option? I feel Leary Avenue NW is not viable option for multi-use trail.
- 37) I commute by bike to work five times a week and my ride takes me through Fremont next to industries which have driveways and big trucks, specifically Salmon Bay Gravel trucks. I have always felt safe crossing intersections by being aware of traffic and because the drivers are courteous and attentive. What is so special about the “driveways” along Shilshole? Why are those businesses being treated differently than those in Fremont?
- 38) It’s hard to imagine a multi-use trail on either/any of the non-Shilshole routes because there are so many crossings of frequently traveled auto routes – from multiple sides. So what assumptions will the EIS make about how safety could be enhanced using those alternative routes with all those crossings?
- 39) Parking – Both sides of Shilshole Avenue are heavily used for parking; mid-week by shop owners and workers, nights by night clubbers, and weekends by Sunday Market shoppers. Will the loss of parking and impact on local business be addressed by the EIS? Multi-Use Trail – Why – Some sections of your alternative routes are great for walks and strollers, others better for cycling. Why not separate walkers and cyclists? Related question and suggestion – Why not use one route for westbound traffic and a different route for eastbound traffic?
- 40) 1. Can Draft EIS come sooner than Spring 2016? Why?? 2. Which of the 3 routes has/offers fewer traffic impacts currently? 3. When can the rails be moved off the trail?? How soon? 4. If Economic Analysis will look at adjacent business costs, what are some of those costs? 5. What businesses adjacent to the Shilshole trail option are in favor of a trail there? 6. Can you consider installing more lighting, even security cameras along isolated, non-visible sections of the trail east of the Ballard Bridge?
- 41) I bike the Missing Link regularly. It is terrifying. Can you please build the Shilshole alternative ASAP? Thank you.
Could we eliminate all of the rail crossings by acquiring the property and move the existing trail to the other side of the tracks?
- 42) Couldn’t there be a “bridge” of sorts on Shilshole? Trucks go under and everyone else goes over. Not a big bridge – just a modest overpass. Are we just thinking flat on the ground?
- 43) 1. Will you please add stop signs at 17th and Shilshole 3-way intersection? It’s the worst part of my bike commute by far. 2. Currently cars do not tend to observe crosswalk onto Shilshole from end of Missing Link extension – what can you do about this to improve safety? (lower speed limits?). 3. If the NE side of Shilshole is chosen – how do you expect to minimize crossing vehicle traffic at Shilshole and 54th? 4. Any plans to increase safety of the 17th and Leary crossing? Many cyclists use 17th to get to Burke-Gilman from places north between 15th and 28th.
- 44) Please make intersection of 17th and Leary safe. It’s dangerous for bikes and pedestrians to safely navigate. It really surprised me when someone brought this up tonight and the SDOT person said no one had been considering making the intersection safe.
- 45) “Restart”? This is a corrupted process! This is the third EIS and 4th SDOT Shilshole design process. All three previous agreed the Shilshole route is the logical, clearest, potentially “safest” route. Money from the Industrialists has obstructed this civic project! A minimum \$3.5 million has been spend for lawyers, lobbyists, and public relations. “Fresh Eyes” – new consultant is such a

farce. The schedule – 3 years – is not an industry standard (ref. the Westlake Blvd.) and the SR 520 EIS. This is “soft corruption”!! Seattle Style.

- 46) I bike the route along the Missing Link every day and do not feel it is safe. For me the best route is a multiuse trail along Shilshole Avenue just as the trail is through Fremont. With respect to alternatives on Leary and Ballard avenues: How will trail users be kept safe from vehicles unless traffic is banned? There is ample room on Shilshole but I don't see how on Leary and Ballard Avenue. How will intersections be handled on Leary and Ballard so users and cars are safe? The trail on Shilshole would not have car traffic crossing the trail which is infinitely more safe. As a stop-gap measure, is it possible to add stop signs or traffic lights on Shilshole and ban parking so that in the interim the route is safe?
- 47) Looking at economic impacts of the options – loss of parking can be a negative impacts but will you also look at the positive impacts to businesses when you have completed the trail that is safe, therefore less parking is needed since people can safely commute by biking, walking, etc.
- 48) When did an Environmental Impacts Study become a great tool for oil and industry to use against the community? What do you value more – human safety or ridiculous process? When can I grab a wheel barrow and build my own trail? When are we going to stop studying this and get to work fixing the problem?