



Harrison and Mercer Transit Access Project

Frequently Asked Questions

November 2023

PROJECT STATUS

What is the current status of Harrison & Mercer Transit Access Project?

The project is in the early planning phase. Right now, we're conducting traffic analysis, consulting modal plans, and holding conversations with project stakeholders to determine what is possible.

With COVID-19 changing travel patterns, is the Harrison & Mercer Transit Access Project still needed?

Yes. Even with the recent shift to work from home, the South Lake Union and Uptown neighborhoods remain a growing economic and residential hub. As traffic and congestion are returning to pre-pandemic levels, accessing and traveling through these neighborhoods is a challenge that's likely going to become even more challenging as the area grows.

The Harrison & Mercer Transit Access Project is essential to meeting Seattle's ambitious climate/CO₂ reduction goals, reducing Vehicle Miles Travelled, and supporting King County Metro's [long-range plans](#).

In addition, the project will provide a direct bus route to and from the future Sound Transit South Lake Union Light Rail Station, as well as access to Climate Pledge Arena and cultural assets along the north and east sides of the Seattle Center (McCaw Hall, Memorial Stadium, Theatre District, Space Needle, MoPOP), which have seen record attendance since the COVID-19 Pandemic.



ESSENTIAL TRANSIT ELEMENTS AND OPERATIONS

What type of essential transit elements will you be adding to support transit access and safe, reliable operations?

While the details of the Harrison & Mercer Transit Access Project are still being determined, the project is expected to provide improvements along the project corridor that will enhance or provide access to new or improved transit facilities.

These improvements may include new bus stops and bus shelters, bus lanes, pavement to support bus travel, signal improvements and intersection operation changes. All these potential improvements will contribute to increasing transit access.

Pedestrian scale lighting is also being considered around bus stops, which helps improve security and navigation by keeping the area well-lit throughout the evening. New and wider sidewalks, marked crossings, curb bulbs and more will increase pedestrian space and improve access to Harrison for transit riders and anyone else walking or rolling through the area.

How will adding buses along Harrison and Mercer Streets affect car traffic operations in the neighborhoods?

Adding bus service along Harrison and Mercer Streets will provide a much-needed new way for people who take transit to travel east-west across the South Lake Union and Uptown neighborhoods.

From a bus rider perspective, this new option for routing buses will infill the existing transit network and improve transit access, reliability, operations.



For people driving, reallocating right-of-way and introducing intersection operational changes may be a part of this project. The project is focused on improving transit along the corridor while also accommodating vehicle access to businesses, residential properties, and buildings along the corridor.

MAINTAINED BUSINESS ACCESS

Will on-street parking be lost in the area? Are there any updates on parking mitigation strategies?

As this project is in the early planning stages, it is not yet clear if or how many parking spaces in the area will be impacted. SDOT will be assessing changes to parking, loading, food truck zones, and other curbside regulations in the flex zone for each concept alternative during the project development process.

In particular, SDOT will evaluate whether critical access needs for adjacent buildings will be met at the curb, on private property, on a nearby street or in an alley. A building's critical access needs can be defined as access to services needed to perform its core operating functions safely and successfully.

Critical access needs (CAN) can include commercial and urban goods delivery, on-demand deliveries, designated parking and loading spaces for vulnerable users, passenger pick-up and drop off, and more. As part of the alternatives analysis, SDOT will assess if we need to develop measures to preserve CAN access to adjacent buildings.

Will impacted streets be repaved in advance of the project?

There may be separate projects in the project area (either done by 3rd party private developers or utility companies) but the Harrison and Mercer Street Transit Access Project will not repave the impacted streets in advance.



Will the Harrison & Mercer Transit Access Project include installation of protected bike lanes? Which side of the street will they be on?

Part of the project scope is to provide transit access to the new or enhanced bus facilities along the project route. Access includes improvements for people who bike, and the project route crosses or is near existing or upcoming bicycle facilities, such as Dexter Ave N projected bike lanes (PBL), 9th Ave N PBL, 5th Ave N PBL, Queen Anne N PBL, and [Thomas St: 5th Ave N to Dexter Ave N](#).

As the Harrison & Mercer Transit Access Project goes through its planning process, an assessment for opportunities will be conducted to determine if and how PBLs will provide transit access from these bicycle facilities to the project route.

Can bus lanes be used as bike lanes during the morning and afternoon commute, and as parking or travel lanes during other times of day?

Bus lanes are being considered for this project to ensure transit reliability and shorter travel times for people riding transit. If bus lanes are included in this project, they will be 24/7 bus lanes. Current practice allows bicyclists to use bus lanes.

Are you considering site specific areas for bike share and micromobility parking?

Yes. Micromobility corrals located near bus stops are expected to be included in this project.

BUS SERVICE

Are you moving any specific routes on Harrison and Mercer?



Metro is early in the process of identifying what service will be the best fit for Harrison and Mercer Streets once the corridor is ready for transit in 2028. Frequently congested Denny Way is the only way for buses to cross east-west in the area today, so Metro has long recognized the need for an additional east-west option. Additionally, there are increased population and jobs in South Lake Union that could benefit from additional east-west transit service.

Currently, Metro is working with SDOT to better understand the potential benefits of the new corridor through early design work. Next steps will include a community engagement process to get feedback on different service options and an assessment of budget capacity for new service.

Will Route 8 be moved to Harrison?

Metro and SDOT have made substantial investments to improve Route 8 reliability in the last five years and Metro remains committed to providing bus service on Denny Way. Metro's long-range plan also identifies bus service on both Denny Way and the Harrison/Mercer Street corridor.

Shifting Route 8 to the Harrison and Mercer corridor is only one of several potential options to utilize an additional east-west pathway for buses through South Lake Union and Uptown. Before the corridor is ready for service in 2028, Metro will evaluate different service options to determine what routes will operate in the new corridor. This service plan will be informed by a community engagement process, which has not yet begun, as well as availability of service funding.

How many buses per hour will stop along the route?

Since the project is still in the early planning phase, we're not yet sure how many buses will operate along the Harrison/Mercer Transit corridor. The project intends to allow for very frequent transit (buses every 10 minutes or less) and SDOT is working hand-in-hand with King County Metro in developing this project.

Will you be updating any of the bus stops in the neighborhood?



There will be new bus stops with this project and there may be modifications or improvements to existing bus stops within the project area.

How will buses connect to the future Eastlake Layover facility?

When the Eastlake Layover Facility opens in 2024, buses will use Howell and Stewart Streets to connect with the layover facility from downtown. The Harrison and Mercer Street Transit Access Project will identify needed improvements to enable an additional route that buses can use via Fairview Ave N and Republican St. This new connection will enable additional routes to efficiently reach the layover facility.

SOUND TRANSIT

How does the Harrison and Mercer Transit Access Project relate to the future Sound Transit light rail project?

The Harrison and Mercer Transit Access Project is being scoped assuming that Sound Transit constructs the South Lake Union light rail station along Harrison St around 7th Ave N. Since it is anticipated that the construction timeline for this project will precede the Sound Transit project, our project team is in close discussion with the team overseeing Sound Transit's work on behalf of the City such that our project will not impede and will complement their scope in areas where both projects overlap.

SOUTH LAKE UNION STREETCAR

How will the project integrate with the existing Seattle Streetcar South Lake Union line?

The Harrison and Mercer Transit Access Project will make improvements along the Seattle Streetcar line on Harrison St between Terry Ave N and Fairview Ave N. The impacts and opportunities for improvements to streetcar operations will be further understood as the project develops. The project will coordinate closely with the streetcar team to ensure that the impacts are minimized and that the project aligns with considerations for the future Culture Connector.



PROJECT BACKGROUND

Why was the decision made to move forward on the Harrison & Mercer Transit Access Project? What existing challenge is the project addressing?

The City of Seattle has experienced rapid population growth over the course of the last 20 years and the South Lake Union neighborhood has been a hub for new homes and jobs. Since 2015, the neighborhood has seen a 154 percent increase in housing units and the number of jobs has nearly doubled—to just under 80,000—over the same time period. Combined with a 65 percent increase in housing in the Denny Triangle neighborhood and a 25 percent increase in Uptown, the North of Downtown area is one of Seattle’s fastest growing sub-regions.

Despite this rapid population and economic growth, there are no east-west transit connections north of Denny Way. Transit riders traveling between Uptown and South Lake Union must either rely on the Route 8—which travels along one of Seattle’s most congested streets—or go out of their way to transfer downtown. This project seeks to develop a high-frequency, east-west transit corridor between some of Seattle’s fastest growing neighborhoods, create seamless connections to the future South Lake Union Link station, and expand access to regional transit corridors like those along SR-522 and I-405 as envisioned in King County Metro’s long-range plan, “Metro Connects”.

With the removal of the Battery St Tunnel in conjunction with the removal of the Alaskan Way Viaduct, there is an opportunity to create a new east-west connection through South Lake Union and across the former SR-99 roadway.

Why not leave things as is?

In support of the expansion of the bus and light rail network, SDOT is working on infrastructure projects such as the Harrison and Mercer Transit Access Project. Today, parts of Harrison St cannot support the weight of heavy vehicles, such as public transportation buses. This project will rebuild the street where needed to ensure that once buses start serving this area, the roadway will not immediately fail resulting in potholes and causing hazards for people walking, biking and driving.



Infrastructure projects of this scale are often multi-year projects that require coordination with multiple agencies and stakeholders. Building this project in advance of the light rail expansion will meet an existing need for east-west connections as well as provide an opportunity to enhance the connection to the future light rail station.

Why is SDOT doing a transit project on Harrison St and not on Denny Way?

This Harrison project was identified for study in alignment within the METRO CONNECTS long range transit plan. The project also aligns with the newly-created Eastlake Layover Facility and supports critical connections to North and South King County Metro services and Sound Transit's proposed Link light rail stations. SDOT has made recent improvements on Denny Way to support transit movements, and there are continued plans within the Seattle Transportation Plan (STP) to make further improvements, as well.

How is the project funded?

The project is funded through a combination of resources including the Landscape Conservation & Local Infrastructure Program (LCLIP), Seattle Transit Measures (STM) and North Downtown Mobility Action Program (NODO) local funding combined with Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) funds for design.

What is the role of King County Metro in the project?

King County Metro is a funding partner and will lead planning and decision-making processes for what bus service would operate on the corridor. Metro is contributing \$500,000 to the city for design. Metro is also working closely with the city to design a corridor that can support new bus service, identify optimal bus stop locations and map out potential future improvements that can support growth, while maintaining reliable travel times. A separate Metro-led process to engage the public on specific service proposals is currently anticipated to start in 2024/2025.

If SDOT is focused on equity, why invest in a well-resourced community like SLU instead of an area that has faced historic disinvestment?

By creating a high-frequency, east-west transit corridor, the Harrison and Mercer Transit Access Project will make it easier to access and get around North Downtown for everyone, regardless



of whether they can afford to live in the area or if they own a car. Transit riders tend to be less white and less wealthy than Seattle as a whole and this project will make it easier to visit some of the City's premier public spaces and ensure that public investments in South Lake Union and Uptown are available to everyone. We expect this project to improve mobility for transit users, create better connections to North Downtown, and increase access to economic opportunity in one of the region's fastest growing job centers.

For SDOT, equity is not an either/or question and the Department continues to invest directly in the City's historically underserved communities. These investments include the Judkins Park Station Access Project and the Route 48 Transit Plus Multimodal Corridor (TPMC) Project along 23rd Ave E in the Central District, Safety and Mobility improvements along NE 130th & 125th St to provide local transit access, connections to light rail, and protected bike lanes, as well as the recently completed Delridge RapidRide H Line and Route 7 TPMC (Rainier) Corridor projects.