

To: Councilmember Rasmussen

From: Michael Terrell, Director of Capital Projects and Roadway Structures (CPRS)

Cc: Mayor McGinn, Council President Clark, Councilmember Bagshaw, Councilmember Burgess, Councilmember Conlin, Councilmember Godden, Councilmember Harrell, Councilmember Licata and Councilmember O'Brien, SDOT Director Hahn

RE: South Spokane Street Viaduct Weekend Closure Summary/Action Plan

Closure Summary: Severe traffic backups occurred this past Saturday, January 28, during the daytime closure of the South Spokane Street Viaduct's eastbound lanes. Field staff for the contractor and the construction management team began noticing backups as the morning progressed, and by late morning SDOT Director's Office staff also began receiving messages from the media highlighting the traffic.

Recognizing that many West Seattle motorists were surprised by the closure and experiencing significant delays, a senior employee of CPRS drove to the project site to address the issue with members of the construction team and other SDOT staff. This team began looking at ways to relieve the congestion, working to add and relocate uniformed police officers at critical intersections. At 12:30 p.m., with work proceeding more rapidly than expected, it was determined that the viaduct would be reopened to full use by mid-afternoon, rather than 5 a.m. Sunday morning as originally planned. By 3:30 p.m., all traffic control for the closure was removed, opening the structure to traffic, and notifications were sent to the media.

Review and Improvements: SDOT staff reviewed the closure and all associated activities, along with all related correspondence, to identify specific issues and develop associated corrective measures. It is clear that motorists did not receive sufficient advance notification about the closure to avoid significant delays and that the detour signage was clearly inadequate. We know that this generated major frustrations for travelers wanting to use the Spokane Street Viaduct last Saturday. We have identified a number of improvements on how to enhance notification and traffic management for future closures. These improvements are identified below:

- **Issue 1:** Three or more days of advance notification on variable message or static signs about the full eastbound closure on the Spokane Street Viaduct was not provided.
 - Improvement: In the future we will provide notification three days in advance using variable message or static signs. This process will be incorporated into future traffic control plans for the department and our contractor, and will be part of the traffic control plan approval process.
- **Issue 2:** Notification about the closure during the work was limited to signs on the West Seattle High Rise Bridge. Signs further to the west, before one approaches the bridge, would have provided early warning to drivers and allowed the use of alternate routes.
 - Improvement: In the future, SDOT will use its permanent Dynamic Message Signs (DMS) located beyond the bridge for advance notification during a closure. Additional temporary and mobile signage will also be used to provide adequate warning in advance of the construction zone. These changes will be part of any future traffic control plans.
- **Issue 3:** Signs for Fauntleroy Expressway closures were mistaken for signs for the Spokane Street Viaduct closure.

- Improvement: We will review the overlapping traffic control plans, and will clarify and improve all signage so that the traveling public is not confused by the two closely located projects.
- **Issue 4**: Operations related to the closure were not evaluated early enough in the day.
 - Improvements:
 - SDOT will drive detour routes, check our traffic control and look for opportunities to further improve traffic control during closures, and will continue to monitor it throughout the work.
 - We will verify that uniformed traffic control officers report to the necessary locations.
 - We will notify the media of modifications made to traffic control or incidents that impact detours.
- **Issue 5**: Press releases highlighting the Spokane closures in chronological order put the weeknight overnight closures at the forefront of the message to the media. The daytime closure was not highlighted adequately.
 - Improvement: We will review our media releases in the future to ensure all work and impacts are appropriately highlighted, and will modify our releases to fully emphasize all closures.
- **Issue 6**: Media focus was on the Mercer East project traffic switch, which minimized reporting on the Spokane closures. Where the Spokane closures were reported, the project's multiple closures resulted in both confused messages and/or unintended focus on the overnight closures.
 - Improvements:
 - When we have daytime full closure impacts such as this in the future, we will review and adjust the media's focus as needed through methods such as direct phone calls, Twitter, Facebook, Web pages, etc.
 - The department will also more fully use its Web site and social media to highlight closures for the public, and will consider paid advertisements if needed.
 - We have also implemented a new process that will include a pre-closure meeting every Thursday morning to review any and all planned closures for the upcoming weekend. This will ensure that appropriate SDOT personnel are aware of all details and impacts of any significant upcoming closures, and can take appropriate steps to alert the public.
- **Issue 7**: Constituents felt the closure highlighted a lack of transparency about the project and insufficient project outreach for significant events.
 - Improvements:
 - SDOT will establish a Spokane Street task force that includes community members, business representatives, local media, council representatives and project staff. The group will meet regularly until work is completed to enhance project transparency and to ensure that continuous public feedback is incorporated into the project.

- Project staff will also re-emphasize community outreach, enhancing awareness through additional face to face meetings and project communications.
- Staff will work with external stakeholders, such as local media outlets, to solicit ideas for enhancing outreach.

The Need for a Daytime Closure: The department has received inquiries about whether a daytime closure was necessary for the project. Nighttime work is less efficient than daytime work as take down and set up times are longer due to darkness, and work zone lighting is required. Especially with projects of this large scale, daytime closures are sometimes necessary for timely completion of the work. We estimate that in order to accomplish the same amount of work at night as we did during this Saturday closure, nine nighttime closures would have been required.

Conclusion: We believe these improvements will provide better information to the public and help minimize future delays for motorists traveling to and from West Seattle.

It is unfortunate that major construction does have significant impacts to the traveling public, but SDOT staff are committed to do as much as possible to minimize such disruptions. Where they are unavoidable, we must do an effective job to let people know what will happen and when. We believe these improvements will greatly help but we also know we need to continually seek to improve our tools. I am more than happy to meet with you and your staff to discuss this information further if you so desire.