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As Stabilization Repairs Continue, Mayor Durkan Announces Decision for Seattle Department of Transportation to Pursue Repair of the West Seattle Bridge

by [Anthony Derrick](#) on November 19, 2020

Traffic could be restored by mid-2022, Work Will Begin Following Completion of Stabilization on the West Seattle High Rise Bridge

SEATTLE (November 19, 2020) – Mayor Jenny A. Durkan announced that the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) is moving forward to continue repairs to the West Seattle High-Rise Bridge. Durkan also directed SDOT to continue early design work for an eventual replacement of the bridge.

“After weighing a number of factors and listening to the experts, neighbors, and small businesses in West Seattle and impacted communities, we will move forward with repairing the West Seattle Bridge to restore mobility as soon as possible. Safety, jobs, certainty, speed to resume mobility, costs, and community input were all key factors in my decision to repair,” said Mayor Durkan. “This corridor is critical to our economy and our residents and the other options could not realistically be done in a reasonable timeframe, would cost significantly more money and provided no more capacity for transit or other modalities. While all options have risks, repair will get West Seattle reconnected the fastest and funding is more certain. In the last five months, SDOT has worked to stabilize the bridge through repairs, and work has already begun on the longer-term repair plan so traffic can resume by mid-2022.”

Mayor Durkan’s decision was informed by expert advice from SDOT engineers and Technical Advisory Panel, community engagement including through the West Seattle Bridge Community task Force and other outreach. These advisory

groups examined a range of options for repairing or replacing the damaged bridge, which was closed in March after regular inspections revealed worsening cracks.

“The safe and rapid restoration of traffic mobility to the high bridge is the highest priority for the Port of Seattle and The Northwest Seaport Alliance,” said Peter Steinbrueck, Port of Seattle Commission President, Co-Chair of The Northwest Seaport Alliance. “As this project proceeds, we appreciate that the City continues to prioritize freight access to Terminal 5 via the lower swing bridge to support successful operations.”

SDOT and consultant WSP will continue stabilization efforts and design the final phase of the repair work in the coming months, with an eye toward reopening the West Seattle High-Rise Bridge in 2022. The design consultant for the eventual replacement of the High-Rise Bridge, HNTB, will also move forward with a Type, Size & Location study.

“The Mayor’s decision to repair the West Seattle High-Rise Bridge continues work that has been happening on, under, and inside the bridge since March. Through these ongoing stabilization repairs, we are already months down this pathway,” said Seattle Department of Transportation Director Sam Zimbabwe. “Not a moment has been lost to restore travel across the Duwamish for communities in and around West Seattle as the Mayor consulted our structural team at SDOT, members of the Community Task Force, our outside technical experts, and others to arrive at the best path forward to safely restore this critical connection as quickly as possible. SDOT stands ready to drive this repair forward and reconnect West Seattle by 2022. It will take partnership and courage at all levels of government to restore travel quickly and plan for an eventual replacement that leverages all opportunities for improved connectivity, but I know, together, we can continue on this path and on this timeline.”

Since the bridge closed, SDOT has worked to simultaneously advance all efforts to pursue both a repair or replace scenario. These measures were required to support either path: first, releasing damaged bridge bearings at the Pier 18 column, and, second, the installation and tightening of post-tensioning steel cables inside the bridge girders to further support the main bridge arch. More detailed explanations of this work, along with images and videos, are available here: [New steel post-tensioning cables installed](#) and [Damaged bearings released at Pier 18](#).

“After consulting technical experts, Seattle residents, local businesses, and the Port of Seattle, I want to thank our Mayor for her careful and thorough consideration of how best to move forward safely and effectively so we can quickly restore this vital infrastructure,” said Seattle City Councilmember Alex Pedersen, appointed earlier this year to chair the Council’s Transportation Committee. “After studying various choices, I agree with Mayor Jenny Durkan that immediate repair of the bridge is the right choice so we can quickly and safely restore mobility to our region’s bridge network. Repairing the bridge now still keeps open the long-term solution to plan and fund a methodical replacement in the future and to coordinate with increased transit options. I believe the cracking and closure of the West Seattle Bridge must be a wake-up call to take better care of all of our aging bridges with more investment in maintenance to keep transit and freight moving throughout a city defined by its waterways and ravines. I remain committed to work with Mayor Durkan, our Seattle Department of Transportation, and the rest of the City Council to make sure we honor this commitment to our bridge infrastructure and get this done.”

The initiation of stabilization repairs in March means the City is already months down the repair pathway selected today, ensuring that not a moment of forward-progress has been lost. Today’s announcement to repair the West Seattle High-Rise Bridge continues work that has been happening on, under, and inside the bridge six- to seven-days-a-week.

“Since the closure of the West Seattle Bridge on March 23rd, I’ve heard every day from residents and businesses that are hurting, their lives and businesses disrupted,” said Councilmember Herbold. “I’ve heard consistently from D1 constituents that restoring safe access as quickly as possible is the highest priority. I agree repairing the bridge is the best approach to restore safe access as quickly as possible. The Mayor’s decision to choose the repair pathway for the West Seattle Bridge has been thoughtful, thorough, and inclusive of a diversity of perspectives as well as the input of SDOT’s independent Technical Advisory Panel.”

“We’ve said from the beginning that all impacted communities – particularly those in the Duwamish Valley – need a seat at the table and through the Community Task Force we’ve done our best to represent those voices. The impacts of increased traffic and additional air pollution on our communities are very real, and Mayor Durkan and the City have listened and understand that,” said Duwamish River Cleanup Coalition Executive Director and West Seattle Bridge Community Task Force Co-Chair Paulina López. “They brought us into the process and made a decision that will limit the amount of time the Duwamish Valley will be impacted by detour traffic to avoid additional environmental and safety burdens. I’m very thankful that community members had the opportunity to give feedback and influence this decision. Reconnecting West Seattle and mitigating its impacts during this prolonged closure is the real hard and necessary work but we look forward to ensuring these efforts continue to meet the needs of our communities most acutely impacted. We will also continue to advocate for healthy mobility, reducing emissions and encouraging increased capacity for alternative modes of transportation thinking of our future”

“Mayors have to make tough decisions. I know this from experience,” said West Seattle Bridge Task Force Co-Chair and Former Mayor Greg Nickels. “Closing the West Seattle Bridge last March was a gutsy call by Mayor Jenny Durkan to put the public safety first. Choosing to repair the bridge has to be one of the tougher choices a mayor has made in recent times, but it is the right one in this context and I support her decision. On behalf of the Task Force members, Co-chair Paulina López, and myself; we thank Mayor Durkan for asking the people, partners, and businesses affected by this closure to tell her what we think. And we’re ultimately very pleased that she listened and chose to repair the bridge in order to minimize the disruption to our communities.”

“Members of the Technical Advisory Panel support the Mayor’s decision for the quickest, least expensive option to restore connectivity for the West Seattle peninsula,” said Barbara Moffat, PE SE, West Seattle Bridge Technical Advisory Panel co-chair. “As with all technical solutions, there remain questions, and SDOT will continue to monitor the bridge and repairs as they plan for the future. We were pleased to provide technical guidance on this challenging decision.”

“Especially during a recession, it is vitally important that any infrastructure project of this size supports our local economy by investing in jobs, apprenticeships and workers that live in our community creating opportunities for construction careers,” said Monty Anderson of the Seattle Building Trades Council. “Our local recovery infrastructure package starts now, and I look forward to working with Mayor Durkan and our other elected officials to ensure that this project benefits construction workers living in Seattle and King County.”

“The businesses of West Seattle appreciate the Mayor’s thoughtfulness in approaching this decision and her dedication to the economic health of the peninsula,” said Lora Radford, Executive Director of the West Seattle Junction Association Business Improvement Area. “While we understand this decision was multifaceted, the Junction Association appreciates the care Mayor Durkan put into gathering opinions before making this critical decision that affects all West Seattleites.”

More than 17,000 community members responded to the Reconnect West Seattle survey this summer, which helped SDOT prioritize immediate and long-term community needs and projects to best mitigate the impacts of the High-Bridge closure and corresponding detour routes. To date, SDOT has implemented more than 185 projects in and around West Seattle. Many more will come online in 2020 and 2021, with a particular focus on prioritizing environmental justice by addressing detour impacts in communities already facing higher levels of pollution, asthma, and other environmental and health inequities.

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