

Date: March 18, 2016
To: Moira Gray, Seattle Department of Transportation
From: Capitol Hill Community Council, Seattle Central Greenways, and Melrose Promenade
Subject: Comment on Street Vacation Petition for the Washington State Convention Center Addition (Clerk File 314338) and Requested Public Benefits for Olive Way

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the street vacation petition for the Washington State Convention Center (WSCC) Addition. This is an exciting and innovative public project for Seattle, and it promises to spur further economic growth through new jobs and visitors. It will also positively contribute to the urban form and energy of Downtown and surrounding neighborhoods.

However, the project is unprecedented in its scale and the number of requested street vacations. The currently proposed public benefits are nominal and do not fulfill the spirit of City Council Resolution 30702. The WSCC and its developer must go above and beyond in how they give back to the Downtown and Capitol Hill communities. **We believe the time is now for one particular improvement to Seattle's public realm: increasing safety on Olive Way.**

Data shows that on the portion of Olive Way between the project site at Ninth Avenue and the Sound Transit light rail station at Broadway, from 2007 to 2014, there were 69 people walking and bicycling hit by cars. This is an average of ten collisions per year, an unconscionable rate of injury.¹

The Addition will double the Convention Center's capacity and it is foreseeable that thousands of new and existing visitors, employees, and residents will use Olive Way to reach the shopping, restaurants, and entertainment offerings on Capitol Hill. Further, the Convention Center anticipates creating hundreds of low wage service jobs that are likely to involve commuting by foot, bike, and transit. It is in the best interests of the City and the WSCC for Olive Way to be a safer and more attractive street for all.

The WSCC Addition and its associated co-development will straddle Olive Way, but the petitioner currently proposes anemic improvements to the pedestrian environment and the roadway. The petitioner also proposes entirely closing two blocks of Olive Way during at least one stage of construction, a major break in the street grid for traffic, transit and especially pedestrians.² The proposed addition of two bike-share stations also makes safety improvements along and across Olive Way critical for bicyclists.

The Capitol Hill Community Council, Seattle Central Greenways, and Melrose Promenade are jointly requesting Olive Way safety improvements be included in the WSCC's public benefit package. We are most concerned with the area around the Interstate 5 ramps and the intersections with Melrose Avenue and Bellevue Avenue. We believe these areas are eligible for both physical off-site benefits and in-lieu funding.

Olive Way's safety problems have been substantially documented. The 1998 Capitol Hill Neighborhood Plan notes, "...some pedestrian crossings along E Olive Way remain treacherous due to poor location and fast vehicle speeds. Pedestrian crossings at Interstate-5 are especially dangerous. The street's diagonal orientation results in acute corners that make it difficult for pedestrians to be seen by cars."³ The dual on-lane ramp also encourages high speeds, as recently demonstrated by a collision that destroyed a pedestrian warning sign.

The same plan identified a solution: rechannelizing the Interstate 5 off- and on- ramps, forcing vehicles to a complete stop and improving drivers' view of pedestrians (see Figure 1). As the plan notes, this change would greatly improve the safety and convenience of walking across Interstate 5. With increased foot and vehicle traffic from the WSCC Addition, now is the time to implement this improvement.

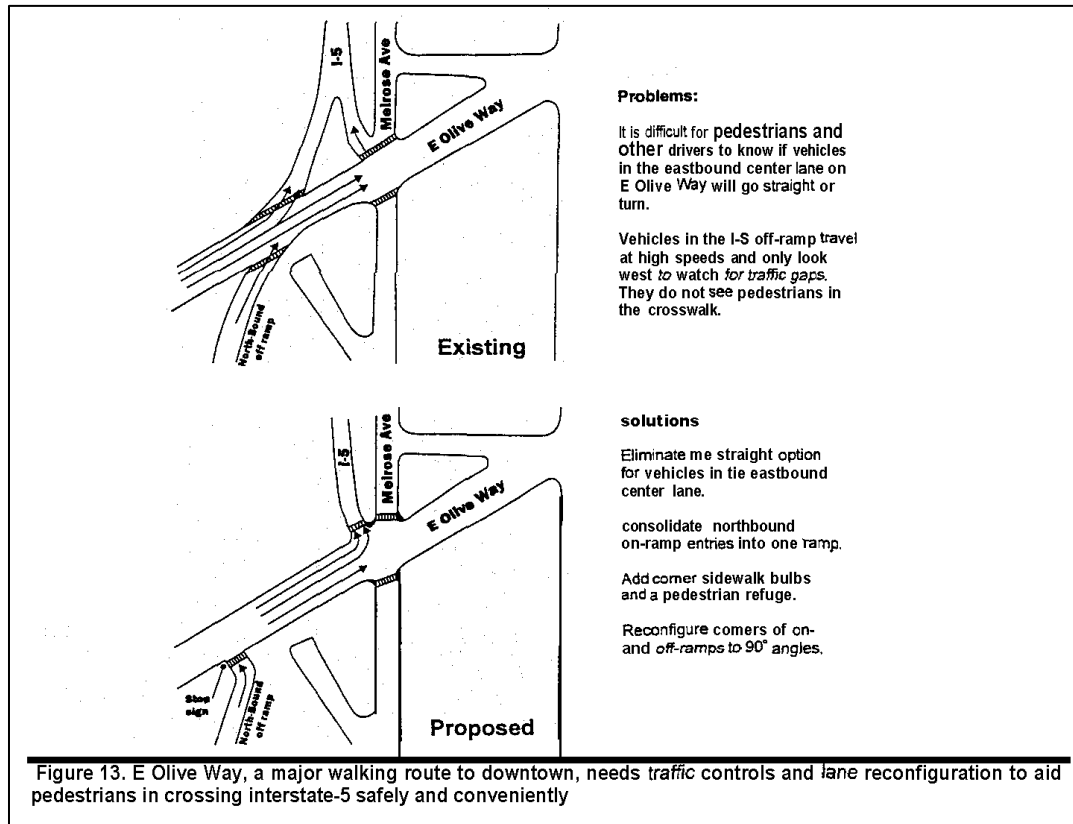


Figure 1 - Proposed configuration of the Olive Way freeway ramps from the Capitol Hill Neighborhood Plan, page 30.⁴

Another possible option at this interchange is to allow vehicles exiting Interstate 5 to turn left onto Olive Way, simplifying traffic flows to the WSCC Addition. This would necessitate converting the Olive Way overpass to two-way traffic, which is how Olive Way already operates on both ends of the overpass (see Figure 3 for one example of a concept design with this feature).

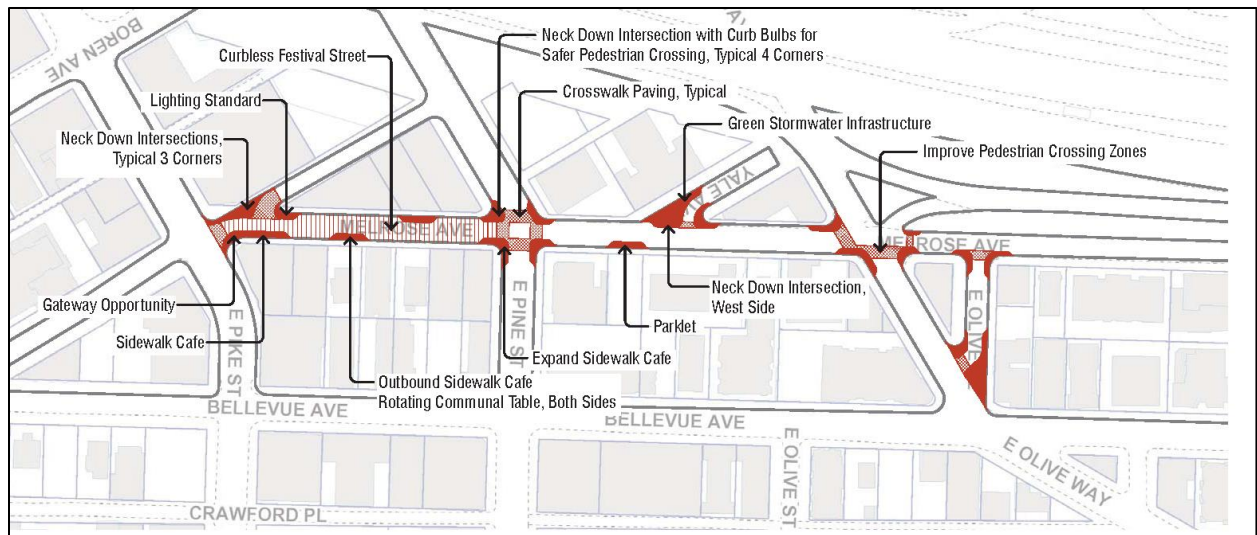


Figure 2 – Street improvements envisioned by the Melrose Promenade plan, page 49.⁵

The Melrose Promenade plan, more recently completed by community members with extensive stakeholder input, also envisions safer and shortened pedestrian crossings at the Melrose Avenue intersection with numerous sidewalk extensions (see Figure 2). Of particular importance is the narrowing of E Olive Place, which currently is an extremely wide crossing that draws significant traffic because of the eastbound left-turn restriction onto Melrose Avenue.

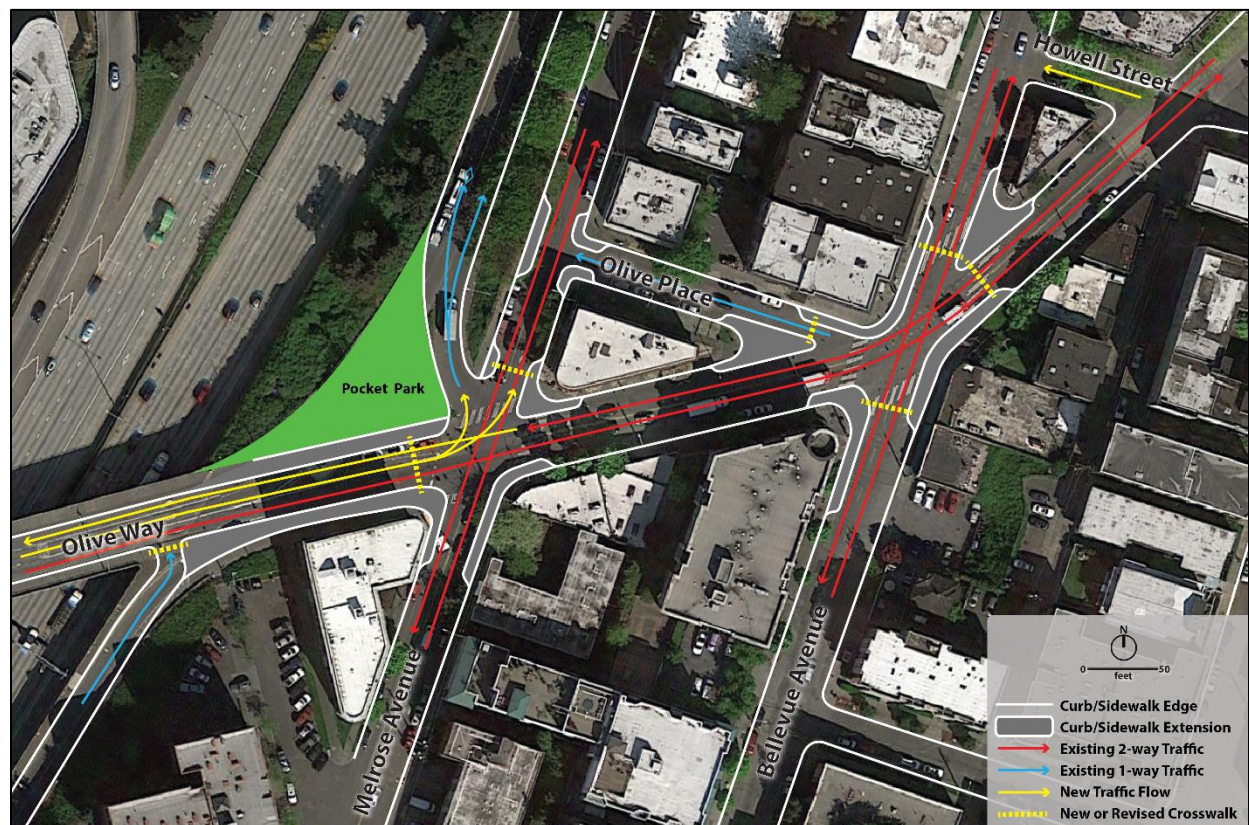


Figure 3. One concept for improving Olive Way at the I-5, Melrose Avenue, and Bellevue Avenue intersections.⁶

These improvements would effectively decrease the chance of traffic collisions for Olive Way's most vulnerable users. We are strongly interested in staying engaged on this issue and helping SDOT and the City Council develop a public benefit package that benefits the wider community. We appreciate your attention to this matter and the opportunity to provide comment on the street vacation process.

With regards,

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Capitol Hill Residents

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¹ Collision data from *The Seattle Times*:

<http://old.seattletimes.com/flatpages/local/pedestrianandbicyclecollisionsinseattle.html>

² Washington State Convention Center Addition Draft Environmental Impact State, Page 2-32 (February 2016).

³ Capitol Hill Urban Center Village Neighborhood Plan, Page 26 (December 1998):

<http://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/Neighborhoods/Planning/Plan/Capitol-Hill-plan.pdf>

⁴ Ibid, page 30.

⁵ Melrose Promenade Vision Project, page 46 (2013):

https://melrosepromenade.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/melrose-promenade_report_final.pdf

⁶ "Let's Make Olive Way a Safer Street for Everyone" by Scott Bonjukian (February 9, 2016), *The Urbanist*:

<https://www.theurbanist.org/2016/02/09/lets-make-olive-way-a-better-street-for-everyone/>