

Amtrak Station Relocation Citizen Advisory Committee

Meeting Notes

Tacoma Municipal Building, Room 708 – Monday, March 18, 2013 – 4:30 pm

Attendees:

- Keith Stone (Dome District)
- David Talcott (Huitt-Zollars)
- Milt Tremblay (UWT)
- Janice McNeal (Dome District)
- Clarence Burris
- Andrew Strobel (Puyallup Tribe)
- Alisa O'Hanlon (City of Tacoma)
- Aaron Winston (BLRB Architects)
- Chris Larson (City of Tacoma)
- Cheri Gibbons (City of Tacoma)
- Ricardo Noguera (City of Tacoma)
- Todd Huber (Brown & Haley)
- Shari Hart, City of Tacoma
- Rob Henson (City of Tacoma)
- Jori Adkins (Dome District)
- Ed Davis (Hillside Development Council)
- David Schroedel (Tacoma-Pierce County Chamber of Commerce)
- Jane Moore (Coalition for Active Transportation)
- Tina Lee (Pierce Transit)
- Brian Borgelt (Freighthouse Square)
- Erin Hunter (Sound Transit)
- Ian Munce (City of Tacoma)
- Ko Wibow (AIA SWW)
- Les Gerstmann (AIA SWW)
- Su Dowie (Foss Waterway Development Authority)
- Don Erickson (Chair, City of Tacoma Planning Commission)
- Elizabeth Burris (New Tacoma Neighborhood Council)
- Edward Berntsen (National Railway Historical Society)
- Kim Bedier (City of Tacoma)
- Shari Hart (City of Tacoma)
- Ed Brooks (Bamboo Property Management)
- Rick Semple (Dome District)
- Frank Davidson (WSDOT)

Welcome

Chair Erickson welcomed the group.

History of Planning in the Dome District

Ian Munce, City of Tacoma Planning and Development Services Department, provided a brief overview of the past planning efforts in the South Downtown Area along with information about more recent studies in the District. The current planning effort, the South Downtown Subarea Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) which is a joint effort with the University of Washington Tacoma, will be released in draft form for public review this month and the Plan is expected to be adopted by the end of this year. Ian also discussed how the current South Downtown Subarea Plan and EIS project tie into the regional planning goals such as Vision 2040.

Group Discussion and Identification of Issues relating to the Amtrak Station relocation

The group engaged in discussion of areas of concern relating to the relocation of the Amtrak Station to Freighthouse Square in the future. The discussion was led by Aaron Winston and Les Gerstmann of the American Institute of Architects, South West Washington Chapter, and throughout the dialogue the discussion points were written down on poster boards for future reference. The bulleted points from the posters are as follows:

Traffic

- Trains should never block 'C' and 'D' Streets because:
 - Causes economic hardship to nearby businesses because of impacts on truck deliveries and pickups.
 - Blocks access to Dome District's limited open space to the north and west.
 - Impacts emergency services ingress and egress, especially during Dome events.
 - Deters downtown visitor access because of multiple gate closures throughout the day.
 - Blocks an important North/South corridor which extends from the Thea Foss Waterway through the District and up to the McKinley Hill neighborhood.
 - Interferes with pedestrian access and safety throughout the Dome District.
 - Affects transit options, such as busses passing through the District.
- 'D' Street is the north/south 'Spine' of the Dome District and it should never be blocked.
- View corridors in the District should be preserved, especially those north to the Foss Waterway.
- Traffic counts in WSDOT's Findings of No Significant Impact (FONSI) need to be reviewed and studied further, especially along Puyallup Avenue.
- 6pm to 8pm are the peak hours for ingress during Tacoma Dome events.
- The crossing gates close on 'C' and 'D' Streets whenever a train is in the station, regardless of whether the train extends into the intersection. This is a BIG problem!
 - The typical time that the crossing gates are closed for Sounder trains is currently about 2 minutes and 16 seconds with about a 60 second drop time.
 - Amtrak estimates future closures of about 6.5 minutes for its passenger trains.

Parking

- There is a desire to keep long-term parking (up to 3-days) out of the Dome District's core (unless enclosed in a parking garage?).
- Amtrak needs a minimum of 83 long-term (up to three days) spaces.
- Parking too far away is a concern.
- The Tacoma Station is Amtrak's fourth-largest station along the corridor, 83 spaces are not enough to accommodate probable future growth.
- 44 stalls may be made available under Freighthouse Square in the future. Capability apparently exists.
- Surface parking under I-705 is also an option.
- Any parking on Puyallup Tribal-owned property would only be available through a long-term (50-100 year) lease, not ownership.
- There are currently new pedestrian amenities on 'D' Street due to recent upgrades including new sidewalks, street trees, and street lighting.
- 'C' Street is the second most important street in the Dome District for pedestrians and vehicles.
- There is a strong desire to foster new development along 'D' Street in the District.

Signage

- Electronic 'Parking Available Here' signage may help with way-finding. Such signage should be located at major entrances into the District and identify major lots/garages with spaces still available so that drivers do not plug up streets searching for a parking place.

Dome Events

- Only 1,300 parking stalls are available on the Dome site.
- The Tacoma Dome can seat up to 20,000 people at full capacity.
- Currently Dome management encourages event ticket holders to park downtown and take the Link to major events at the Dome. BIG problem in that both the Link and Pierce transit reduce or stop service around 10 pm when people may still be at their event.
- The Link light rail can move up to 600 people per hour.
- Dome events may occur during the day or during the evening depending on the type of event.
- On March 29th the Bob Segar concert is sold out and approximately 14,000 people will come to the District.
- The Link will typically only operate late trains to Downtown during events with more than 15,000 people in attendance and they are compensated for this special service.

Principles of Transit-Oriented Development

Tina Lee, from Pierce Transit, provided a brief overview of Pierce Transit's activity in the Dome District as well as an introduction into the principles of transit-oriented development. The presentation included a handout of area, regional maps, transit route maps, and an explanation of the basics of transit-oriented development for the benefit of the group. In brief, transit-oriented development can be described as having the following characteristics:

- Provides alternatives to the car
- Socially equitable
- Fun and surprising
- Supported by frequent transit
- Public leadership
- Variety of uses
- Greater density
- Limited, managed parking
- Active, defined center
- Designed for walking

Next Meeting

- AIA's ten principles for livable communities – (Les Gertmann, AIA SWW Chapter)
- Evaluation of station alternatives in terms of addressing previously identified issues
- Ranking of station alternatives/design principles in terms of probable feasibility and importance for Inclusion in city's response letter to WSDOT

The next Steering Committee meeting will be held on March 25, 2013, at the Tacoma Municipal Building in Room 708 at 4:30 pm.