

August 14, 2023

Mayor Bruce Harrell
600 4th Ave, Seattle, WA, 7th Floor
Seattle, WA, 98104

CC:

Seattle City Council
Susan Fletcher, Acting Administrator, FTA, Region 10
Greg Spotts, Director, SDOT
Jenifer Chao, Director, DON
Rico Quirindongo, Director, OPCD
Lyle Bicknell, Urban Planner, OPCD
Adiam Emery, Deputy Mayor
Girmay Zahilav, King County Council
Rachel Berkson, Deputy Chief of Staff, Pramila Jayapal

Re: Rapid Ride J Line – For Equity, relocate redundant J line dollars to South Seattle

Dear Mayor Harrell:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Eastlake Community Council to ask that you redirect the federal funding for the RR-J line to another more appropriate project in Seattle that would address fairness and equity.

We appreciate the effort that the RR-J team has made over the last few years. They have provided current information as it became available and worked collaboratively with us to address pedestrian and cyclist safety, negative impact on neighborhood businesses and the elimination of parking on Eastlake Ave. There have been revisions, compromises and adjustments. CM Pedersen, Transportation Chair, has been part of several of our meetings. Ultimately, the use of funds to build a project that is outdated and inappropriate for Eastlake Ave. is simply not a wise use of public funds. We understand that SDOT has limited power to reverse a decision by a previous administration. We need your support to reverse this now redundant project.

Specifically, the project is misaligned with both City and community goals in a number of significant ways:

1. The data which drove the Rapid Ride J line project is out of date. The opening of light rail at Roosevelt and the University District to downtown significantly affected commuting options. The Covid pandemic altered commuting patterns to downtown that we continue to assess. Those wanting fast service to downtown will choose light rail. There is uncertainty with the longevity of any transportation system so providing one with flexibility is important. The hardscape construction of the RR-J is expensive and leaves little room for adaptation.

The proposed design radically contradicts the recommended principles of neighborhood street design as documented in the City of Seattle ROW manual, and the goals for the

Eastlake Urban Village as outlined in its neighborhood plan and the City of Seattle Comprehensive Plan, introducing changes that would negatively impact our neighborhood business district.

2. The safety of cyclists on a narrow street shared with Rapid Ride that also has turn lanes to support on and off access to I5 and several buildings with turn-in parking mid-block is a major concern. During peak traffic times, safety concerns will multiply and there will be nothing rapid about a Rapid Ride bus on Eastlake Ave.

3. From an equity standpoint, Federal resources which have been allocated to this project would be better used in neighborhoods which are not as well-served by existing transit resources. This would be consistent with King County's equitable decision to focus on other rapid lines in the region.

To elaborate:

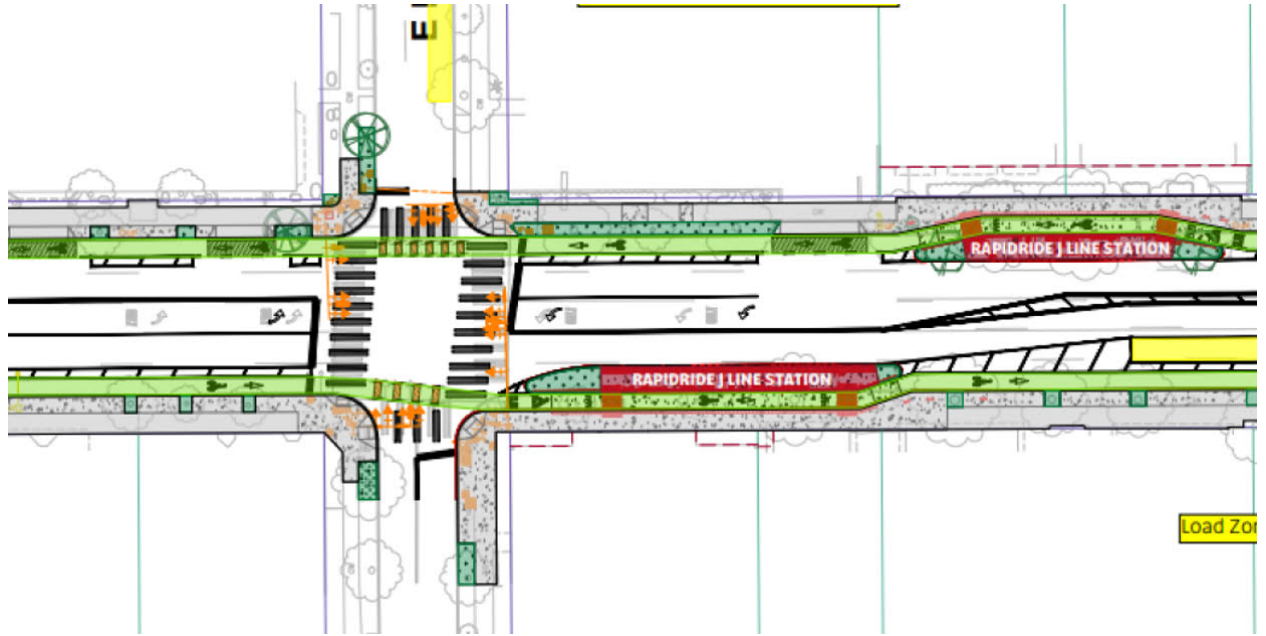
The Rapid Ride J line project requires a comprehensive reassessment of its premises and objectives. The cost-benefit analysis which justified this project was completed prior to the opening of the Roosevelt and University District light rail stations in 2021 and the global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The first altered commuting options permanently and the second presented another reason for flexibility.

Furthermore, the proposed design violates several key principles that drive the street design goals illustrated in the City of Seattle Right of Way (ROW) manual. It is deeply concerning that the Rapid Ride J line project seeks a deviation that would **shrink the width of the sidewalks adjacent to some proposed stations to less than 7.5 feet, which is below minimum standards for any city street**, let alone a neighborhood main street. This falls significantly below the city code requirement of 12 feet. **Note that this deviation also entails removing many existing mature street trees** at a time when council has passed a new ordinance to protect our tree canopy.

By compromising our pedestrian space, we risk limiting the accessibility and safety of pedestrians, particularly those with mobility challenges or individuals who rely on strollers, wheelchairs, or other mobility aids. In addition, our local businesses rely heavily on pedestrian infrastructure for their success and such a deviation would be a fatal blow to many of our longest-tenured and most-loved businesses in Eastlake.

The following diagram shows SDOT's proposed RR-J design at Eastlake Avenue and Lynn Street, which is effectively the "Main & Main" of the Eastlake Urban Village. The shadowed outlines show where existing curb lines and trees would be removed. Please compare this to the next diagram which shows the City's own recommended design for Urban Village Main Streets. This design accommodates both bike lanes and bus service, while maintaining street trees, adequate sidewalks, seating areas for small business as well as loading and parking in some locations.

Rapid Ride J Street Design Diagram – Eastlake & Lynn

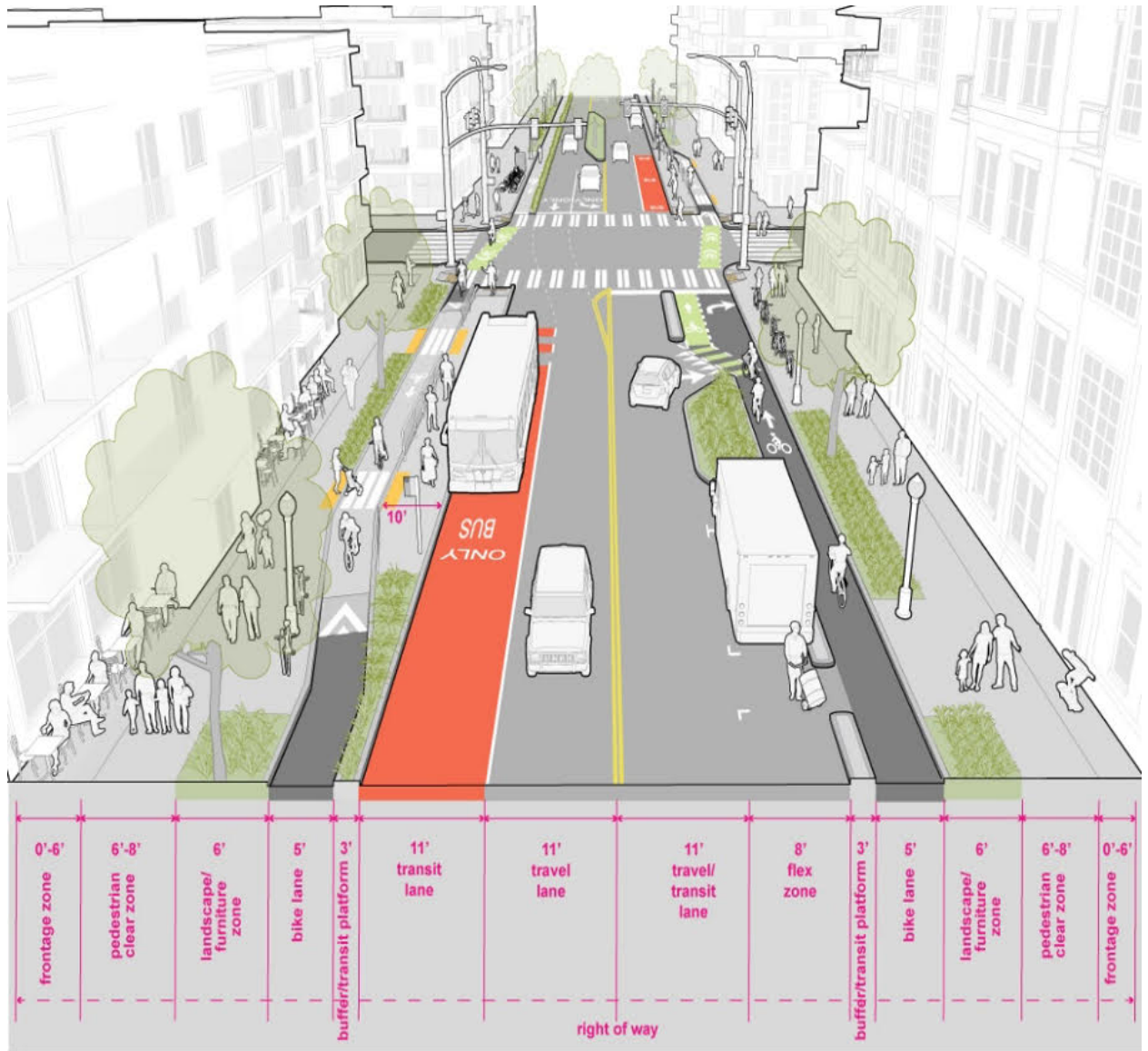


[1] “[2.8 Urban Village Main](#),” Seattle Right-of-Way Improvements Manual, [Seattle.gov](#).

[2] “[Seattle Roadway Classification](#),” City of Seattle GIS.

[3] “[Street Type Standards](#),” Seattle Right-of-Way Improvements Manual, [Seattle.gov](#).

Cross-Section View, Urban Village Main Street – Principal Arterial



Eastlake Avenue is designated an Urban Village Main Street with minimum widths of 6' for the pedestrian clear zone and 6' for the landscape/furniture zone (6' + 6' = 12' minimum) as depicted above. The Rapid Ride J project requires a reduction to 8.5' combined for these two zones. (Source: Seattle Right-Of-Way Improvements Manual

Additionally, we believe that the project's current design is misaligned with the City of Seattle Comprehensive Plan which recognizes Eastlake's status as a historically established neighborhood and an urban village and calls for Eastlake to "increase the development of neighborhood-serving businesses at street-level". The Eastlake

Community Council is currently working with OPCD to further clarify and elaborate on this goal to create the best possible environment for pedestrian-oriented small business. To be clear, Eastlake would welcome protected bicycle lanes and more frequent headways on the #70 bus line, to the extent achievable with our current infrastructure, but not if it comes at an existential cost to our small businesses and our pedestrian environment. **To summarize this point, a cycle thoroughfare and a bus rapid transit line don't belong in the same urban village main street because they simply don't fit and the deviant design is the result of this basic fact.**

What we do need is a resurfaced Eastlake Ave and the 50 year old water line replaced. We need safe bike lanes and an efficient bus service. The bus service need is currently being met by the #70 bus.

Lastly, we question the allocation of budgetary resources to the Rapid Ride J line project, **particularly in relation to consideration of need, fairness and equity.** Our neighborhood is being asked to accept a questionable design and now unnecessary Rapid Ride project while many neighborhoods are in need of more adequate transit service and federal funding to close their budget gaps. We use SDOT, in collaboration with the Federal Transit Authority, to explore alternative uses of the Rapid Ride J funds that could address pressing equity concerns in less advantaged areas of Seattle, and/or fill the gap on projects that would help to revitalize downtown.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and would welcome the opportunity to discuss our concerns further. We have more than fulfilled our obligations pursuant to the Comprehensive Plan by adding substantial housing density to the Eastlake neighborhood. With the Rapid Ride J line project, the City is renegeing on its obligations to us for all the above-mentioned reasons. The Eastlake Community Council stands ready to collaborate with the City and SDOT to ensure that any transportation project in our community upholds the highest standards of safety, accessibility, and equity.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Detra Segar
President, Eastlake Community Council