MassTransitMag.com HomepageCygnus Business Media
A Cygnus Business Media Website
MassTransit
powered by: Google Search Site Web Search

Top Transit News

Most Read Most Emailed Email Story Print Story

With Seattle Bus Viaduct Closed, a 'Thousand Little Fixes' have Improved Traffic

Updated: January 9th, 2007 10:35 AM EDT

Danny Westneat
The Seattle Times

When the downtown Seattle bus tunnel closed for two years of construction, transit bosses were braced for gridlock.

LexisNexis

"There was a lot of concern it was going to be a disaster, with buses jamming the streets and traffic backed up all over the place," says Jim Jacobson, deputy manager of Metro, which runs the buses.

People were so worried buses would be at a standstill that the city chose to ban cars from Third Avenue, the street above the tunnel, during rush hours.

Then people fretted that cars would hopelessly clog the other streets. So Jacobson says they did "a thousand little things" to compensate such as moving bus stops farther apart and eliminating some parking to aid traffic flow.

Fifteen months ago, the tunnel closed. A funny thing happened: Most commuters have been getting through downtown faster than ever.

Ads by Google Advertise on this site

Quality Used Buses Sale
We have Coach, Tour, Transit, MCI, Conversions, & Charter Buses
www.colonialbussales.com

Delineators 888-846-2693
Channelizers & Delineators Sale. Our prices beat any free shipping!
MARKSTAAR.com

That's right: faster. Buses are traversing almost every downtown street quicker without the tunnel. In some cases, dramatically so.

Metro has logged car and bus travel times before and after closing the tunnel. Car speeds stayed about the same. (They were expected to slow.) But buses, carrying more riders, surprisingly are faster on all streets except First Avenue.

Example: When the tunnel was open, it took a typical bus nine minutes to go through downtown on Third Avenue. Now it takes less than six.

Even on some streets that now have up to 20 percent more traffic on them (because Third Avenue is often closed to cars), the buses still are faster. Why? Apparently because of those "thousand little things."

It makes you wonder: Did we need this bus tunnel? If we'd known back in the '80s that we could get superior results by making a series of little changes to street use rules and signaling, would we have spent $480 million and ripped up the heart of downtown for nearly four years?

It's a moot point now. On the plus side, at least we have a place to put light rail.

But the tale of the bus tunnel has me wondering again about our other tunnel, the one not yet built. What to do with the Alaskan Way Viaduct is down to two choices: build a new elevated one or a tunnel. It's the big ugly or the big costly.

Do we really need either one? What if we did a thousand little things instead?

This idea is not mine. It's been talked about for years: Tear down the viaduct, reduce Highway 99 to a small boulevard through Seattle and then try to make up for the loss of the freeway with busways, freightways, beefed-up arterials and so forth.

I have no idea if it would work. I could quote experts saying it'd be smooth sailing. And experts saying it would paralyze the city. You know, it would sound a lot like the debate about the bus tunnel.

So here's my modest proposal: Let's just try it. Close the viaduct. It's unsafe anyway, remember? Let's come up with a thousand-point plan like they did for the bus tunnel and shut down the viaduct for a month or two. Then see what happens.

I suspect if we did this experiment it would at least help clear one kind of viaduct gridlock. The political kind.

Danny Westneat's column appears Thursday and Sunday.

Copyright 2005 LexisNexis, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.
Terms and Conditions | Privacy Policy

News stories provided by third parties are not edited by "Site Publication" staff. For suggestions and comments, please click the Contact link at the bottom of this page.

back to top

- Contact Us
- Privacy Statement
- User Agreement
- Link to Us
- Other Cygnus Sites
- Bookmark Us

Printable version may be for personal use only. Content may not be duplicated, re-used or otherwise replicated without expressed, written consent from **MassTransitMag.com** and/or the original author/source.

Visit **MassTransitMag.com** at **http://www.masstransitmag.com** for the latest industry news, commentary, features and more.

s Copyright © 2007 All rights reserved. Cygnus Interactive, a Division of Cygnus Business Media.

- Publishing
- Expositions
- Interactive
- Custom Solutions

- Find Your Market
- SRDS Classifications
- Content Licensing

- Event Calendar

- Career Opportunities
- Find Your Market
- Internet Trends
- Get Started Now
- Content Licensing