This presentation highlights the needs and opportunities that we see in the U-District.

It was originally presented by Eli Goldberg and David Amiton in May 2011, to Tracy Burrows and Barbara Gray from the Seattle Department of Transportation, Seattle city council member Sally Bagshaw, and Seattle Bike Advisory Board chair Blake Trask.

(Photos courtesy of: Flickr users ‘sea turtle’ and ‘Wonderlane’)

I’d like to open this meeting with 3 ideas.

#1: The U-district is special. We really have all the conditions necessary to have widespread bicycle use, given the leadership and relatively small investment.

#2: The needs of our community is misaligned with the design of our streets. The vast majority of us don’t own cars, but we have roads that are 4 full-sized traffic lanes wide. Our design of our streets don’t reflect the needs of those of us who actually live in the U-District.

#3: We have enormous amounts of underutilized asphalt, and tons of opportunity. A number of our streets could accommodate inexpensive cycletracks without removing traffic lanes or even taking out a single parking spot. I believe we are a place where many things can be made better without stirring up the controversy we see on road diet projects.
First, though, I’d like to start with some facts relevant to the potential for community biking in the U-district.
This is the core of the U-district – the part in yellow. It’s where I’m going to focus my presentation. This is the dense area – that’s UW, of course, on the right. We’re mixed use, chock full of pedestrians and students.

I’ve lived in this neighborhood for five years not just for what it is, but for what it so easily could grow into with the right leadership, and relatively little expense.

As of the census from 10 years ago, there’s about 8500 people living in this yellow block. There’s going to be 1600 new beds in the southern part in just the next 2 years, very little new parking. There’s also 3,000+ dorm beds on campus. That’s over 13,000 people.

Naturally, there aren’t 13,000 resident parking spaces in this block.
We don’t have a community built around convenient parking.

If you have a car, you’re going to typically have to walk several blocks to get it.

As a result, the U-district is a community where it’s not practical to use a car for short-to-medium trips within this community, because there’s often nowhere to park it. This is where community biking is a slam dunk for efficiency and convenience.
Most of us don’t own cars anyway.

Of the portion of our population that works (about 50%), only 37% of them own automobiles. I think it’s a safe assumption that the rest – ostensibly students – are less likely to own cars, if they don’t have jobs.

Manhattan’s car ownership rate is around 25%. We really are in the same ballpark as Manhattan.

What this means is that the U-district is different from the rest of Seattle, which an 84% car ownership rate. Unlike other communities, no one has to “get us out of our cars” – most of us don’t even own one!

Instead, our mobility is defined by walking and by public transit. But, these options often don’t work well within our community. I’ll talk more about that.
We don’t have lots of money.

The average income is about $17,400 among U-district workers.

(source: Y2K census)

Another favorable condition for bicycling is the fact that our core community population is lower-income and student-oriented.

We couldn’t solve our transportation problem in the U-district by building parking garages...our community doesn’t have the money to own cars (and shouldn’t have to).
This is the apartment building where I live. Like most of the U-district core, it was built before automobiles were common. It has about 150 residents, and maybe space for 25 cars.

That means, most of us have to rely primarily on walking and transit. Most of us own bikes, but they’re used more on weekends on the Burke-Gilman.

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So, just to summarize, we have a place that’s unique for Seattle. We have a population that’s overwhelmingly car-free, lower-income, and that lives in a dense community where things are just far enough that they’re often impractical to walk to, but too close to warrant public transit.
I really think in the U-district, we have the opportunity to create one of the rare places in America where biking is open and relevant to the majority – Eugene, Boulder, Stanford, etc.

I’d like explain why.
If you look at the top cycling cities in the US and Europe (rather than just famous cities like Copenhagen and Amsterdam), they’re the student-oriented communities.

This list goes on and on. Each country’s top biking city is a University community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Bike mode share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Groningen (Netherlands)</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leiden (Netherlands)</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enschede (Netherlands)</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muenster (Germany)</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freiburg (Germany)</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambridgeshire (UK)</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxfordshire (UK)</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*source:* Pucher, John and Buehler, Ralph (2008) *Making Cycling Irresistible: Lessons from The Netherlands, Denmark and Germany*
In John Pucher’s research, the highest mode share in industrialized countries is for trips of 1.5 miles (2.5 km) or shorter. If you compare the graphs on the right with the ones on the left, you can see how people’s willingness to cycle falls across all of these countries as the trips get longer.
And coming back to the U-district – if we look at that optimal 1.5 range for bicycling – where the trips are just too far to walk but impractical for public transit, it lines up perfectly with a map of the University District, the core of UW, and a bit of Wallingford.

Just to be sure, the radius here is 3/4 miles – it’s 1.5 miles from one edge of the circle to the other edge.

Our community perfectly aligns with the distances for optimal neighborhood community biking – where it’s efficient and practical as a choice, given the proper infrastructure.
Our neighborhood is blessed with major destinations. We have the oldest and largest farmer’s market in Seattle on 50th & Brooklyn.

At the other end, we adjoin the Burke-Gilman, one of the most popular biking and walking trails in America. Brooklyn also is going to get a major light rail station in five years, bringing thousands of car-free people each day in the community needing options. And there’s all the 1600 bed dormitories going in at the south. On 47th, we have block after block of dense student housing.

I haven’t talked about the commercial aspect – but we have growing vacant storefronts, and shopkeeper after shopkeeper wanting to bring in more business, but we can’t increase parking without destroying the character of the community.

So, I really think we have all the conditions necessary for bicycling to be relevant to a much larger swath of our community than it currently is. We have a car-free population that’s unlike the rest of Seattle. **They don’t have a fast, safe, efficient way to get to the people and things in their community.** We can give them that option. And our neighborhood is pretty flat!
Let’s talk about what’s getting in the way of having bicycling as a safe, efficient means of transportation in our community. Because there’s a lot getting in the way. And the great part is that it shouldn’t be that hard to fix.
I know very few people who feel safe biking on our streets.

This is what a typical street looks like in the core of the University district. Not an arterial – just any street.

This street is a four-lane road that’s theoretically wide enough to accommodate FIVE FULL LANES OF TRAFFIC. There’s a stop sign at each block. The impact on bicycling (and walking!) is that cars drive at deadly speeds mid-block -- since the wide road signals to them that it’s meant for speeding).

And it’s just not efficient to bike on, because you have to start and stop every single block or break the law and put your safety at risk.

Let’s go to the consequences of our wide streets at the intersections.
As an adult pedestrian, I am often even scared to cross the street in my own neighborhood.

This is a fairly common intersection in the U-district, on Brooklyn. Pedestrians face a total of EIGHT LANE WIDTHS worth of intersection space to monitor when crossing. Let’s come back to the speeding cars. When a driver is going 30 miles an hour, and wants to make a turn, they’re NOT going to stop. The end result is that cars are often making high-speed into pedestrians with just inches of clearance.

Let alone bike, I don’t even enjoy walking in parts of the U-district very often – the same places that should be idyllic for pedestrians and cyclists.

Overall: the roads are just too wide for our community’s needs. Look at how few cars are actually using this massive space. (it’s really like that.)
Finally, in the University District core, we’re not getting the kinds of infrastructure that would make it efficient, safe, and pleasant for our own population to navigate our community.

Instead, we’re getting bike infrastructure like this. This is right in front of my apartment – it’s where we’ve placed sharrows on a high-speed arterial. For athletic people who want to bike at high speeds to and from the U-district, this is great. But these don’t help everyday students and residents get to and from the places they need to go.

Even if you’re athletic, you can’t safely carry two bags of groceries back home on one of these. A mother probably isn’t going to ride with her children to the farmer’s market on a road that looks like this. You’re not going to ride this to Ravenna Park with your girlfriend on a summer’s day.

Overall, we have two infrastructure problems:
#1: Our street designs actively encourage dangerous driving and don’t allow safe space for bicycling.
#2: We don’t have a plan that treats the U-district as a unique community with unique needs, and would enable the U-district to become the bikeable, walkable place that it has all the conditions to support.
We have enough excess street space to easily accommodate greenways and cycletracks.

We’re here to start this conversation on what **would** meet our needs.

I just want to share some thoughts, and then we can have a discussion.
We have lots of asphalt. And for the vibrancy of our businesses, we definitely need to make sure those of us who rely on cars have the space they need to drive and park.

But unlike New York, we’re not choked with car traffic. There shouldn’t be community pressure to keep us from doing the right thing. We really, truly don’t need block after block of nearly-empty super-sized travel lanes that you can’t bike on safely.

This community should be a planner’s dream. There’s so many cost-effective low-hanging fruit to repurpose this asphalt for our community’s needs.

+ Reallocate street space based on what our community needs

“One of the good legacies of Robert Moses is that, because he paved so much [of New York], we’re able to reclaim it and reuse it.”

- Janette Sadik-Khan
NYC DOT Commissioner
We need bicycle infrastructure that people feel safe using. Not “cyclists” – but everyone.

It sure looks like a street like Brooklyn is wide enough to support physically protected cycletracks without giving up traffic lanes or parking.

Finally, I just want to reiterate how cheap these are. In this picture from Washington DC, all you’re doing is restriping the road and moving the cars over. That’s it. They’re spending just $100,000 for a full mile of roadway improvement.

These wouldn’t just benefit cyclists, but also pedestrians. By narrowing the lane width, cars would not longer be incentivized to drive as if they were on a country freeway. We could also simplify the intersections further for pedestrians.

If we’re not looking a these for the U-district, we really should be.
Of course, Neighborhood Greenways – low-traffic roads that are typically a block or two away from an arterial, which are updated to be preferential for walking, biking, and for the neighbors who live in the street. In American cities that have built them – such as Vancouver BC and Portland Oregon, we know from research that residents love them, and realtors see being on a Greenway as an active selling feature of a home.

Especially for the University Park neighborhood – where we have a grid of residential streets – these could be a natural fit.
David will now walk us through a conceptual plan for what a University District low-stress bikeway network could look like.

[This map can be found at: http://neighborhoodgreenwayssea.files.wordpress.com/2011/07/north-seattle-greenways-july-20111.pdf]
Thank you!