

**Suggestions for the Waterfront Master Planning Process
for the Georgia Pacific Site and CBD links**

Develop a new train station on the property bound by Cornwall, Chestnut, Commercial, and the abandoned rail spur. Topography lends it to be designed as a truly European style station with the passenger platforms parallel to the reactivated rail spur under the terminal (See more about activating abandoned rail spur below). The station should be designed as a substantial architectural focal point in the downtown, perhaps including an architecturally significant mid-rise building. Bellingham has an opportunity to position its downtown and waterfront as a business, tourist, and residential destination that is intimately linked to the greater Puget Sound area and points further via a first class rail terminal in the city center. Immediate and attractive access to a vibrant downtown and waterfront would be a catalyst for new downtown development.

Consolidate the multimodal transit center in Fairhaven and the WTA Transit Center to the new rail station's new geographically central location on Cornwall Avenue where the abandoned rail line exists. The multi-modal transit center should not be tied to the cruise terminal which is used but only a couple days a week for the Alaska Ferry and seasonally for the San Juan Islands. Instead, the cruise terminal should be accessed by a dedicated transit route between the downtown and Fairhaven. A new location on Cornwall would be more geographically centered within the city, residential population, business community, and waterfront.

Include a light rail element to the multi-modal transit center that links downtown Bellingham to Fairhaven (including cruise terminal?). It could be light rail or electrified trolley. Light rail likely would have higher ridership than buses as it would be a novelty to locals and tourists and should be explored with further study. Consider extending it to the airport as a future leg. Also consider other potential routes based on their ability to foster redevelopment in the form of transit oriented development (development corridors) and reduce auto dependence. A potential development corridor could be along the seldom-used Squalicum Creek industrial line. Restrict industrial access to this line to evenings if the gauge of the light rail and traditional rail allows mutual use.

Move the main rail line through downtown to the abandoned rail spur at the base of South Hill. The existing main rail spur makes 2 turns through the downtown (GP property) which slows train speeds. Moving it to the abandoned spur would allow for one continuous and more gradual sweep through downtown, and would allow for higher speeds for through rail traffic. This is an option that was recently explored by Burlington Northern Railroad to reduce travel times for passenger service between Seattle and Vancouver, BC. Burlington Northern should be contacted for their findings and a mutually supportive solutions should be explored.

Begin capping the main rail spur through downtown. Rail traffic is incredibly noisy which is not conducive to commercial and residential redevelopment in the downtown.

- a. **The first phase could be the stretch between Army and Pine Streets.** In the process, replace the dangerous rail crossing at Wharf Street with a bridge over the rail line at Oak Street that leads down to the waterfront.
- b. **The second phase could be the stretch between E Street and Broadway Avenue.**
 - **Eliminate the rail crossing at F Street by raising the F Street intersections at Holly and Roeder Avenue and bridging over the rail lines.** Benefits gained would be higher train speeds, reduced rail noise with the extended cap, increased auto and pedestrian safety, and redevelopment on the 4 adjacent blocks at F & Holly Streets that could include below grade parking without the substantial cost of excavation and shoring since the intersection would be raised. Consider redevelopment of these 4 blocks with taller, narrower buildings in exchange for a unified architectural design that constitutes a gateway feature to the waterfront and downtown.
 - Future phases could cap the section adjacent to Boulevard Park and the area between Broadway and Lafayette Street and include connections into the neighborhoods.

Develop the capped rail line as a highly landscaped bike/ped corridor through downtown with new development oriented to the corridor. The corridor should be well connected with the existing trail network that leads into downtown. The level of use and park-like setting would be conducive to outdoor cafes, small boutique retail, and artist studios that could be allowed to display judged productions within the corridor, etc.

- a. Consider a plan of linking the Army-to-Pine Streets stretch with the Whatcom Creek trail and Railroad Avenue to create an attractive walking loop within the downtown. A principal element of this plan is replacing the earthen street berms across Whatcom Creek (Grand, Commercial, Young, Cornwall, Ellis, State, Meador, and James Streets) with architecturally significant bridges of distinctly different designs. Bridges are a symbol of grace, strength, and unity; and their designs should reflect that. Run the Whatcom Creek Trail under the bridges to allow for uninterrupted strolling enjoyment, visual enlightenment, and seating areas/overlooks for contemplation. This evolves into the "*Romantic Route.*"

Allow industrial uses that are generally compatible with residential and commercial uses to remain. Cap the main rail line to the greatest extent possible as described above. The GP tissue manufacturing should pose minimal impact. The presence of large trucks along with the distinct sounds adds a dramatic affect to the waterfront atmosphere. Consider restricting operating hours for more intense uses to minimize evening and overnight impacts. Regulation of industrial and downtown lighting should be minimal as it creates a dramatic wash of lighting effects within residential spaces and also to look out at.

Develop the entire GP shoreline as a pedestrian and recreation friendly open space corridor. This recreational corridor would complement the alternative transportation corridor that would cap the rail line further inland, creating a second walking loop. The focus here should be tourism and multiple waterfront recreation and support activities. There should generally be a minimum 60-100' wide corridor provided between buildings and the waterline that expands into plazas/parks and reduces in certain circumstances where a building's design and use would directly correspond to a waterfront use or reinforce the architectural identity of the waterfront/Bellingham. Nevertheless, through access along the waterfront shoreline should not be interrupted. Include:

- Piers, docks, overlooks, water taxi, and other fingers into the water for watercraft access, fishing, viewing, and other interactive activities,
- Occasional small buildings in limited defined near or over water locations for dining, gathering, or small public events.
- Signage with historic pictures describing the site or area history,
- Signage with pictures/diagrams describing the shoreline ecosystem,
- Larger scale projects such as an aquarium, historic ship converted to a museum, maritime museum in a building, convention center, hotels, etc.

Redevelop the waterfront with a high-density mix of business, residential, tourism, and waterfront open space uses. More and more land in the urban fringes of Bellingham is being developed with large lots and McMansions, many owners of which commute to jobs down south in Everett and Seattle. Downtown Bellingham could include high-end commuter residential uses that have easy access to high paying jobs to the south via an enhanced and centralized rail and train station, yet spend their incomes in Bellingham where the quality of life is exceptional and cost of living is generally cheaper. New businesses in downtown Bellingham would likewise be easily accessed by tourists and workers living elsewhere via the enhanced rail connection. See article excerpt at bottom of page.

Building height should be varied to maximize solar access. Waterfront properties largely face the northwest so "waterfront" buildings should be limited in height to maximize solar access to the interior blocks. The height limit within 300' of the shoreline should be 60', next 300' should be 90', and no height limit generally within the CBD as currently allowed. Modify the height proposal where it interfaces with residential areas. Impose a 60' height limit within 10' of the capped rail/pedestrian corridor and the "Diagonal Boulevard" described below. Exceptions to the height limits should be considered for buildings that demonstrate a high degree of architectural excellence and contribute to a strong identity for the waterfront/Bellingham.

Maintain a typical downtown street "grid" system that is highly conducive to pedestrian traffic rather than an auto oriented business park setting. Streets should be platted at 80' wide to provide ample light, air, and view corridors to the bay. Sidewalks should be a minimum of 14' wide. Blocks should be highly walkable and short, generally 200' per side similar to Portland, Oregon

and Bellingham's "Old Town" blocks. Modify the grid where it incorporates historic buildings to be preserved.

An exception within the grid street system could be a wide (100-120') diagonal pedestrian boulevard that lines up with the sunset at the spring (vernal) equinox and aligns between the waterfront and the new train station. Due to the elevation gain between the train station and waterfront, the boulevard could be designed as a series of steps and plazas. The boulevard, a-la Spanish Steps, becomes symbolic for residents and tourists alike as a place to be to celebrate the right of passage into spring and summer. Further validate this corridor by enhancing the opposite terminal view into the train station with a lit colored glass dome or other significant architectural feature that becomes a spectacular downtown landmark after sunset. Take into consideration whether the eastern view along this boulevard could terminate, or be slightly offset from Mt. Baker, and impose height restrictions on view corridor properties to protect this view.

Extend additional road links into the waterfront at Laurel, Ivy, and Oak Streets to provide multiple auto access points and distribute auto trips over a larger street grid instead of concentrating traffic into just a limited few corridors. **These links enable the creation of abundant below grade parking** on the resultant blocks without the substantial cost of excavation and shoring since these street links would be largely above existing grade where they slope between the uplands along State Street down to the level lands around Cornwall Avenue.

ATTACHMENT

International

Data: International Union of Railways

http://www.businessweek.com/bwdaily/dnflash/oct2002/nf20021031_8250.htm

A Magic Cure for Flight Delays and Traffic Jams?!

European business travelers are getting some welcome relief from chronic headaches caused by the region's overcrowded airspace and congested roads. No, they haven't found a magic cure for flight delays and traffic jams. But train travel across the Continent is getting faster, more luxurious, and more practical for business travelers, thanks to a dramatic expansion of the region's high-speed rail system.

Over the next eight years, European governments are set to install 2,046 miles (3,300 kilometers) of new high-speed track, more than doubling the current network. At the same time, Europe's railways are introducing a new generation of trains that reach top speeds of 217 miles per hour (350 kilometers per hour), up from about 186 mph (300 kph) now. "In more and more places, the train is now faster than taking a plane," says Johannes Ludewig, executive director of the Brussels-based Community of European Railways.

Fast trains are increasingly grabbing market share from Europe's airlines, as rail travel time between major cities shrink to three hours or less. That's a critical figure because air passengers, even on short-hop flights, usually spend at least three hours in transit, counting ground transportation and airport formalities. Train passengers, by contrast, travel directly from city center to city center, and most Western European destinations have no check-in formalities. And because trains aren't subject to air-traffic problems and weather-related delays, their on-time performance is much better than that of the airlines.

Speed and relatively low prices are only part of the trains' appeal. The newer ones also offer amenities such as on-board Internet connections, video and DVD rentals, and children's play areas. And unlike air travelers, train passengers are free to use their cell phones and laptops, or stand up and stretch their legs whenever they want.

Here are the major European high-speed rail projects scheduled for completion in the next five years:

Spain: Madrid to Barcelona, first segment opens late this year, completion 2004. Cordoba to Malaga, 2006. Madrid to Valencia, 2007

Italy: Rome to Naples, 2004. Milan to Bologna and Florence to Bologna, 2006

Benelux: Amsterdam to Antwerp, Belgium, 2005

France: Paris to Strasbourg, 2007

Britain: Completion of track improvements on cross-Channel Eurostar line, 2007