

Crime & Safety Technical Memorandum

Third Avenue Transit Corridor Improvement Project

Prepared for:
Seattle Department of Transportation
King County Metro Transit
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Executive Summary

Third Avenue is the most heavily traveled transit corridor in the Seattle metropolitan area. It spans from South Jackson Street in Pioneer Square to Denny Way in Belltown, spanning Downtown Seattle and serving the City's bustling Business District and Retail Core. Through the future capital improvements planned for the Third Avenue Transit Corridor, the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) and King County Metro Transit (METRO) will strive to create a beautiful, functional, safe, and secure transportation corridor in an urban setting.

SDOT and METRO recognize the importance of crime reduction to this effort and have sponsored a holistic evaluation of how Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) techniques can further the project's goals. CPTED is an approach to planning and urban design that promotes the deterrence of crime by using physical assessment tools to analyze the vulnerability of a specific site to criminal activity and provide recommendations for adjustments to the built environment. CPTED includes three main principles:

Natural Surveillance

This principle refers to characteristics of a site that afford site users the ability to see and be seen. "Natural" indicates that the ability to see well is inherent in the environment and is a feature of the normal use of the space. An important component of natural surveillance is "capable guardianship" where users feel a sense of ownership of the space.

The sheer volume of foot and bus traffic on Third Avenue can make this corridor safe and secure. The criminal element that exists on the corridor today can be displaced by empowering legitimate users and promoting a greater sense of guardianship.

1

Access Control

This principle refers to strategies that guide people through a space and clarify which parts of the space are allowed to be used. Access control must match the intended uses of the space and be directed towards decreasing criminal accessibility, particularly into areas with low visibility.

Third Avenue is very accessible, but its overwhelming sensory environment promotes disengagement by users who feel little sense of ownership. Criminals use the disarray and anonymity to their advantage. Better wayfinding and organization of users and infrastructure can help to alleviate confusion and reduce the opportunity for crime and incivilities.

2

Territorial Definition

All spaces should declare clearly what it is designed or intended to do. Defining space through recognizable patterns that reflect the desired use helps to reveal unwanted or abnormal uses of the place. Clear territorial definition includes orderly transition through use zones, properly designated uses, appropriate signage, and empowering the capable guardians of the site.

Identifying legitimate and illegitimate users is much easier to do in a well-defined space. Third Avenue business owners, residents, transit riders, and downtown patrons will protect territory that they feel a sense of ownership toward.

3

These three principles lay the groundwork for a planning and design approach that deters crime by changing use and user patterns and behaviors. They can create a context in which committing a crime unseen would be unlikely.

By implementing strategies for capital improvements that conform to the CPTED principles recommended in this report, crime on the Third Avenue Transit Corridor can be reduced. By increasing the perceived sense of security, a more pleasant user experience along the Third Avenue Transit Corridor can be promoted. This will further the project's goal of making "...Third Avenue a great street for transit, businesses, residents, and visitors—an inviting, accommodating, safe, and attractive place where people want to be."

This CPTED evaluation of the Third Avenue Transit Corridor revealed that a significant challenge to revitalizing this corridor is the existence of petty crime hot spots that fuel a sense of insecurity throughout the entire corridor. This insecurity manifests itself in several ways that negatively impact the reputation and maintenance of the corridor, such as disengagement from residents and businesses, an unpleasant transit user experience, and the deterioration of the physical infrastructure of the corridor. While these crime hot spots are not pervasive, they negatively affect the corridor as a whole and result in an impression that Third Avenue is an unsafe and unwelcoming place.

The following section details the project team's recommended improvements.

Recommendations

Natural Surveillance

Lighting

Existing Conditions:

Lighting in the corridor is accomplished using high-pressure sodium (HPS) vapor lamps with globe fixtures that are energy inefficient, and create light trespass and light pollution.

The quality of the yellow light does not create a positive experience. Additionally, the glare and shadow qualities of the lighting source and luminaires do not promote facial recognition of strangers.



Recommendation:

Develop a new lighting template that replaces HPS vapor lamps with LED lighting and includes fixtures that reduce light trespass and pollution.

Ensure that all areas intended for legitimate use, including pathways, are well lit.



Bus Shelters

Existing Conditions:

The standard METRO bus shelters (seen at the Pike Street, Union Street, and Marion Street intersections) are not transparent, provide hiding spaces, and make patrol by police and security more difficult.

In addition, benches within some shelters enable loitering. The police officers interviewed by the project team confirmed these observations. New bus shelters that exist in other places throughout the city better promote visibility and natural surveillance.



Recommendation:

Develop a transit shelter that avoids any obstructions to visual sight lines or pedestrian circulation patterns, similar to the new First Hill Streetcar shelters.



Corridor Seating

Existing Conditions:

Presently many different types of benches are used along Third Avenue. Un-segmented benches promote loitering because they allow for lying or sleeping behavior and lack the boundary definition that would encourage use by multiple people.



Recommendation:

Replace existing benches with segmented benches or benches with intermittent rails.



Recommendation:

At high-traffic locations, remove benches completely and implement leaning rails. These are already successfully used at several bus zones on the corridor, including Union Street.

Leaning rails provide the ability to lean and rest, while protecting building facades. However, they also encourage waiting transit passengers to linger and effectively narrow the available walking corridor.



Develop a specific leaning rail standard and guideline that is adaptable for installation on the sidewalk or other parts of the public right-of-way that does not touch or interfere with the private sector architecture or other urban amenities.

Building Awnings

Existing Conditions:

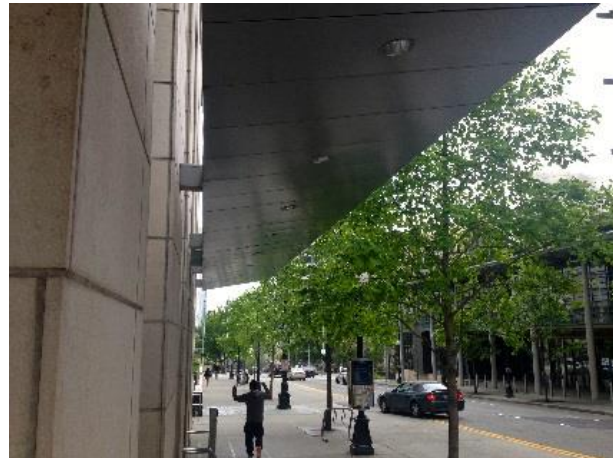
Building awnings serve different purposes throughout the corridor. In some areas with significant “merchant zone” activity, awnings provide shelter for patrons conducting business (i.e. sidewalk cafes, storefront promotional areas, etc.). Because they have a legitimate purpose for lingering under the awnings, these patrons serve as responsible guardians for the public realm.

Most of the awnings in the Business District connect to large office complexes with no retail frontage. These awnings serve primarily to shelter pedestrians from the elements as they walk along the street or wait for transit. This is a much more transient type of activity that does not encourage responsible guardianship the same way retail business does.



Recommendation:

Develop a new set of guidelines for building awnings which differentiates awnings meant to shelter retail business patrons from those meant to shelter pedestrians and waiting transit passengers. Awnings specific to the latter group should follow a different set of design guidelines to enhance the natural surveillance abilities of people in motion. Ideally, they should be translucent to let in as much daylight as possible, and have underlighting fixtures to illuminate the area underneath the awning at night.



Building awnings should be designed with some thought to both the available sidewalk width and proposed sidewalk use. If a sidewalk is too narrow to facilitate a waiting area in addition to a walking corridor, the awning should be disconnected from the building in a way that allows stormwater to stream down the building façade to discourage people from leaning against the building.

Traffic & Transit Signage

Existing Conditions:

A variety of different signage for traffic and transit is found throughout the corridor. The inconsistency creates confusion regarding the space's intended and legitimate usages, and does not aid in wayfinding.

Additionally, some signage is difficult to see or is obscured.



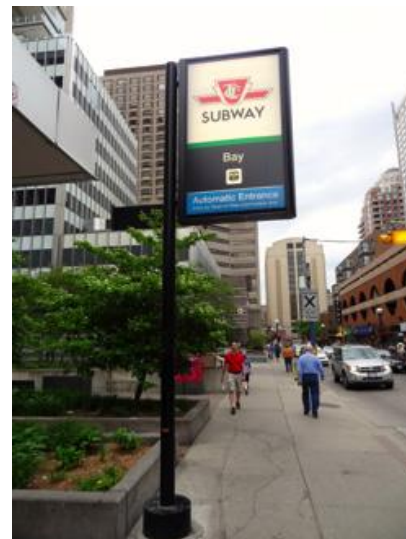
Recommendation:

Develop a street template for uniform signage throughout the corridor for all transportation-critical infrastructure such as street signs, bus stops, rules of conduct, and tunnel entrances. This could be as simple as updating corridor signage to meet MUTCD standards.

The template should include providing uniform street sign placements visible to all users of the corridor. For example, motorists cannot see street names embedded in the concrete sidewalk; they need signs on signposts as well.

Conduct a visibility review with SDOT Urban Forestry to identify locations throughout the corridor where tree overgrowth has reduced visibility of traffic and transit signage. Schedule regular maintenance to coincide with the growing season.

Ensure that all traffic and transit signs are well-lit at night and visible from a distance. Tunnel station entrances should have 270-degree visibility from the street.



Rule Enforcement Signage

Existing Conditions:

Many rules for appropriate conduct are posted throughout the corridor. However, they suffer from several problems.

While a complete list of transit rules are clearly posted in buses, they are seldom seen in bus shelters. When they do appear in shelters, they are most often found in an abbreviated form and inconspicuous location that doesn't fully convey their importance.

Perhaps more importantly, many posted rules are simply not enforced and thus ignored by transit passengers. This has the effect of delegitimizing the rules. Users become disengaged with the idea of responsible guardianship as they see others disregard the rules with no consequence.



Recommendation:

Establish and post rules of conduct consistently throughout the corridor.

Post rules on transit shelters or at bus zones to alert riders prior to boarding the bus.

Post rules for public areas at eye level and with maximum visibility. Clearly identify who the owner of the space is (for example, SDOT or METRO) and provide contact information for reporting rule violation.

Landscaping

2

Existing Conditions:

Along the corridor landscaping was observed to obstruct visibility, impeding natural surveillance and creating confusion regarding the correct pathway.

**Recommendation:**

Develop a landscape template for pruning trees, ground cover, plants, screening, dog rocks, and watering and care of plants. The template should also ensure that plants do not obstruct visibility and direct users on the correct pathway.



Existing Conditions:

Many crosswalks along Third Avenue are deteriorating and unclear

**Recommendation:**

Restripe and refresh all crosswalks throughout the corridor.

If possible, create a new crosswalk template that includes sounds, lights, and graphics. Pedestrians will interpret this as an enhanced standard of care for their safety and user experience. Ensure it is applied consistently throughout the corridor to promote adherence to crossing at designated locations.



Existing Conditions:

Throughout the corridor there are many alleyways that are mostly obscured from view, providing hiding places.

**Recommendation:**

Work with building owners to install access barriers on all private alleyways, stairways, and alcoves using screens, railings, fencing, and posted notices.

Art Template

Existing Conditions:

Third Avenue contains a myriad of blank walls and building facades that contribute to the perceived sense of insecurity along the corridor.



Recommendation:

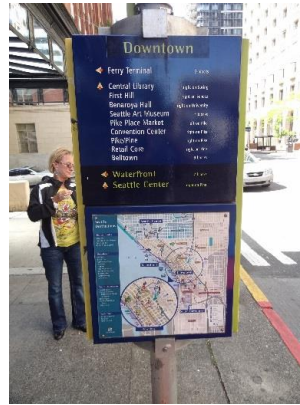
Use local artists to contribute to wall murals to increase local ownership and territoriality. Consider graffiti artists but discourage “tagging”. Examples are already present in Pioneer Square.



Existing Conditions:

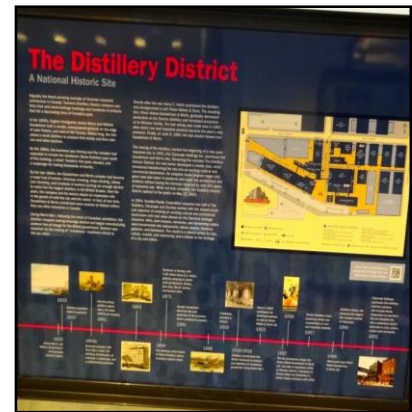
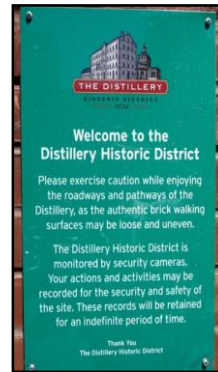
Throughout much of the corridor, there is a clear lack of wayfinding materials.

In other parts, too many different wayfinding concepts are employed.

**Recommendation:**

Develop a single, consistent wayfinding template that contains user-friendly maps and diagrams.

This does not necessarily need to be a brand new template. The most cost-effective method would be to select the best wayfinding template currently in use in Downtown Seattle and standardize around it. Whichever template is selected should be updated to reflect infrastructural changes. Other wayfinding systems should be removed and replaced with the standard one.



Include area history to educate and excite visitors; this can be as simple as a plaque explaining the history of a specific edifice.

Litter & Recycling

Existing Conditions:

Litter receptacles and recycling bins are often next to the curbs, on corners, or near bus stops.

Depending on their placement, these amenities can conflict with the desired uses of the space available to waiting transit passengers. In the most extreme cases, poor trash can placement has led pedestrians to dart around them and into the traveled way, resulting in a number of serious accidents.



Recommendation:

Establish a template for the consistent placement of trash cans. Move trash cans away from corners and outside of the transit zones to decrease interference with waiting transit passengers.



Promote Responsible Guardianship

General Recommendation:

Create spaces in the corridor to support capable guardianship by a variety of users in the corridor. This can include features for residents and visitors that provide a reason to return to Third Avenue and feel a renewed sense of ownership, such as:



- Dog stations, with refuse bags, disposal stations, and a designated, thoughtfully design area for dogs to relieve themselves.
- Programming space for entertainment, such as buskers, and an activation program to ensure regularly performances/use of the space.
- Amenities attractive to groups including but not exclusive to transit, such as a water bottle filling station, phone charging area, or areas for food trucks.

Next Step

Completion of the Third Avenue Transit Corridor's Preliminary Urban Design Corridor Concept is slated for late September 2014. At that time, the project team will perform a review of the resulting corridor plans pursuant to CPTED principles and the recommendations listed in this technical memo.