

## SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER

[http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/transportation/307376\\_viaduct14.html](http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/transportation/307376_viaduct14.html)

### Viaduct voters say no -- twice

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**By ANGELA GALLOWAY AND LARRY LANGE**

P-I REPORTER

And the winner is: none of the above.

Seattleites cast a ballot for further political uncertainty Tuesday as voters overwhelmingly rejected both proposals for replacing the Alaskan Way Viaduct, according to early returns.

"The voters answered two questions and what they said with the answer to both questions is 'we don't want a freeway along our waterfront.' They want better answers," said Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels, speaking at a party supporting his tunnel proposal Tuesday night

With nearly 30 percent of registered Seattle voters' ballots counted, about 70 percent turned down a proposal to replace the viaduct with a tunnel and more than 55 percent rejected another elevated roadway.

The all-mail election, which was not binding or even considered a major factor in the viaduct's future, hands back to politicians the thorny, long-stymied debate over how to replace the earthquake-damaged, 54-year-old double-decker highway.

State and city political leaders plan to hold a joint press conference Wednesday morning to discuss where they'll go from here. Meanwhile, City Councilman Peter Steinbrueck already has a new plan in the works for a no-highway proposal.

But, much like Seattle's morning commute, don't expect a breakthrough anytime soon in the political gridlock between city and state, observers say.

The ballot asked voters separately what they thought of the state's proposal to build a new \$2.8 billion elevated highway, which Gov. Christine Gregoire supports; and a \$3.4 billion four-lane tunneled highway pushed by Nickels.

Voters weren't asked to choose between the two options. Nor were they given a third alternative -- one increasingly prominent in politics, yet almost entirely undefined on paper -- tear down the viaduct and get by with enhanced transit and existing streets.

Pundits predict politicians will now retreat from the headlines temporarily -- meeting privately, if at all, until the political heat cools.

That doesn't include Steinbrueck. He said Tuesday that if voters soundly rejected the tunnel he would propose a city ordinance Wednesday to direct the city to begin working on a surface alternative.

The proposal would free up \$8 million, essentially prohibiting that money from being spent for another alternative, and direct the city's transportation department to develop such a plan, he said.

Steinbrueck said he'd pursue his plan regardless of what voters say about the rebuild proposal. "As far as I'm concerned it doesn't matter what happens with the rebuild," Steinbrueck said. "The electeds have already rejected (that)."

Deputy Mayor Tim Ceis said the Nickels administration, too, wanted to further examine the surface option if voters shot down both ballot measures. Nickels has already said that's his second choice.

If both lose, as Ceis predicted, "we're going to hear what the voters have told us, which is, 'You don't have the right solution yet, bring us back to another solution.'"

"Some of it is frustration that they're being asked at all," Ceis said. "Some of it is frustration over us getting through a process without a definitive decision. And some of it is people saying 'enough of freeways on the waterfront.' A lot of anger and frustration about freeways dividing our city has come out again."

Gregoire has rejected the no-build alternative because of its potential to snarl traffic and drive up congestion on Interstate 5. Ceis, however, said the mayor will wait and see what the governor says once the ballots are counted.

Pro-rebuild campaigners, out-financed by more than 10-to-1 by their opponents, were fully confident Tuesday they'd defeat the tunnel proposal. Co-chair Gene Hoglund predicted voters would narrowly approve a new aerial viaduct "because of all the advertising against it."

"Hopefully, the state will support the people," Hoglund said of the uncertain aftermath. "I think they're waiting in Olympia to hear what happens."

Viaduct backers "will reorganize and regenerate themselves if Nickels says he wants it torn down and put all the traffic on the surface," Hoglund said.

But many tunnel supporters, such as environmental groups, are likely to turn their energy now to helping make a surface alternative a reality.

The tunnel camp on Tuesday was optimistic they had at least helped kill the rebuild proposal.

"We're all hopeful it's going to come together and (we will) figure out where we go from here, whatever the results," said Kelly Evans, who managed the anti-elevated and pro-tunnel campaigns. "I'm sure it's not over after tonight but we'll see where it goes."

Some observers suggest the tunnel will be the foundation of any deal -- but it will first be further scaled back.

Others suggest politicians will agree to punt: simply pay billions to temporarily repair the existing viaduct and leave it to another generation of elected officials to negotiate. The state has said that would cost \$2.3 billion and last about 25 years. But one group of engineers contends it could be done for less.

Art Skolnik, spokesman for a group advocating repair of the viaduct, predicted the election will push the state in his direction.

"The clock has run out," he said. "There's only thing that's a rush, and that's eliminating the hazard on this (viaduct). Rushing a decision on Seattle's waterfront, you can't do."

Yesterday's vote was of historic proportions, said Nickels' office. Nickels views the city's central waterfront as "a natural asset and one that we really need to embrace, to help shape the future of our city and help shape the growth in our city," spokesman Marty McOmber said.

Nickels came to favor a tunnel option for the viaduct after he was first elected mayor and has been an unbridled campaigner for it.

McOmber wouldn't make any predictions about the voting outcome or what the aftermath would be like. "Hopefully with this vote people will give a direction on what they want to see," he said.

If not? McOmber wouldn't speculate.

"It does look like it's going to be pretty unparalleled turnout for a special election," McOmber said, comparing the advisory ballot to the 1971 vote on preserving the Pike Place Market, in which 129,000 residents cast ballots. "I wouldn't be surprised if the turnout (on the viaduct) surpasses that."

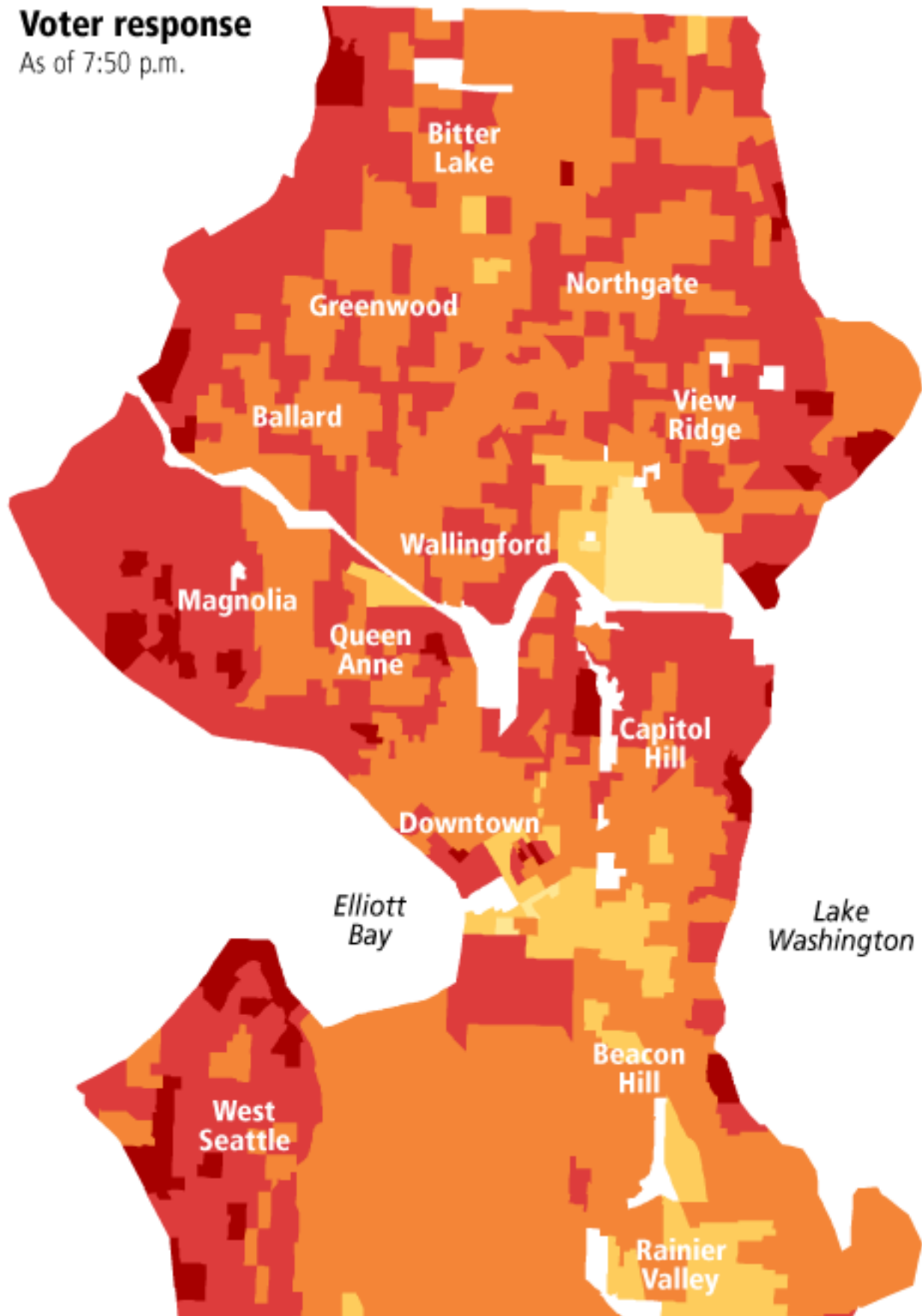
"It's been obvious this has been an issue people have paid attention to and are generally engaged in," McOmber said. "And it's been a very vigorous civic debate."

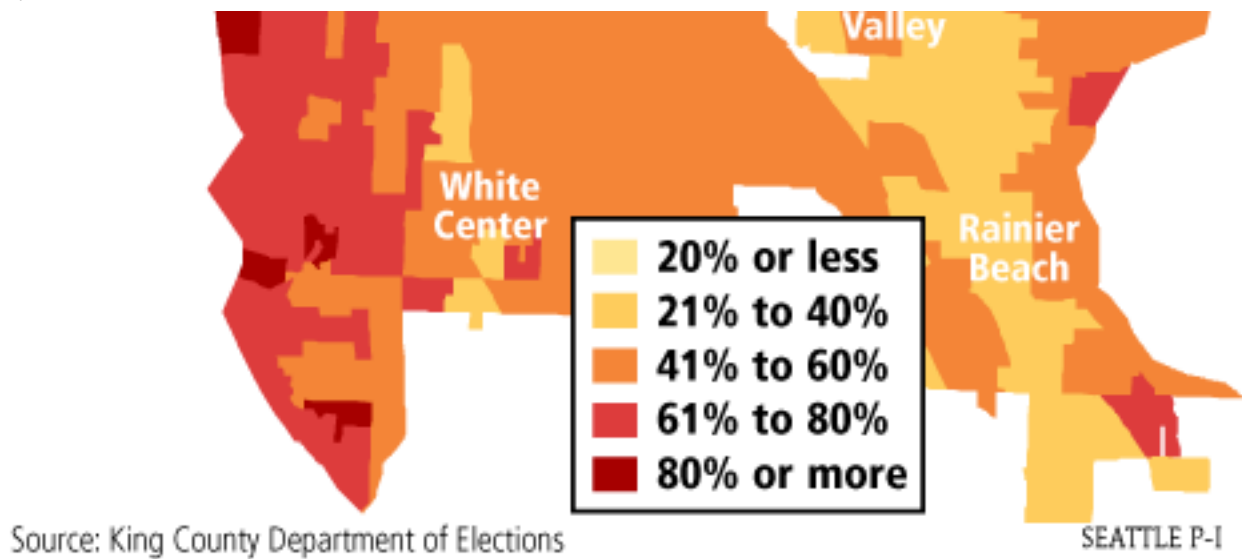
# BALLOTS CAST

Precincts in West Seattle, Capitol Hill and Magnolia had some of the heaviest turnouts in the Alaskan Way Viaduct advisory vote.

## Voter response

As of 7:50 p.m.





## WHAT THEY'RE SAYING

- **Seattle Deputy Mayor Tim Ceis:** If voters opt for a new viaduct "we're not going to stand in the way of it." If a tunnel wins, "we'll pursue it."
- **Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels, speaking at a pro-tunnel party at The Edgewater Inn:** "It's the most exciting night at The Edgewater since The Beatles stayed here. The voters answered two questions and what they said with the answer to both questions is 'we don't want a freeway along our waterfront.' They want better answers."

He compared this vote to the 1970s vote to save Pike Place Market.

"We're going to find that common ground. We're going to put aside the old answers and find some new answers. And we're going to make this a great 21st century city."

- **City Councilman Peter Steinbreuck, who has emerged as a champion of the surface street replacement option, was also at The Edgewater:**

"I can't say that the voters have the precise answer. That's what they look to electeds for. I think the voters are dissatisfied with the status quo. Clearly, with both of these options. I'm very excited, I think it's a new day."

- **Gene Hoglund, No Tunnel Alliance co-chair:** "Hopefully, the state will support the people."
- **Cary Moon, co-founder of the Peoples Waterfront Coalition, chief advocate of the surface-and-transit option:** "We're going to keep fighting. We feel like you can't keep a good idea down."
- **Art Skolnik, spokesman for a group advocating repair of the viaduct:** "The clock has run out."

There's only one thing that's a rush, and that's eliminating the hazard on this (viaduct). Rushing a decision on Seattle's waterfront, you can't do. I haven't seen such polarization since the battle over Fort Lawton, over what should be preserved and what should be torn down. That fight loomed for decades."

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