

Business

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Letters to the Editor: Viaduct idea an innovative compromise

It was with great enthusiasm that I read your front page article (“Viaduct vision calls for open tunnel with lids,” Dec. 23, 2008). The vision of an “open tunnel” truly appeals. I think it is the best proposal that has been put forward. It gives the benefits of waterfront access without the higher costs and risks of a dug underground tunnel.

I grew up in Chicago, living near the lake on that city's south side. The entire waterfront from the Loop — as the downtown is known — south is park and it “makes” the city. Similarly I lived in San Francisco before and after the 1989 earthquake and the qualitative difference in that city's livability and the vibrancy of its waterfront after the Embarcadero Freeway was removed provides a stark example of what Seattle stands to gain by viewing the transit needs of the SR99 corridor in a holistic context that takes the city's natural, stunning setting into full consideration. To me, this open tunnel proposal shows an innovative compromise that strikes an appropriate balance.

The design engineering manager you quoted in your article said that the unlidded sections of tunnel would be noisy. But the noise could be easily mitigated by shaping the walls. This is done, for example, on Germany's autobahn. Having concave walls will direct the sound back toward the roadway. The result would certainly be much quieter than the alternative proposals.

I do hope you follow up on this subject. I think the outcome of this process will have a profound impact on Seattle for years to come.

Ezra Epstein

Seattle

Light weight soils could keep costs down

(Regarding comments that the open tunnel viaduct option would be expensive because the weight of wet soil would require very strong lid supports). Such short-sighted view points are why the viaduct replacement is such a large issue. Light weight soils have been in use on roof gardens for years.

The tunnel structure itself could be designed to be prefabricated off-site for a considerable cost savings.

No wonder the state economy is in the dumps. One must quit thinking traditionally, about job security, and get out of the box.

Thom Vetter

