



Seattle Neighborhood Greenways

safe healthy streets for all SeattleGreenways.org @SNGreenways

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“Adaptive” Signals Are Destroying Seattle’s Urban Fabric

Two points in Seattle history have been hugely destructive to the urban fabric in our city center: The first was Robert Moses inspired era where I-5 was blasted through neighborhoods, sidewalks were narrowed, streetcars were ripped out, and streets were remade to serve mainly as conduits to the new vision of highway fueled suburban life. **The second, is happening right now** but is happening quietly and with less visible means.



“Adaptive” signals, seen here in the image above at Queen Anne Ave and W Mercer St, prevent people from walking even when cars going in the same direction have a green light. They also prioritize signal length in the direction with the most car traffic, regardless of how many people are waiting to walk across the street in the other direction. They also require people walking to push a button to be given permission to cross rather than automatically getting a walk light as is standard in urban centers around the world. In summary, as Councilmember Mike O’Brien has said “Until that technology is evolved, really **what [adaptive signals do] is maximize automobile throughput at the expense of pedestrians.**”

The current technology is **antithetical to the goals our city espouses** time and time again: We want to craft a city where families, visitors, and all of us feel welcome to live, work, and play in our city center. We want a city that is accessible to people of all ages and abilities. We want a city that creates a quality built environment that prioritizes transportation options that benefit our health, climate, local economy, and wellbeing. And these aren’t just stated goals, people are

voting with their feet, because “walkability” is [the #1 reason](#) people choose to live in central Seattle neighborhoods (according to data for the Puget Sound Regional Council).

Yet, **what we are seeing is a return to a philosophy that values the movement of vehicles over everything else**, but disguised this time with a more high tech veneer. This is simply a new way to turn our city’s urban fabric, our core streets that should be fantastic places for people and civic life, into little more than highway queuing space for vehicles.

It doesn’t have to be this way. We can be a city with streets and signals that prioritize people. We should wait until this technology matures to a point that it is able to reflect our city’s shared goals and values. If we don’t, we risk expending tens of millions of dollars on technology that locks our streets into serving as little more than highway queuing space.

- **Long term goal:** Signals that prioritize people, not just vehicles.
- **Short term objective:** End the spread of adaptive signals until they can be made to prioritize people walking, biking and taking transit.
- **Opportunity:** Use the fall 2018 budget process to put a proviso on the ITS budget until the short term objective can be met.
- **Lead:** Seattle Neighborhood Greenways
- **Current Allies:** 350 Seattle, 500 Women Scientists, Cascade Bicycle Club, Feet First, Seattle Pedestrian Advisory Board, Seattle Subway, Seattle Transit Blog, Sierra Club, Transit Riders Union, the Uptown Alliance, the Urbanist.

How Adaptive Signals Reduce Pedestrian Mobility

