



SEATTLE CITY COUNCIL | DISTRICT 4

COUNCILMEMBER ALEX PEDERSEN

April 23, 2020

David G. Jones, City Auditor
Office of City Auditor
700 Fifth Avenue, Suite 2410
Seattle, WA 98104

Re: request for audit assessing physical conditions and maintenance investments for Seattle bridges

Dear Auditor Jones:

The purpose of this letter is to request, as chair of the City Council's Transportation and Utilities Committee, that the [Office of City Auditor](#) complete an audit report to assess the physical conditions and maintenance investments for the major bridges owned by the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) with the scope of work proposed below.

In a city surrounded by multiple waterways, bridges are a critical component of Seattle's infrastructure for its residents and local economy and vital for transit, freight, and other uses. Bridges require relatively large investments to build and maintain to ensure they remain safe for their expected useful life. The rapid deterioration of the West Seattle Bridge underscores the need for City officials and the general public to have a clear, thorough, and independent understanding of the condition of major bridges throughout Seattle, including preventative maintenance investments and practices.

This requested report is intended to provide the basic oversight we believe the general public expects, especially in light of the unfortunate physical deterioration and closure of the West Seattle Bridge. We appreciate SDOT's recent transparency, responsiveness, and proactive sharing of information regarding the West Seattle Bridge. We want SDOT to continue its focus on the immediate needs of the West Seattle Bridge and can, therefore, be flexible on the final completion date(s) for this more formal review of information regarding the other bridges. We would, however, like the Auditor to provide a brief interim summary of the maintenance investments on bridges by mid-September to inform the City Council's fall budget process.

Proposed Scope Limitations and Objectives:

- According to the City of Seattle's adopted 2020 operating budget (p. 411) and SDOT's 2019 Capital Roadway and Structures report (page 19), there are 124 bridges owned and operated by the City of Seattle. The City Auditor's report will focus on SDOT's bridge maintenance program for the major bridges in the City's portfolio and may discuss other non-bridge assets. While SDOT already obtains and monitors much of this underlying information on our City's bridges and the federal government and state government also provide important oversight, I would like your office to methodically gather, summarize, and analyze that information for use by the City Council. It should include the following focus on assessing conditions and quantifying maintenance:

I. SDOT Preventive Maintenance on Major Bridges

- a. How much money does SDOT budget for bridge preventive maintenance?
- b. How much of this money has been spent on bridge maintenance?
- c. To what extent have expenditures on preventive maintenance aligned with national best practices?

II. SDOT Condition Assessments of Major Bridges

- a. What measures and practices does SDOT use to assess the condition of Seattle's major bridges?
- b. How have the conditions of Seattle's major bridges changed over time, and which bridges are at highest risk of failure?
- c. To what extent do the conditions of Seattle's major bridges compare to similar jurisdictions?

- In addition to summarizing key information on all major bridges, the report should include a deeper analysis of a sampling of major bridges across our city including, but not limited to, the Ballard Bridge, Magnolia Bridge, Montlake Bridge, University Bridge, and West Seattle Bridge.
- The Auditor will discuss the final scope with SDOT, which could include a description of other major non-bridge infrastructure assets owned by the City to provide context for SDOT's broader asset management portfolio.

Please contact my office with any questions about this request.

Thank you.

Regards,



Alex Pedersen

City Councilmember and Chair of the Transportation & Utilities Committee

cc:

City Council President Lorena González and Seattle City Councilmembers,
City Council Central Staff Director Kirstan Arestad,
SDOT Director Sam Zimbabwe,
Budget Director Ben Noble