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Alaskan Way Viaduct: A third way

Monday, September 18, 2006

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Before making a profound public policy decision, it's valuable to look at it from a fresh perspective. Such a perspective was offered last week with a report that bolsters the argument that neither of the two contending proposals for the Alaskan Way Viaduct may be in Seattle's best long-term interests.

To be fair, the proffered perspective comes courtesy of two organizations with an alternative view of what urban transportation should look like. So it may come as no surprise that a new multilane thoroughfare, whether elevated or running through a tunnel along the central waterfront, doesn't fit that view. The study, conducted for the Congress for the New Urbanism and the Center for Neighborhood Technology (both support removal of urban highways) disagrees with the state's estimates of local street capacity, transit potential and the severity of traffic congestion without the viaduct.

"We don't think the capacity is there," said a state spokesman, "especially when you consider our design year of 2030"

2030? Who knows what the next 24 years could bring, in expanded transit, rising sea levels, gas prices, vehicle technology? Is the traditional approach of providing for increasing auto capacity the right basis for spending billions of public dollars and, more important, for designing Seattle's next 100 years?

As frustrating as it may be for the powers that be, forcing Seattle to look at the question from a different perspective is healthy and welcome.

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