

Dear Seattle Department of Transportation:

First, it might be helpful to reset on physical barriers as a social construct and how SDOT's dangerous barrier here has severely traumatized and upset our community at the **Refugee & Immigrant Family Center (RIFC)**.

Historically, barriers have been used to exclude, isolate, divide, discriminate against, project power over, subjugate, render less than status to, punish, segregate, humiliate/embarrass, harass, degrade, and so much more. More recently, the Trump administration sought to build an enormous wall on the southern border with Mexico – presumably, to exclude certain individuals deemed “undesirable” in the name of national security.

As you can imagine, many refugee and immigrant members of our RIFC community have overcome significant personal challenges to arrive safely in this country. Some have literally sacrificed everything along the way for the opportunity to pursue a better life in America for their families. Others have faced significant trauma during their perilous journeys, including by navigating divisive structures and barriers designed to exclude.

That is why SDOT's ill-advised concrete barrier placed directly in front of RIFC (despite our strong feedback against) has only re-traumatized many members of the RIFC community. It is triggering for many of our members. However, this distress is totally unavoidable. We hope that you are able to carefully reflect on your actions/inactions here. We also hope you now have a better understanding of the terrible optics and impact of SDOT's misguided decision to put a barrier directly in front of RIFC, particularly when there appears to be no other similar barriers for at least a mile in either direction along Delridge.

In addition, your responses to our repeated pushback (here and other forums) suggests that there is some lingering confusion about the specific role of communities and government bureaucracies such as SDOT in determining how best to keep communities “safe”. ***For clarity, we don't need a secretive “design team” to impose their errant decisions on us in the name of “public safety”. Nor do we need a benevolent king to do the same. I have dedicated the last 5+ years of my life to help bring about lasting reform to our public safety systems and structures across our region. Through this work, I've learned that it's best when we (the community) tell governments how they can best keep us safe, not the other way around as SDOT is seeking to do here.***

Sadly, note that RIFC's Director Luz Casio (cc'd here) let me know recently that she still wants the unsafe barrier removed immediately. Same for its sister site (SWEL) further north on Delridge. She also reports that she continues to be disappointed with SDOT's response to the strong community feedback in favor of removing the barrier. I share her concern. We've been left out of SDOT's deficient design/ planning processes for too long, despite being most impacted by its decisions. That ends now; we will not tolerate it any longer.

Our strict position is that the severe lack of outreach and feedback on this highly unique and bizarre project feature BEFORE the decision was made and finalized requires a new direction. The good news is that it is completely reversible. We are not seeking a complete overhaul of the entire Delridge project end-to-end. Instead, our singular demand here is much more limited: ***SDOT must immediately remove the most egregious feature – a concrete barrier that directly targets our RIFC community and was erected without our prior consultation, input, or knowledge.***

*Similarly, with new leadership at City Hall, we also believe there is an opportunity to take a fresh look at this specific barrier as well as chart a better course for continued engagement to avoid similar situations going forward.* I also note that former SDOT Director Sam Zimbabwe was added to this thread shortly before the end of his tenure. Thus, we're not convinced that this issue has been appropriately escalated. We would appreciate sponsorship and support from CM Herbold to ensure as much. Until we reach an acceptable conclusion to this matter, we will vigorously pursue additional escalation paths in parallel.

We look forward to your response in the meantime.

Thanks,

Rob Saka, Esq.

On Sunday, October 24, 2021, 04:05:14 PM PDT, Rob Saka wrote:

Thank you. I'll take a closer look and follow up if we have any questions or comments. But at a very quick glance at your very disappointing response, expect additional STRONG pushback from our community. Stay tuned.

-Rob

Sent from my iPhone

On Oct 14, 2021, at 3:44 PM, DOT\_DelridgeTransit wrote:

Hello Rob,

Thank you for contacting the Delridge Way SW - RapidRide H Line project team. I am sorry to hear that the new design of the street near the Refugee and Immigrant Family Center has been so impactful to you and your neighbors.

We're listening to your feedback and have been coordinating with the director of the Center. We are meeting with them this week to discuss their concerns about the new design, as well as discussing the current state of the fence.

As part of this project, we worked with the community to design a street that balances the safety of all users of the corridor, including for people who drive, take transit, bike, and walk. We've sent out informational mailers, postcards, and email invites to community members in the Delridge neighborhood inviting them to give their feedback on our

street designs and speak directly with our project team to better understand the safety features we've installed on Delridge Way SW. One of the safety features, as you mention, is the new median curb that was installed directly adjacent to the new RapidRide station near the Refugee and Immigrant Family Center.

This curb is used to prevent people driving from making unsafe passing movements around buses that are stopped at the new RapidRide station. It's also making the street safer for everyone by reducing speeding and decreasing the number of crashes between people driving and people walking or biking.

This curb reinforces the new street layout that restricts people driving from crossing the new double yellow lane markings and the yellow diagonal markings on Delridge Way SW. These yellow stripes were installed as part of the street design to enhance safety for people traveling along the corridor, including those using RapidRide station, the new southbound bike lane and newly upgraded sidewalks in this area. Restricting left-turns across two vehicle lanes, a bike lane, and a sidewalk will help achieve the community-driven goals of making Delridge Way SW a safe multi-modal corridor for all users – people who drive, take transit, bike, and walk.

Thank you again for contacting us and sharing your concerns. If you would like assistance in travel planning with the new street layout and curb, please let us know.

Thank you,

Madison Linkenmeyer

Dear Seattle Department of Transportation:

There is a newly installed yet highly unsafe and obstructive barrier in front of the Refugee & Immigrant Family Center (RIFC) located at [6535 Delridge Way SW, Seattle](#). ***I'm writing you today to strongly urge you to immediately remove this dangerous barrier from our Delridge community.***

As background, RIFC is a dual language English-Spanish program located in the Delridge neighborhood. RIFC is a nonprofit early learning and childcare center that provides services to refugee and immigrant children and families, many of whom come from socioeconomic disadvantaged backgrounds and have experienced severe trauma and toxic stress. RIFC is also a critical hub of the early learning and childcare community in Delridge. I am proud to be a member of the RIFC community, together with its dedicated staff, other families, and allied community members.

First, I assume SDOT had the best of intentions when this particular barrier was designed. Sadly, however, I believe this is one of those instances where something may have been a good idea in principle but terrible in practice. It might have made more sense if the RIFC building was just another residential lot (similar to RIFC's neighboring lots). But it is not.

I understand that SDOT originally decided to build the barrier for purported “safety” reasons. In response to recent pushback against the barrier from impacted communities, I also understand that SDOT has chosen to double down on the trite safety rationale yet again. However, this is extremely disappointing because the barrier actually keeps our community less safe. (Note: For additional details about how it is unsafe, see the recent feedback from RIFC and members of the RIFC community.) Moreover, it seems like a “safety” solution to a problem that doesn’t exist. To the extent a problem even exists, ***the selected design fix contemplates a very narrow view of “safety” without carefully considering downstream consequences to the detriment of historically underserved groups.***

That said, the stated “safety” justifications simply do not hold water when you consider the scant community engagement that was conducted BEFORE the barrier was built. ***Principles of equity and fairness demand that a barrier of this size, scale, and impact on the local community should have been designed in full partnership with impacted residents.*** The decision should have been community-driven. Unfortunately, however, the manner in which we’ve been consulted about this to date has been a far cry from this.

The equity argument alone should be sufficiently compelling to remove this barrier, particularly if we truly seek to close the gap between the espoused values of the City of Seattle and the everyday lived experiences of our RIFC community and nearby Delridge residents. However, as you know, there is also generally a legal and contractual obligation for SDOT to specifically seek feedback from affected communities prior to commencing the work (i.e., as a condition for receiving project funding via a Proviso in certain cases). Again, the outreach we’ve seen has been very limited at best. RIFC’s staff do not recall any targeted outreach or attempts to solicit its opinion on the proposed plans – other than standard notices of street closures once the plans were already set. Same for its sister site (SWEL) further north on Delridge. The result is an unwanted, unsafe barrier that exacerbates existing inequities, creates unnecessary confusion, and ultimately makes our Delridge community less accessible.

***Simply put, we need more sensible road improvements that do a better job of keeping ALL impacted groups safe. Candidly, I can’t imagine a scenario where this kind of purported safety changes, devoid of community input, would be imposed on residents in more affluent areas of Seattle like Madison Park, Magnolia, etc. If SDOT was truly concerned with improving safety in our Delridge neighborhood, it would promptly install a sidewalk along Brandon St on the southern part of the golf course.***

For these reasons, please remove this barrier now. Once it’s removed, consider whether to move the nearby bus stop further north or south 100 yards on Delridge.

I’ve cc’d [CM Lisa Herbold](#). We’re asking for her strong support and sponsorship to make sure that our feedback is not only heard but immediately acted upon.

Thanks,

Rob Saka, Esq.