The Seattle Squeeze

Democratized Data Access Webinar
Heather Marx, Director of Downtown Mobility
08/20/2019

City of Seattle

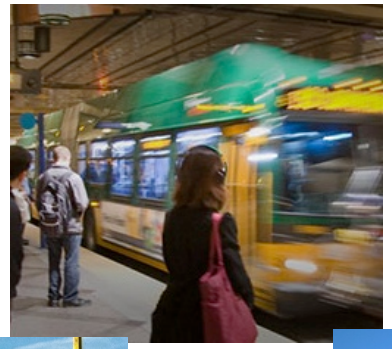
Presentation overview

- Background
- Problem and Goal
- Objectives
- SDOT response
- What did we learn?
- What comes next?

Background: a time of unprecedented growth

PERIOD OF MAXIMUM CONSTRAINT

2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 - 2024



Background: Closing the Viaduct

- Alaskan Way Viaduct (SR 99 through downtown Seattle)
  - 65-year-old structure; weakened by the 2001 Nisqually Earthquake
  - Closed permanently on January 11
- SR 99 closed for three weeks in January 2019
  - Longest highway closure in the Puget Sound Region's history
- SR 99 tunnel opened to traffic on February 4, after a weekend of community festivities

A regional effort

Problem and goal

Problem

Closing SR 99 displaced 90,000 trips per day into the downtown core and other regional networks, which the network may not be able to absorb

SDOT Goal

Maintain broad mobility and equal access to downtown employment, commerce, tourism and housing

SDOT Objectives

- Ensure the efficient movement of people and goods by avoiding persistent gridlock
- Expand the use and reach of transit and other alternatives to driving alone
- Reduce the number of drive-alone vehicle trips downtown
- Maximize the public right of way available for the traveling public
- Make SDOT the indispensable source of public information related to travel around the region
- Prioritize safety for all users, particularly for those who are most vulnerable
- Work consistently and effectively with partner organizations

What SDOT Did

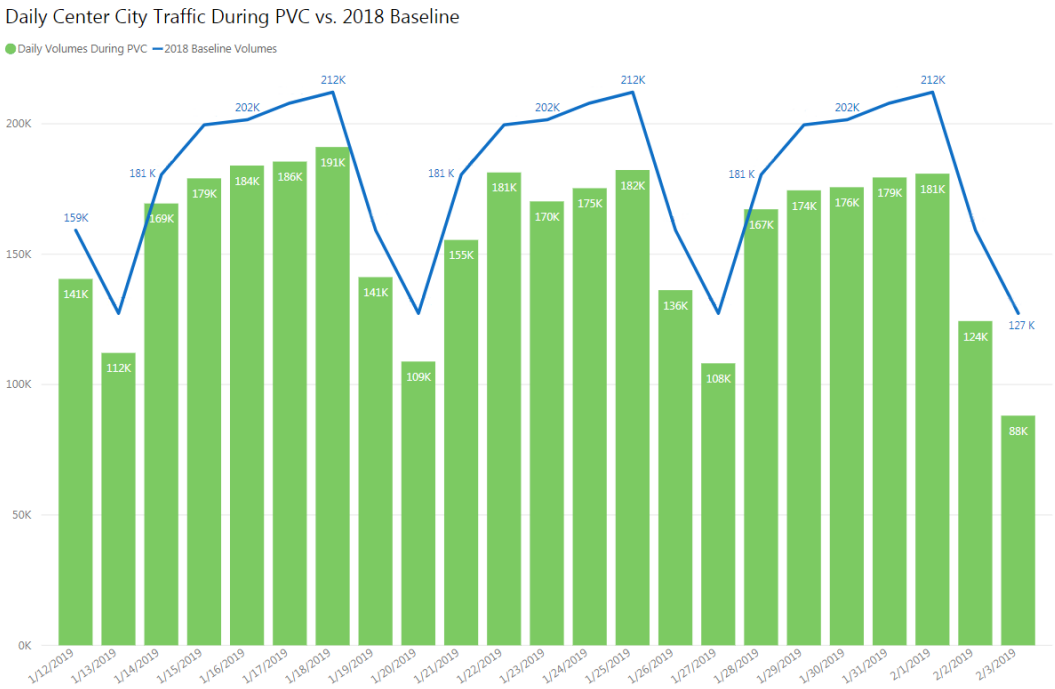
- Developed a strategic plan for SR99 Closure
- Staffed the Transportation Operations Center 24/7
- Made 1,800 signal timing plans and thousands of real-time adjustments to signal timing
- Deployed more than 100 people, working 12-hour shifts for three weeks
- Created a swing shift to enhance response
- Implemented temporary and permanent tactics – bus lanes, increased parking restrictions
- Revoked more than 50 permits to maximize space for the traveling public
- Created a Squeeze-focused website – www.seattle.gov/traffic
- Briefed hundreds of community groups and elected officials

What we learned

- Frequent, formal communication among transportation agencies was critical
  - Twice-daily multi-agency phone calls and co-location
  - Daily elected official briefings
- Shared, consistent messages to the public
  - Daily press conferences
  - Social media effort
- On-going, multifaceted public communications may have been the single biggest contributor to success
- Lack of rapid, formal data sharing was our biggest detriment

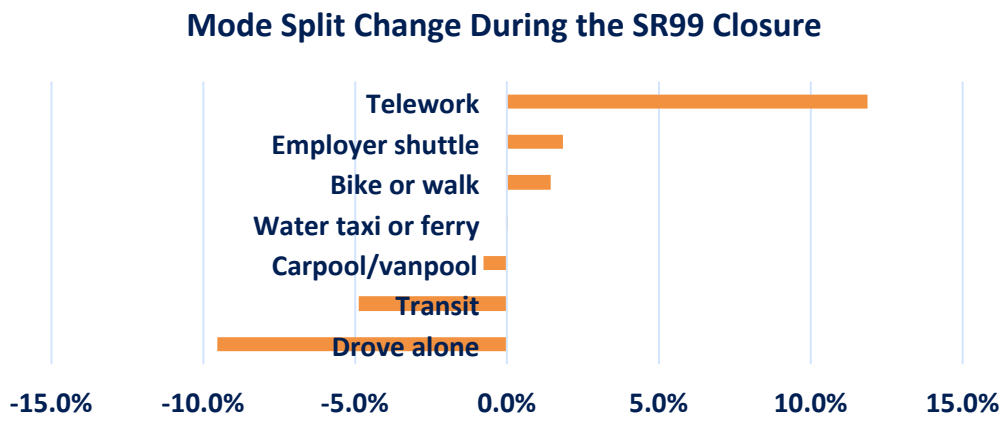
What we learned

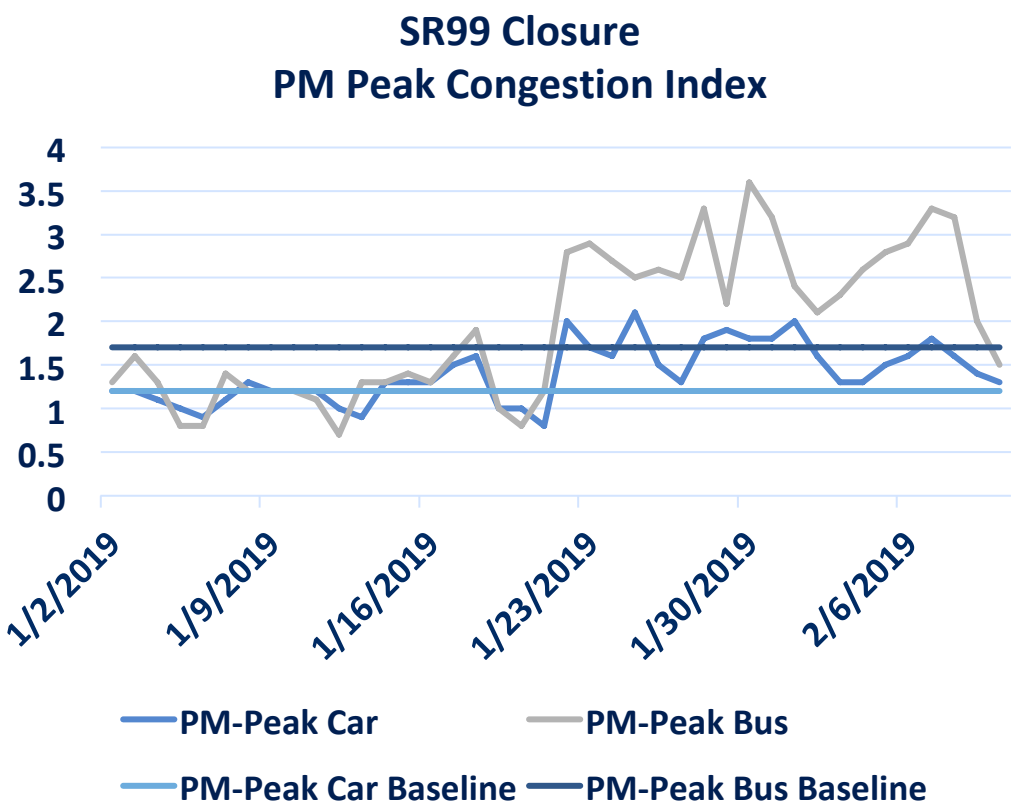
- **Overall Commute**
  - Peak periods skewed about an hour early
  - Overall volume down about 10 percent
  - No persistent gridlock
  - Weather and incidents affected travel times and congestion



What we learned

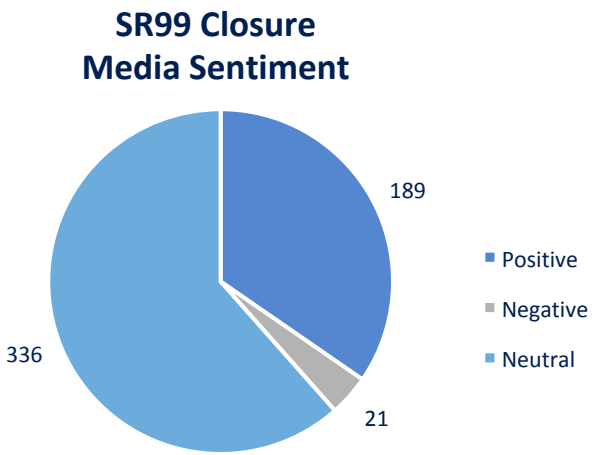
- **Transit, bicycles and telecommuting**
  - Transit congestion was variable in the PM
  - 14 percent increase in Link ridership
  - Bicycle counts at key locations were substantially higher than January 2018
  - Telecommuting played a big role

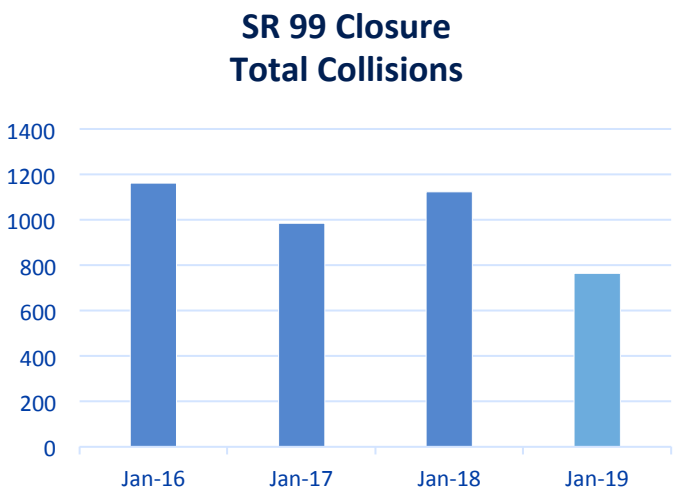




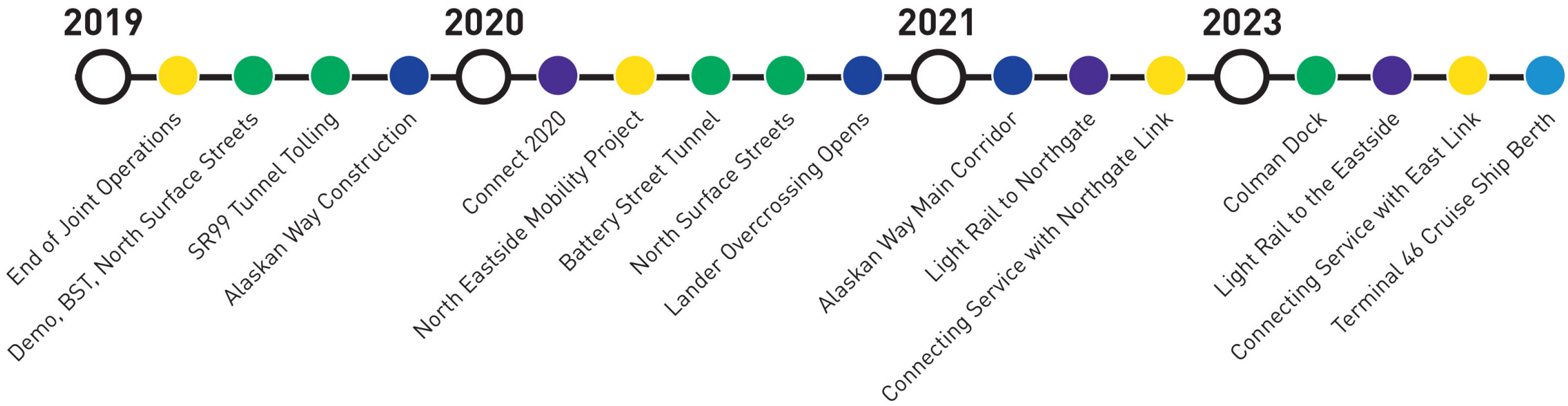
What we learned

- **Permit Revocation and Modification:**
  - 50 job sites were impacted
  - 6 citations and 85 warnings issued
- **Communications:**
  - Excellent interdepartmental and interagency communication
  - Daily media availability; weekly press conferences
- **Safety:**
  - Collisions down compared to January 2018





What Comes Next?



Questions?

heather.marx@seattle.gov | (206) 615-0801

www.seattle.gov/traffic

www.seattle.gov/transportation