

Keep Moving Street Pilot Study

Lake Washington Boulevard

Background

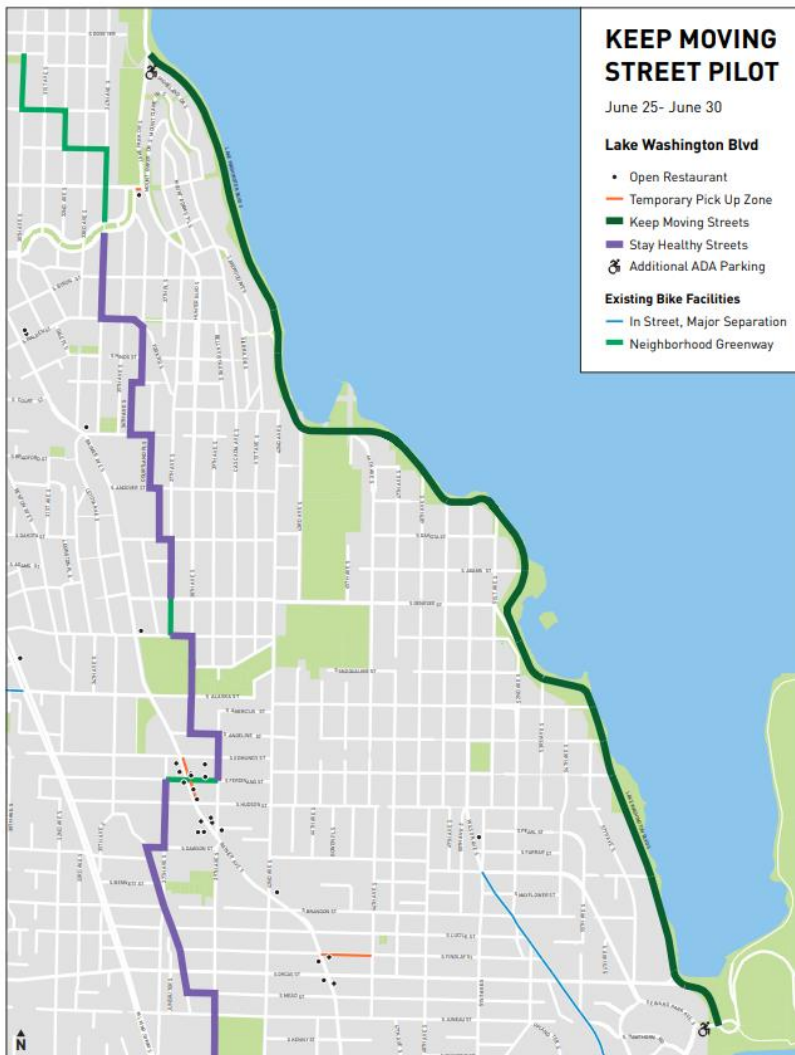
Bicycle Sundays are a 52-year-old Seattle institution in which streets are closed to most motor vehicles to allow people to bike and walk in the roadway without fear of traffic. The event has long been held on Lake Washington Boulevard S between Mt. Baker Beach and Seward Park, one of the Olmstead Boulevards planned and maintained for scenic recreational travel. Bicycle Sundays typically are open May to September, every other Sunday from 10 am to 6 pm. They usually draw about 4,000 people and feature programming and booths from the City of Seattle, businesses, and non-profits.

The need to avoid large gatherings during the early stages of the 2020 Coronavirus pandemic led Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR) to take measures to help park visitors maintain 6' or more distance from each other to slow the spread of the virus. These actions included canceling Bicycle Sunday, closing parking lots along Lake Washington Boulevard and in Seward Park, and prohibiting bicycling within Seward Park. As the pandemic progressed and the initial peak of infections passed, Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) and SPR worked together to close streets to motor vehicle traffic near destination parks to continue to manage crowds and respond to operational issues such as illegal parking. These Keep Moving Streets are in place at Golden Gardens Park, Green Lake Park, and Constellation Park at Alki Point.

Public demand for a similar intervention on Lake Washington Boulevard continued to build, including emails, comments at virtual public meetings, and a first-place finish in a [Seattle Times poll](#) on which streets should be closed next. Also, SPR continued to see crowding in Seward Park and other parks along Lake Washington Boulevard. Illegal parking was a challenge, including people parking on the sidewalks and multiuse paths adjacent to the Boulevard. To test the feasibility of a Lake Washington Boulevard closure, SDOT and SPR piloted a Keep Moving Street for five days at the end of June. This report describes the closure, results and impacts, and options for future closures.

Pilot Implementation

The project team selected the original extents of Bicycle Sunday, between Mt. Baker Beach at Lake Park Dr S and Seward Park at S Juneau St, to closely match the event residents and visitors are accustomed to. This stretch is perhaps the most scenic portion of Lake Washington Boulevard, features few adjacent residents or businesses, accesses several parks, and already had most adjacent parking closed by SPR to manage crowds during the pandemic.



Public Comment Summary

On June 25, we piloted opening Lake Washington Boulevard to people walking, rolling, and biking and restricting people driving to those with destinations along the route. This pilot lasted five days in total, from June 26 to June 30, and spanned from Lake Park Drive S to Seward Park Ave S. The purpose of the pilot was to gauge public opinion on the closure and see if it might be worth extending it through the summer. On June 23, we advertised the pilot closure of Lake Washington Boulevard on social media, including NextDoor and the SDOT blog, and shared information with traditional media resources. The posts communicated the length of the closure and asked for users to send feedback to the StayHealthyStreets@seattle.gov inbox.

The email inbox received over 600 responses as of July 9. Of these, 421 favored the closure, 177 were opposed, and 46 were neither explicitly in favor nor opposed. Responses ranged from allowing ample

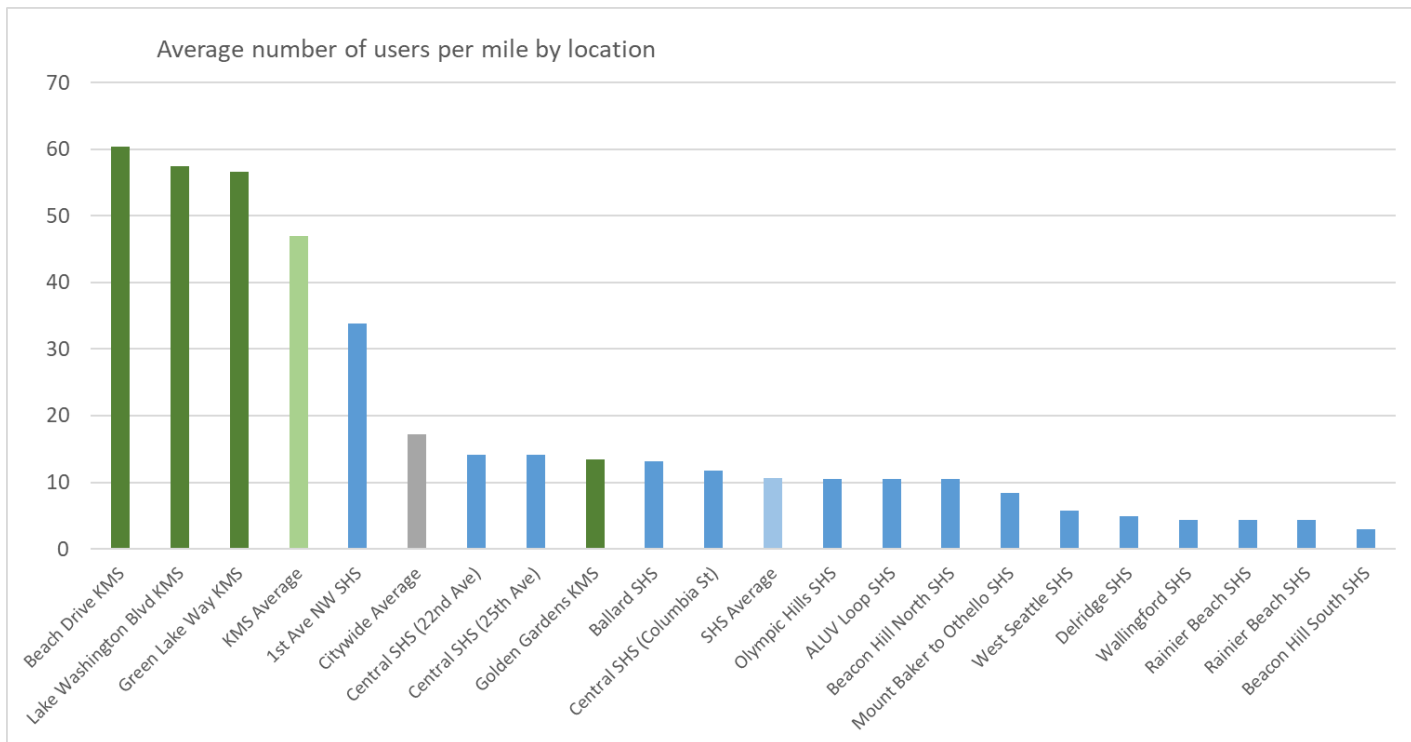
room to social distance and lessening parents’ stress for children using the road to do so. Others worried about an increase in traffic on nearby streets and the potential impacts on commuting essential workers.

General comments included concern about unsafe driving behavior on Lake Washington Blvd and nearby residential streets, including speeding and ignoring signs. Beyond the Lake Washington Blvd changes, some respondents mentioned the impacts of reducing park access for communities of color, elderly, disabled, and low-income community members with parking lots being closed to minimize congregating.

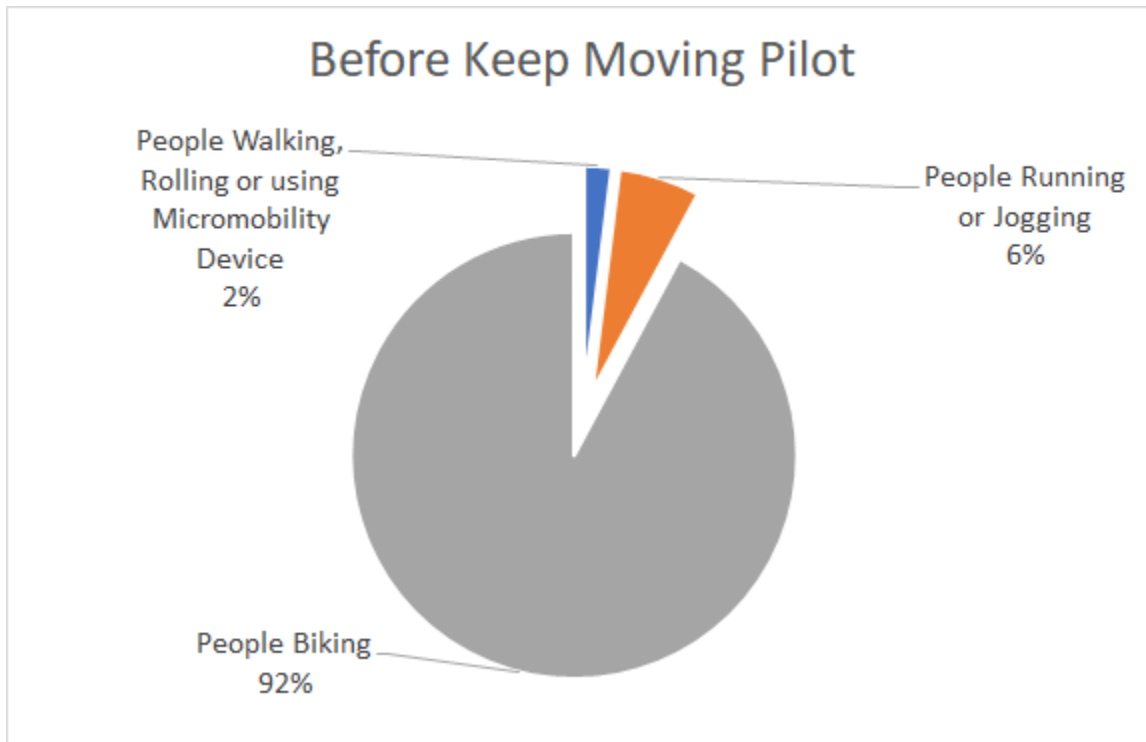
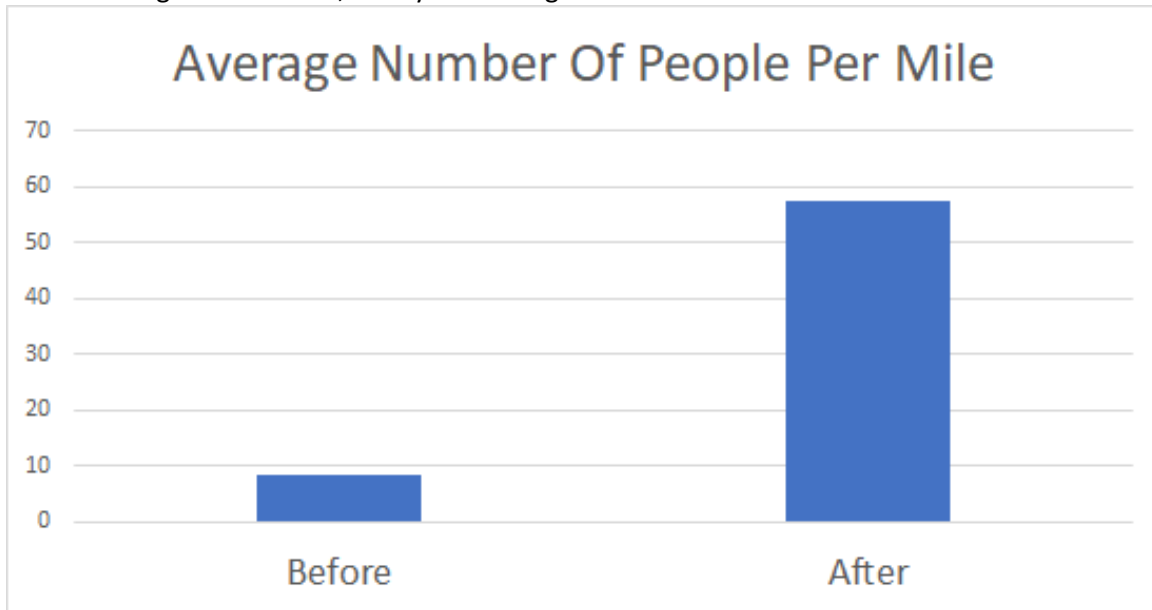
Lake Washington Boulevard Pilot Emails	Support	Opposition	Other Response	Total
LWB Resident	11	6	3	20
Within 1/2 mile of LWB	43	22	11	76
SE Seattle	129	85	15	229
Other Seattle	19	9	1	29
No location given	219	55	16	290
Total	421	177	46	644

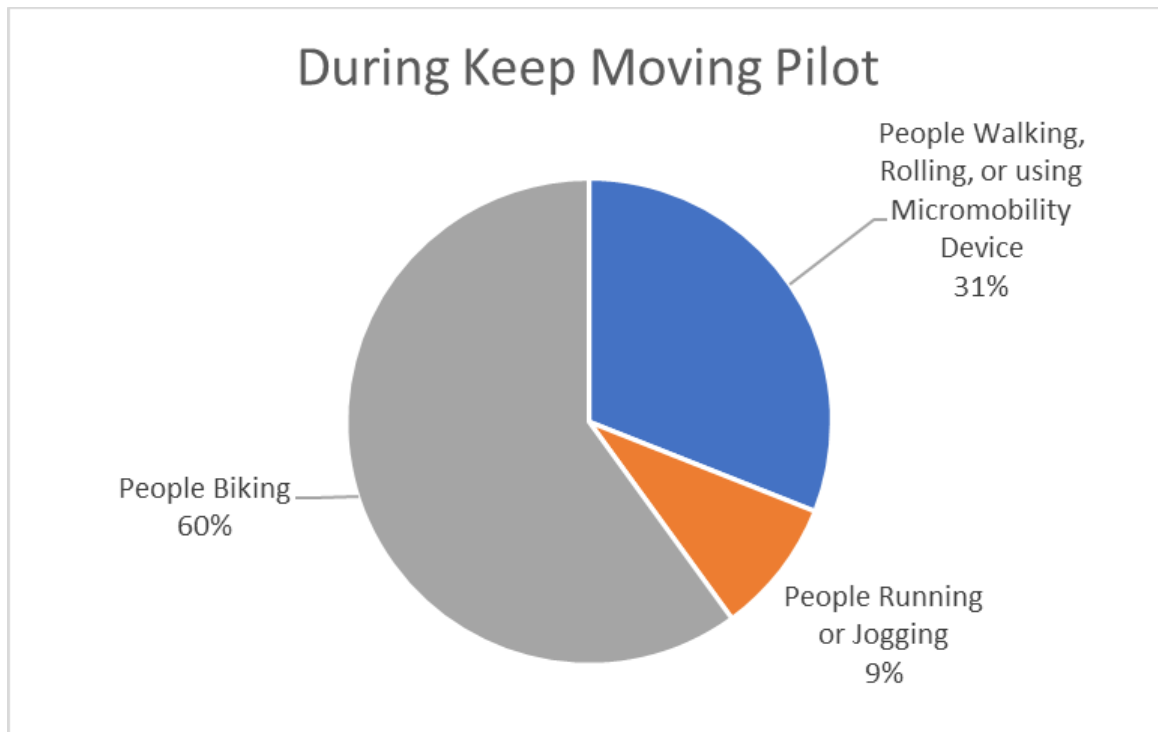
City Staff Observations

SDOT staff visited the Lake Washington Boulevard Keep Moving street during the closure to count users and monitor for impacts. Of all of the streets closed to through traffic to support social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Lake Washington Boulevard Keep Moving Street was the busiest when measured by the number of users per mile of observation.



Observers noted that many people using the Lake Washington Blvd appeared to be with their families, either cycling or walking. Additional people not counted were using the multiuse path on the east side of Lake Washington Boulevard, nearly all walking.





People gathered in the parkland on the east side of Lake Washington Boulevard, as well as a few lawn parties at the residences on the west side of Lake Washington Boulevard. People on the street itself were generally moving unless they were taking a break, adjusting equipment or bikes, or checking their phones.

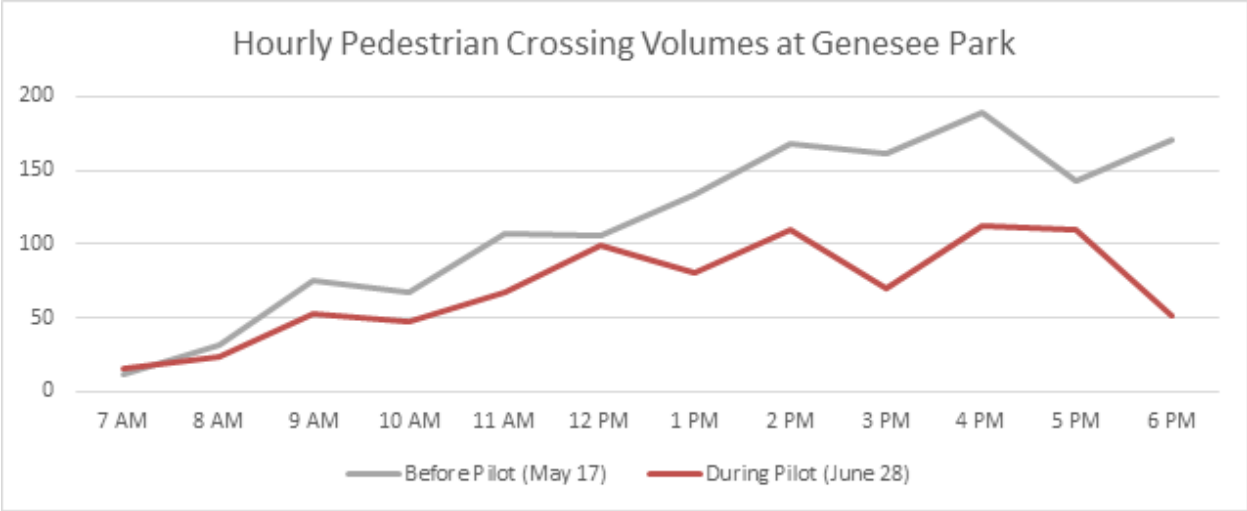
SPR Social Distancing Ambassadors reported reduced crowding at Seward Park during the pilot compared to other weekends. The Social Distancing Ambassadors remind park visitors of temporary rules in place during the coronavirus pandemic, such as the ban on bicycles in Seward Park. Ambassadors reported fewer issues with cyclists traveling in Seward Park and would like to see a similar closure every summer weekend.

Many of the people still driving on Lake Washington Boulevard during the closure were doing so slowly. Visitors were using the side streets for loading, driving their vehicles up to the closure to unload bikes and coolers, and then driving elsewhere to park. Side streets were heavily parked, but SDOT staff did not observe illegal parking blocking hydrants or driveways. Vehicles were parked in parking lots that were still open, such as at the Lakewood Moorage and the temporary handicapped parking lot at Seward Park.

Traffic Data

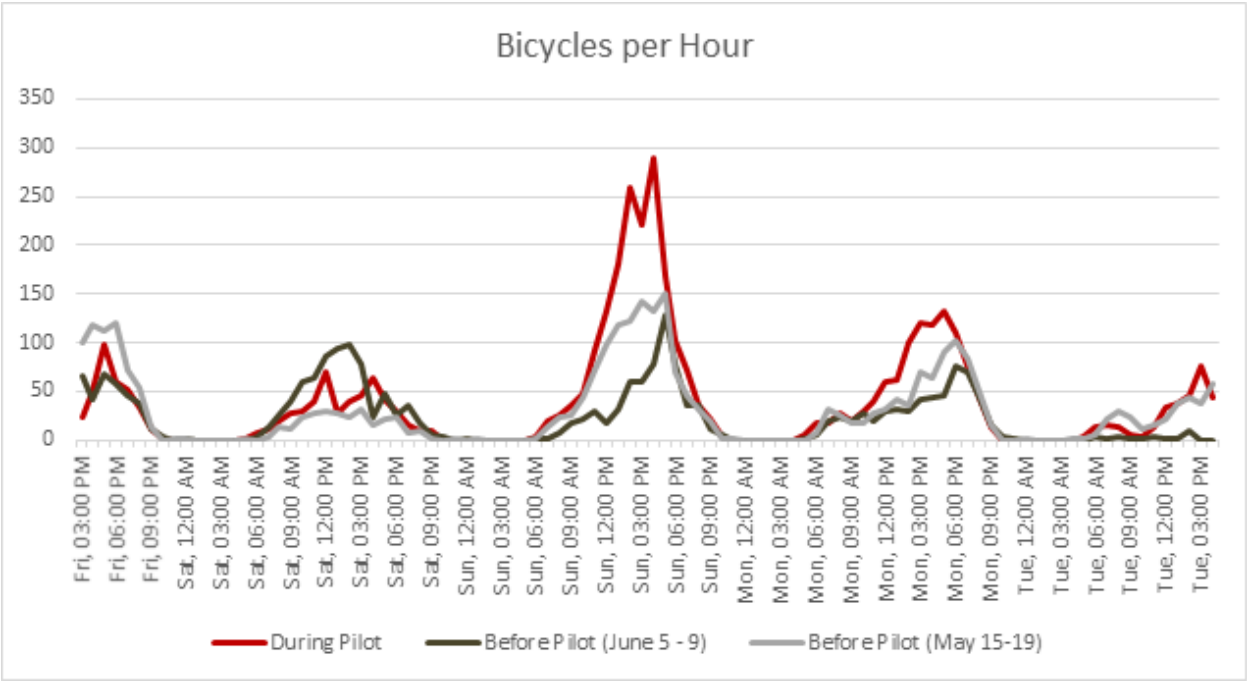
Pedestrian Use

We installed a counter at S 45th St near Genesee Park on Sunday, May 17, and again on Sunday, June 28, during the pilot and counted the number of people walking across Lake Washington Blvd. The counter did not measure the number of people walking along the street. The decrease in numbers may be due to a change in habits. However, further observations would be needed to confirm.



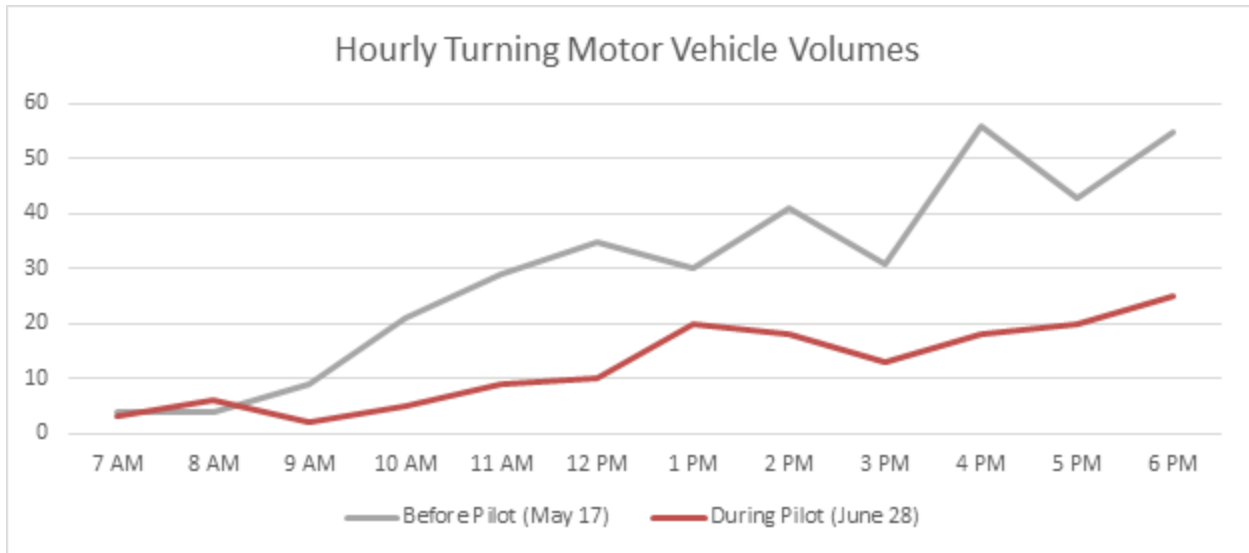
Bicycle Use

A counter was placed just south of S Angeline St in mid-May, in early June, and again in the same location during the pilot. Bike ridership was generally higher during the pilot than before, except for Saturday when we experienced cool weather. Ridership was highest on Sunday but below the levels seen with Bicycle Sunday averages, suggesting that crowding should not be an issue.

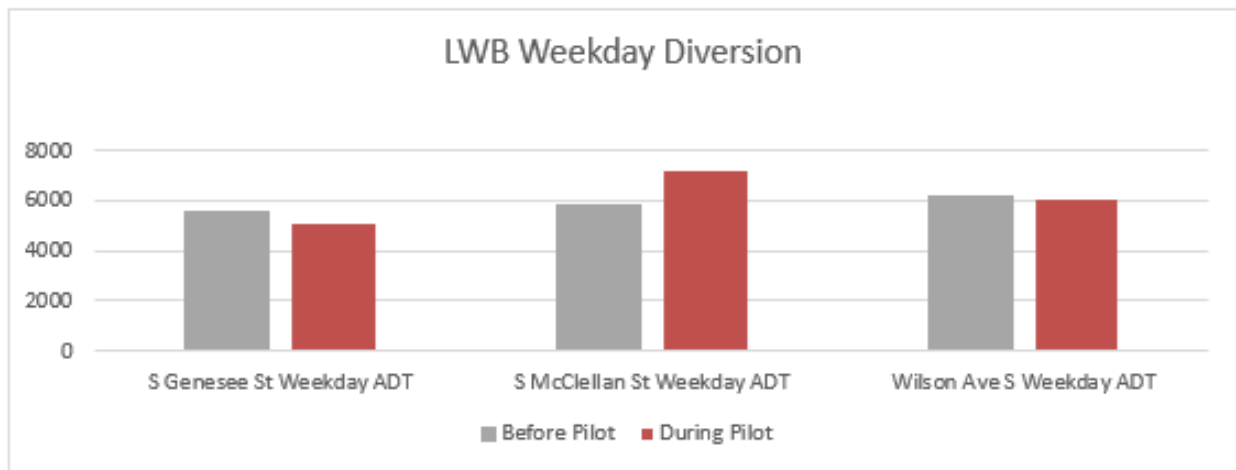


Motor Vehicle Use

A vast majority of drivers respected the Street Closed signs. Through vehicle volumes typically range from 53 to 440 per hour and dropped to zero to 10 per hour. The busiest times were late afternoon into the early evening. Turning volumes reduced but much more modestly, suggesting local access was maintained for residents and service trips.



One of the community’s primary concerns with a longer-term closure of Lake Washington Boulevard is the effect of displaced vehicle trips on other streets in the neighborhood. We placed traffic counters at three locations near Lake Washington Blvd a week before the pilot, then and during the pilot. Diversion on weekdays shows small decreases in traffic on S Genesee St and Wilson Ave S. S McClellan St farther north experienced an increase in traffic, though not to 2018 levels of about 9,200. Traffic throughout Seattle is down about 30%.



On weekends, there was a small decrease in traffic on S McClellan St, and a reduction in traffic on S Genesee St. The counter on Wilson Ave S did not record weekend data before the pilot, so this data point is missing.

