



Northwest

# THIRD AVENUE STRATEGIC FORUM

Moving Forward



STRATEGIC FORUM REPORT | FEBRUARY 2024

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City of Seattle



Downtown Seattle Association

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ON THE COVER: THIRD AVENUE STREET SIGN (Photo by Riley Bancroft)

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## ULI Advisory Services: National and Global Programs

Since 1947, the ULI Advisory Services program has assembled well over 700 ULI-member teams to help sponsors find creative, practical solutions for complex land use challenges. A wide variety of public, private, and nonprofit organizations have contracted for ULI's advisory services. National and international panelists are specifically recruited to form a panel of independent and objective volunteer ULI member experts with the skills needed to address the identified land use challenge. The program is designed to help break through obstacles, jump-start conversations, and solve tough challenges that need an outside, independent perspective. Three- and five-day engagements are offered to ensure thorough consideration of relevant topics.

An additional national offering is the project analysis session (PAS) offered at ULI's Fall and Spring Meetings, through which specific land use challenges are evaluated by a panel of volunteer experts selected from ULI's membership. This is a conversational format that lends itself to an open exchange of ideas among diverse industry practitioners with distinct points of view. From the streamlined two-hour session to the "deeper dive" eight-hour session, this intimate conversational format encourages creative thinking and problem solving.

Learn more at [americas.uli.org/programs/advisory-services/](https://americas.uli.org/programs/advisory-services/).

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Distinct from Advisory Services panels, TAPs leverage local expertise through a half-day to two-day process.

## ULI Advisory Services: District Council Programs

The goal of the ULI Advisory Services program is to bring the finest expertise in the real estate field to bear on complex land use planning and development projects, programs, and policies. Since 2006, the ULI Northwest's technical assistance panel (TAP) program has assembled over 25 ULI-member teams in service of ULI's mission to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide. Drawing from its local membership base, ULI Northwest conducts one-and-a-half-day TAPs offering objective and responsible advice to local decision-makers on a wide variety of land use and real estate issues ranging from site-specific projects to public policy questions. The TAP program is intentionally flexible to provide a customized approach to specific land use and real estate issues. In this instance, the TAP format was modified into a "Forum" to facilitate bringing together decision makers from the City of Seattle and King County as well as private landowners who have authority over this complex downtown Seattle transportation corridor. In fulfillment of ULI's mission, this Forum report is intended to provide objective advice that will promote the responsible use of land to enhance the environment.

## About the Urban Land Institute

The Urban Land Institute (ULI) is a global, member-driven organization comprising more than 48,000 real estate and urban development professionals dedicated to advancing the Institute's mission of shaping the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide.

ULI's interdisciplinary membership represents all aspects of the industry, including developers, property owners, investors, architects, urban planners, public officials, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, and academics. Established in 1936, the Institute has a presence in the Americas, Europe, and Asia Pacific regions, with members in 84 countries.

More information is available at [uli.org](https://uli.org). Follow ULI on [X \(formerly known as Twitter\)](#), [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [Instagram](#).

## About ULI Northwest

ULI Northwest is a District Council of the Urban Land Institute, a nonprofit education and research organization supported by its members. ULI Northwest carries out the ULI mission locally by serving as the preeminent real estate forum in the Pacific Northwest, facilitating the open exchange of ideas, information, and experiences among local, national, and international industry leaders and policy makers.

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This Strategic Forum is a result of multiple individuals and organizations participating collectively toward achieving transformational change for Third Avenue.

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Finally, ULI would like to thank the more than 30 stakeholders who shared their experiences, perspectives, and insights with the panel.

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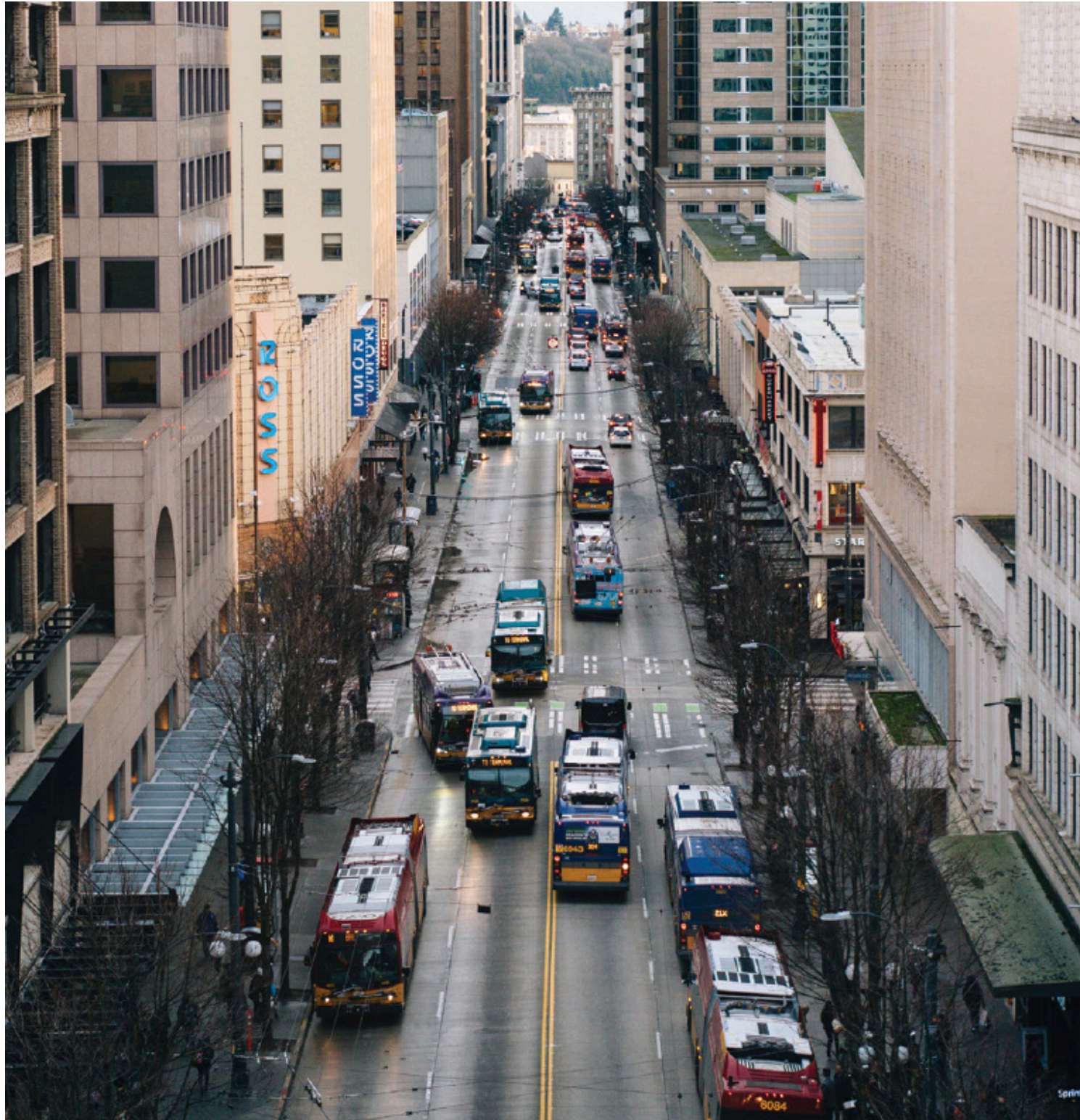


PHOTO CREDIT: DSA THIRD AVENUE VISION REPORT PAGE 7

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Third Avenue is a critical transit-dedicated corridor and front door to Seattle. While it is an essential piece of the regional transportation network, it has recently become an icon for all that is wrong with downtown. A combination of factors, including the shift to remote work due to the COVID pandemic and the shuttering of retail businesses, has left downtown Seattle—and its foremost transportation corridor—a shadow of its former self.

At the request of the City of Seattle and the Downtown Seattle Association (DSA), ULI convened a Strategic Forum comprised of ten leaders from the public and private sectors with a vested interest in the future of the corridor. This panel was tasked with creating a collaboration framework that could guide decision-making and investments for Third Avenue's revitalization, with a focus on the section running through downtown Seattle, from Yesler Way to Battery Street.

Forum panelists delivered their recommendations through the lens of how to make Third Avenue a welcoming and safe neighborhood that provides efficient transportation connections to Seattle and the broader region.

To achieve this goal, the panel evaluated opportunities for better alignment between public agencies, the private sector, and other stakeholders, including property owners, residents and businesses. Coordination between these entities is occurring daily, but a lack of shared priorities between individuals and organizations has led to disorganized progress. Considering this, the panel recommended four areas of emphasis as a framework for unified goals between diverse stakeholders. These four areas include:

- Activations and programming
- Infrastructure and maintenance
- Communications
- Policy

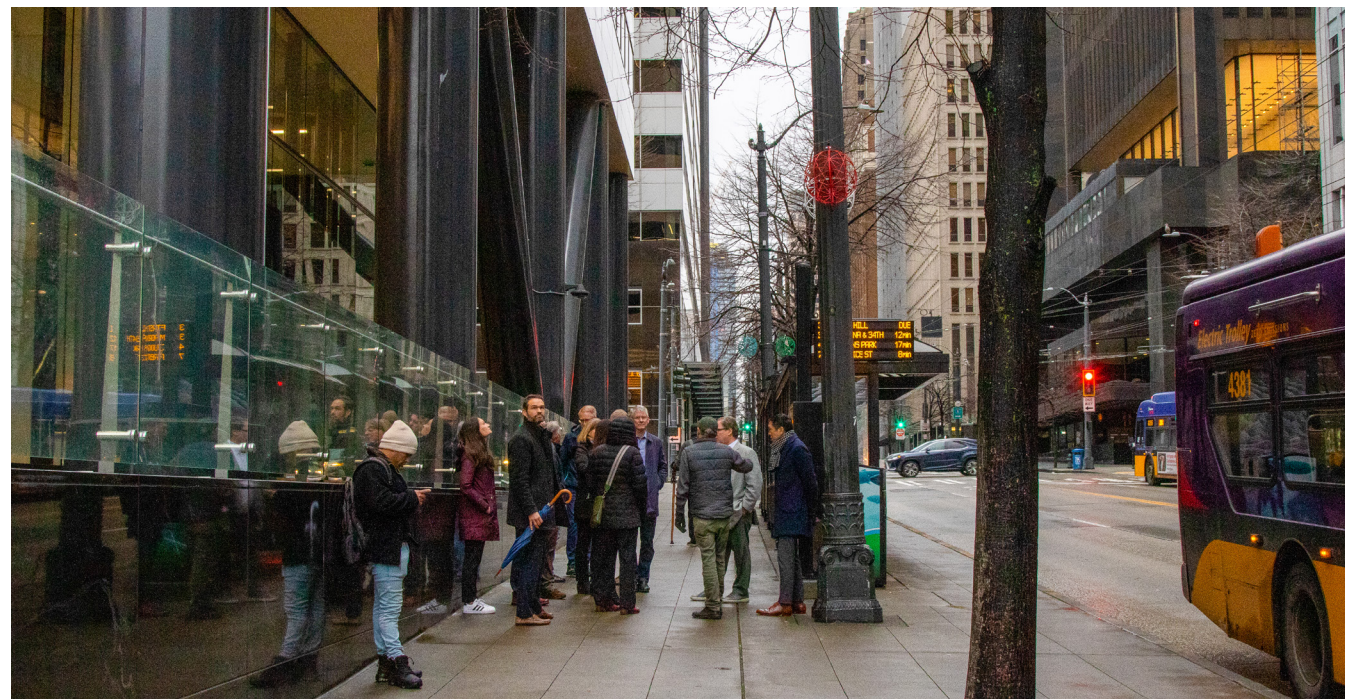
The panel organized its core recommendations into two primary categories: short term changes, which can be implemented within the next two years, and long-term strategies, to be implemented in two to five years. With Seattle hosting several games for the FIFA Men's World Cup in June 2026, the pressure is on to rapidly implement changes before a wave of national and international visitors arrive at Seattle's doorstep at Third Avenue. The World Cup can serve as a catalyst for motivating change within the corridor and the city more broadly.

In the short term, the panel recommends that the City and other stakeholders take the following actions:

- Provide regular maintenance for a clean and functional corridor.
- Improve and replace bus shelters.
- Enhance wayfinding with clear signage.
- Illuminate the corridor and the buildings in the corridor.
- De-clutter the street and remove obsolete infrastructure.
- Invite joy through banners, art, and branding.
- Curate a regular programming schedule in partnership with the community.
- Facilitate accountability and inspire stewardship.
- Streamline and expedite permitting processes for new and remodeled spaces.
- Encourage large employers to return to office.
- Activate empty lots and vacant spaces.

In the long-term, the panel recommends standing up a governing authority comprised of local stakeholders and jurisdictional representatives with authority to create change in the corridor, to advance the Third Avenue vision and expand on the improvements implemented in the first two years. This entity could take the form of a Public Development Authority (PDA), which would manage the everyday coordination and management of activities along the corridor, provide regular programming, and increase the presence of public safety teams.

Today, Third Avenue is the region's most important transit corridor. With focused investment, it could become a welcoming, vibrant, and economically resilient neighborhood that connects people and communities throughout Seattle.



PANELISTS ON A WALKING TOUR OF THIRD AVENUE

## INTRODUCTION

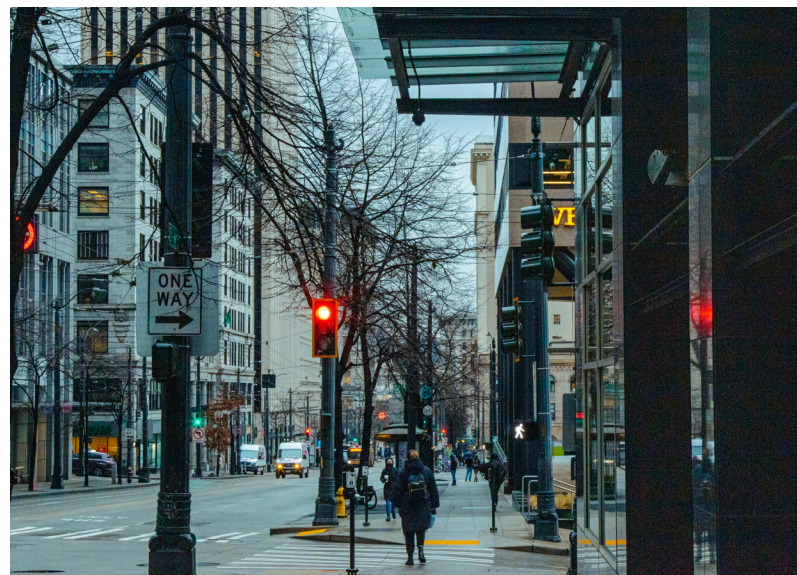
Stretching 1.7 miles through the heart of downtown Seattle, Third Avenue is a busy north-south corridor with regional importance. The street is characterized by its unique transit-dedicated status, which only allows buses to travel its length during most of the day. This critical function facilitates the region's robust transportation network and connects downtown Seattle with communities near and far. Beyond its importance for regional transportation, Third Avenue is a neighborhood, and a place that has been at the center of Seattle's commercial activity for more than 100 years.

In 2018, Third Avenue carried approximately 52,000 transit riders per day and over 290 buses per peak hour, more than any other transit-dedicated street in the U.S. or Canada. The transit-only nature of the corridor has many benefits: it facilitates fast and efficient travel through downtown, promotes easier transfers, and creates a system that is straightforward to navigate for residents and visitors alike. Nearly every King County Metro bus that connects Seattle's neighborhoods to downtown routes through Third Avenue.

Despite high transit ridership in the years leading up to the pandemic, Third Avenue's focus on transit efficiency sometimes came at the expense of the pedestrian experience. With its high concentration of large, fast-moving buses and relatively narrow sidewalks, many considered Third Avenue a necessary stop on the way to somewhere else, and not a destination.

Recognizing Third Avenue's challenges as well as its potential, in 2019 the Downtown Seattle Association led a year-long visioning process to evaluate alternative designs for the corridor that would

allow continued transit efficiency while improving the pedestrian experience. The effort included the contributions of nearly 70 business and property owners, residents, and public officials, and was summarized in the Third Avenue Vision Report. Only a year later, in 2020, the COVID pandemic necessarily shifted priorities and resources away from Third Avenue's reinvigoration.



Today, in the aftermath of the pandemic, Third Avenue faces a new set of challenges. Like central business districts across the country, downtown Seattle has struggled to recover from the economic fallout and shift to remote work. With fewer daily commuters providing foot traffic, increased criminal activity, homelessness, violence, and general disorder have become highly visible and concentrated throughout the corridor. The confluence of these factors has led to Third Avenue becoming an icon for all the problems associated with downtown Seattle.

In response to these and other concerns, the City of Seattle and the DSA invited ULI to convene a Strategic Forum comprised of public and private stakeholders to recommend a vision for Third Avenue and establish a framework for aligning future actions and investments.

### The Assignment

The Strategic Forum was asked to evaluate Third Avenue, specifically the section from Yesler to Battery. The questions posed to the panel are as follows:

1. Corridor characterization: what are the key challenges facing the corridor now? What are its key strengths and assets?
  - What are the different perspectives and priorities of the various stakeholder groups and entities that operate on Third Avenue, when it comes to the challenges that they see?
  - What are the corridor's key assets and strengths that can be built upon?
2. What is our shared vision (north star statement) for what the corridor could be in the future?
  - Are there other places that come to mind as models or inspiration for a future Third Avenue?
3. What collaboration processes or frameworks will be needed over time to build on strengths, address challenges, and realize this vision?
  - How can the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT), Seattle Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD), Seattle Office of Economic Development (OED), King County Metro, property owners and DSA work together productively over time to make this vision happen?
  - What could a collaboration framework or process for involved agencies and group look like?
  - Who can serve as champion/owner for this new collaboration process? Would a new entity need to be created?
  - What are the immediate next steps for continuing momentum on collaboration and action?

Over several days, the panel toured Third Avenue and interviewed more than thirty stakeholders, business and property owners, and residents with a vested interest in the future of the corridor. The session concluded with a presentation of the recommendations to representatives from the City and DSA, along with community members.



PHOTO CREDIT: DSA THIRD AVENUE VISION REPORT PAGE 7

## THE CURRENT STATUS OF THIRD AVENUE

Third Avenue is characterized by its multifaceted functions and identities. As a transit corridor and central spine, it connects Seattle's eight distinct neighborhoods, as well as jobs, shopping, cultural institutions, and housing. It also serves as Seattle's front door and a key gateway for visitors arriving to the city by bus or Link light rail. Most importantly, Third Avenue is a diverse neighborhood composed of residents, business owners, artists, entrepreneurs, and other stakeholders who care about the future of Third Avenue and downtown Seattle. With the city's population expected to hit 1 million people by 2044, investment is needed to ensure Third Avenue can fulfill its core functions and support the economic vitality of a growing region.

### The Region's Transit Spine

The beauty of Seattle's physical environment and richness of its neighborhoods are in large part a function of its geography. But that beauty, including Lake Washington and Elliot Bay, and the many hills that define the city, create an hourglass condition where all modes of transportation moving north-south are funneled through the narrow isthmus between First Hill, Interstate 5, and the Puget Sound. At the center is Third Avenue, which, thanks to its bus-only restrictions, facilitates fast and reliable service for transit users, many of whom rely on public transit for their daily transportation needs.

Multiple transportation modes are consolidated into Third Avenue's compact, multi-level, and efficient corridor. At the street level, King County Metro buses and five RapidRide lines carry passengers to Seattle neighborhoods and nearby cities. Directly below ground, the Link light rail connects people to a growing list of regional destinations north, south, and east of Seattle. Only a few blocks away, transit users can find connections to other forms of transportation, such as the Seattle Water Taxi and Washington State Ferries. Within this varied and diverse network, Third Avenue

offers an efficient, multimodal transit hub in Seattle's downtown core.

The region's climate goals depend on people taking transit, and Third Avenue's infrastructure plays an essential role in carbon reduction efforts. A significant number of buses traveling on Third Avenue are electric trolley buses, using power from overhead wires, instead of internal combustion engines, to move people around the city. These net-zero coaches pollute less than traditional buses and are much quieter, minimizing negative impacts to surrounding neighborhoods supporting healthier air quality.

### Key Challenges and Opportunities

Despite the benefits that Third Avenue provides to Seattle and the region, the corridor faces significant challenges that limit its effectiveness as a transit facility, gateway, and neighborhood. Issues cited by stakeholders included a harsh pedestrian environment, public safety concerns, high vacancy rates, and fragmented maintenance and operations. Third Avenue is often held up as an example of all that is



wrong with downtown Seattle, and if left unaddressed, negative public perceptions will impede downtown’s revitalization efforts. The severity of these issues has led to a sense of urgency among community members and public officials to identify and implement solutions.

Contributing to this urgency is Seattle’s role in the upcoming FIFA World Cup. In June 2026, Seattle will host six World Cup matches and welcome thousands

of soccer fans from across the world. For visitors taking Link light rail from SeaTac Airport, Third Avenue, with three major light rail stations, will likely be their first impression of downtown Seattle. Seattle has an opportunity to put its best foot forward and leverage this once-in-generation event to mobilize investment and resources to spark Third Avenue’s reinvigoration over the next two years.

## THIRD AVENUE SWOT ANALYSIS

### STRENGTHS

- Transit spine serving the 9th largest bus system in the country
- The “center of the hourglass” representing and connecting the city’s vibrant diversity, arts, food, culture, and commerce
- The city’s front door/main street/face of downtown—provides the first and last impression of downtown and the city
- Composed of many unique neighborhoods and identities
- Historic architecture and public spaces
- Key amenities and anchors
- Strong public and private interest in the corridor’s future
- Recent investments in bus and metro safety
- Future investments in King County Civic Campus

### WEAKNESSES

- Fragmented governance responsibility
- Insufficient coordination among agencies
- Lack of unifying identity or brand
- Lack of wayfinding and signage
- Unfriendly experience for pedestrians
- Safety and security issues deter employees, visitors, and businesses
- Crime, vandalism, open drug use, loitering
- High vacancy because of insufficient enduring foot traffic, retail businesses locate elsewhere

### OPPORTUNITIES

- Vacant buildings and lower-priced real estate (for acquisition)
- Increase in events that draw out-of-town visitors and locals
- Increasing ridership, especially on weekends
- Increased density and possibility for office to residential conversions

### THREATS

- Negative perceptions and narrative—among locals and visitors alike
- Changing nature of work
- Challenging economics for traditional office
- Reduced ridership (compared to pre-COVID), especially at weekday peak times



PICTURED: PANELISTS ON A WALKING TOUR OF THIRD AVENUE

## Public Safety

Third Avenue’s public safety issues, especially related to crime and drug use, have become more prominent in the aftermath of the pandemic. While downtown Seattle and Third Avenue have hosted thriving outdoor drug markets for many years, the disruption from these activities has become more visible and concerning following the COVID crisis. A combination of factors, including an increase in people experiencing homelessness, the shuttering of retail businesses, and a dramatic increase in overdoses related to fentanyl have fueled negative perceptions and feelings of insecurity and discomfort for people accessing Third Avenue.

Solving this fundamental need in Seattle requires a multipronged approach that includes investments in law enforcement and public health, as well as the built

environment. The panelists in this study focused their recommendations on adjustments that can be made to the built environment to enhance the pedestrian experience and support economic activity. Strategies for enhancing public health and law enforcement are beyond the scope of this study, but the panel acknowledges the broader importance of these issues for the revitalization of Third Avenue.



## TOWARDS A REVITALIZED THIRD AVENUE

Recognizing Third Avenue's unique characteristics and regional importance, the panel proposed a vision for the corridor. This vision articulates an aspirational future state that builds on Third Avenue's strengths while acknowledging areas for improvement. The panel's vision turns the corridor into an inclusive transit hub where residents and visitors come to experience the diversity and richness of all that Seattle—and its neighborhoods—have to offer.

### Third Avenue Vision

*Third Avenue will be a welcoming front door to our city that connects neighborhoods and serves residents, workers, tourists, and businesses. It will be safe, well-lit, attractive, and characterized by unique transit nodes and multimodal connections.*

### Transit Nodes

As the city and other stakeholders look to make improvements along Third Avenue, it will be important to focus efforts in specific areas that provide critical transit connections and access to civic destinations. This approach will help establish a framework for channeling limited resources into a few key places along Third Avenue's nearly 2-mile length.

The panel identified twelve nodes where Third Avenue intersects with important east-west cross streets. These intersections include Denny Way, Vine Street, Bell Street, Virginia Street, Pine Street, Pike Street, Union Street, University Street, Seneca Street, James Street, Yesler Way, and South Jackson Street.

Of the twelve intersections, the panel highlighted four nodes of particular importance that should be the focus of the City's efforts in the short term. They include:

**Pike Street.** The Pike Street and Third Avenue intersection connects to the city's most important shopping and tourist destinations, including Westlake and Pike Place Market. This node includes Westlake Station for the Link light rail.

**University Street.** The University Street and Third Avenue intersection connects to the city's art institutions including Benaroya Hall and the Seattle Art Museum. This node also includes University Street Station for the Link light rail.

**James Street.** The James Street and Third Avenue intersection connects to Pioneer Square (and corresponding light rail station), as well as the King County Civic Campus, where planning is underway to transform eight blocks from single use government functions to mixed-use, mixed-income, multigenerational urban neighborhood with thousands of new homes and opportunities for large and small business.

**Jackson Street.** While technically outside of the study area, the panel identified Jackson Street and Third Avenue South as an important node because of its connections to King Street Station, Union Station, and the International District/Chinatown Station. As the region's most transit rich neighborhood, this area is inextricably linked to the performance of the corridor as a whole.



Aerial view of downtown Seattle and Third Avenue illustrating the 12 nodes identified by the panel where Third Avenue intersects with important east-west cross streets.

Also highlighted are the four nodes the panel recommends as the priority focus for short term efforts.

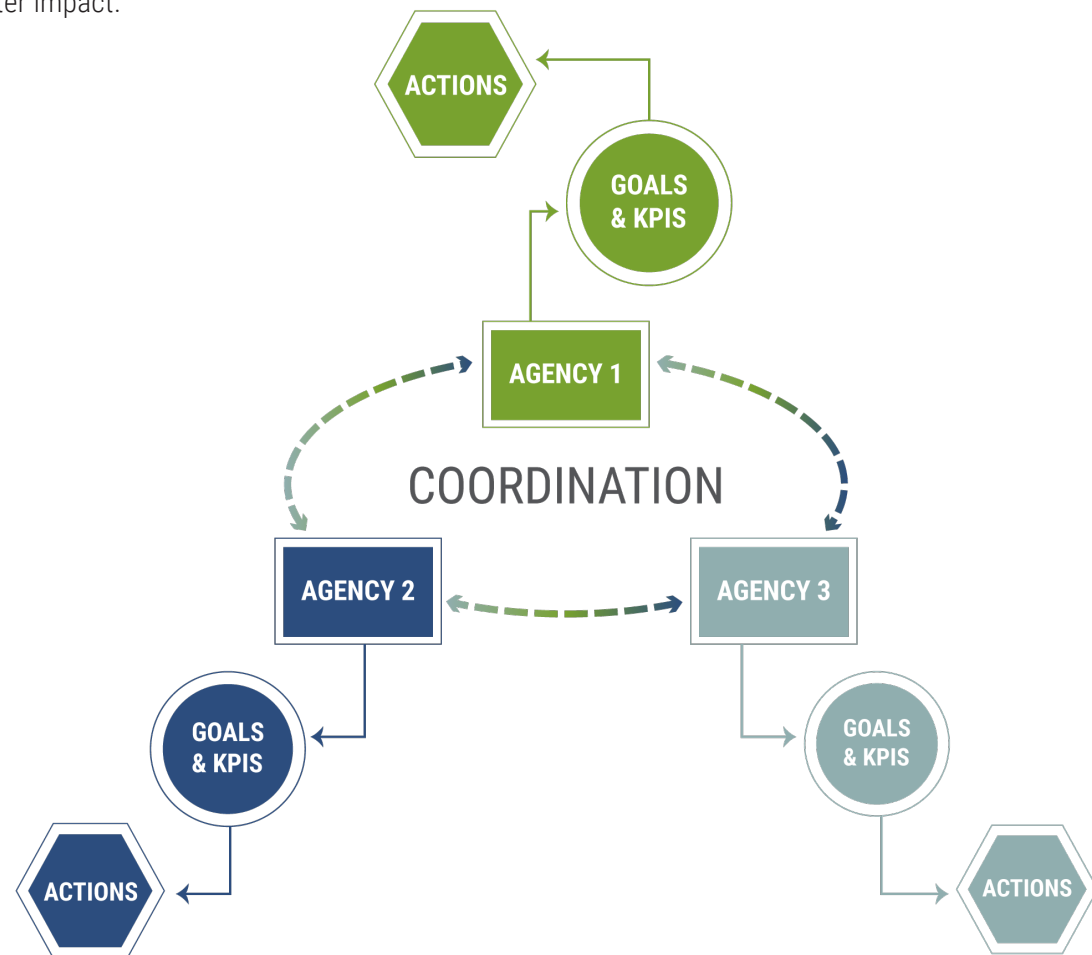
Map created and provided by panelist Dave Cutler, Northwest Studios.

# ALIGNMENT

The successful execution of the Third Avenue vision hinges on the alignment of stakeholders and public agencies around a shared set of goals. If implemented successfully, these goals will provide a unifying framework around which public, private, and non-profit entities can organize and advance rapid change for Third Avenue.

Despite there being frequent and effective coordination among these groups today, progress has been hindered by a lack of shared priorities. Each organization is driven by its own vision, goals, and metrics for success, which has led to disjointed outcomes along Third Avenue. However, through aligned priorities and a commitment to action, agencies and key stakeholders have an opportunity to effect more change together than would be possible if they acted alone.

The panel proposes that Third Avenue stakeholders align around four priority areas: **activations and programming; infrastructure and maintenance; communications; and policy.** Striking a balance between lofty and tactical, these categories offer enough structure to motivate action and accountability while affording the agencies flexibility for creativity and innovation. They also represent areas in which many of the organizations are already operating, allowing stakeholder groups to build on efforts they already have underway while facilitating better coordination and greater impact.



## Activations and Programming

Includes both small, short-term activations and large-scale programs and events. These events might take the form of temporary (or permanent) art installations, free concerts, festivals, pop-up cafes, food vendors, activities tailored to children, and more. Regardless of the size or duration, activations should celebrate Third Avenue’s distinct character and the individuals, businesses, and organizations that make it a unique part of downtown. Programming should occur on a consistent basis to create an ongoing buzz of activity in the neighborhood.

## Infrastructure and Maintenance

Includes the development and upkeep of the physical spaces and equipment along Third Avenue. This category includes private and publicly owned spaces and physical elements like sidewalks and frontages, as well as transit infrastructure, bus shelters, benches, signage, elevators, escalators, wayfinding and more. Efforts in this category should focus on the maintenance and improvement of existing infrastructure as well as the consideration of new infrastructure to improve the pedestrian experience. The public and private sectors should work together to ensure that all infrastructure in the corridor is clean and functional and contributes to the broader Third Avenue vision.

While these priorities provide distinct “buckets” for organizing and accelerating action, it’s important to note that there is significant overlap between the categories. To achieve the desired outcomes for Third Avenue, stakeholders will need to mobilize coordinated strategies that cut across all four areas.

## Communications

Communications mainly include externally distributed marketing, branding, and storytelling about Third Avenue. Third Avenue should have a distinct identity and associated brand that marks it as a separate, special place from other parts of downtown Seattle. This brand could be represented in physical infrastructure, such as wayfinding and banners, and should serve as a platform for sharing a positive narrative about the corridor. Communications are essential for changing negative perceptions about Third Avenue as well as advertising events and programming that may be happening in the neighborhood.

## Policy

Policy and governance structures will ensure that Third Avenue stakeholders have sufficient political, financial, and people capital to successfully implement the vision. Policy changes will likely need to occur across multiple city departments and agencies to facilitate the desired change in the corridor. This category will focus on identifying champions, building governance structures, and procuring resources to initiate and advance change along the corridor.

## GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Both short and long-term actions are needed to address the current conditions on Third Avenue and realize the vision of a safe and vibrant community. The short-term (over the next two years) will be characterized by alignment among the stakeholder groups and rapid deployment of shared funding and resources to prepare Third Avenue for a wave of international visitors arriving for the Men's World Cup. In the long-term, City Staff and stakeholders should establish a governing authority (such as a public development authority) that can facilitate ongoing investments, programming, and activity in the neighborhood.

### Short Term

In the short term (over the next two years) stakeholder agencies including the DSA, Metro, Sound Transit, and city agencies, should stand up a pilot program that will pool resources and staffing to execute immediate improvements at all transit nodes, with special focus on the four priority nodes (Pike, University, Yesler, and Jackson). These improvements include tactical streetscape improvements and consistent programming to prioritize the pedestrian experience, enhance the public realm, and enliven the street. This could be an Interdepartmental Memorandum of Understanding which is expedient to execute.

#### Key Actions in the Short Term include the following:

**Provide regular maintenance for a clean and functional corridor.** Maintenance efforts should build upon the services already being provided by the Metropolitan Improvement District's (MID) Downtown Ambassadors, Metro, and SDOT. These services should include daily cleaning of streets, alleyways, and curbs; graffiti and biohazard removal; maintenance of public infrastructure such as escalators and elevators; and safety, outreach, and hospitality services.

**Improve and replace bus shelters.** The quality of bus shelters on Third Avenue should be enhanced to match those in other parts of the network and better reflect the corridor's role as an essential transit facility and

neighborhood. As an example, Metro recently made significant improvements to the RapidRide stations on Alaskan Way serving routes C and H. These stops include shelter from wind and rain, seating, and digital displays showing real-time bus arrival information.

**Enhance wayfinding with clear signage.** Insufficient and unclear signage on Third Avenue makes navigation difficult for visitors and those unfamiliar with the transit system. Signage should be added throughout the corridor to promote a sense of place and help pedestrians and transit riders locate bus stops, downtown destinations, and other services.

**Illuminate the corridor.** Enhanced lighting serves multiple purposes: it increases safety, aids in geographic orientation, and highlights the identity and history of an area. White lights can be used to brighten street trees and 'up lights' on buildings illuminate and bring attention to Third Avenue's historic character and architecturally significant details. The City's recent installation of festival lighting and white tree lights in City Hall Park is one example of how the simple addition of lighting can greatly improve a public space.

**Declutter the street and remove obsolete infrastructure.** The Third Avenue corridor currently contains signage and infrastructure that is no longer functional or needed, such as broken transit information kiosks. In the past, these structures provided real-time information about bus arrival times, but are no longer in use and are taking up valuable



PICTURED: OXFORD STREET IN LONDON WITH AN EXAMPLE OF ENHANCED STREET LIGHTING

space on the sidewalk. The removal of obsolete infrastructure will improve the pedestrian experience and make room for new beneficial additions, such as art and planters.

**Invite joy through banners, art, and branding.** The thoughtful incorporation of banners and artwork would bring color and life to the corridor. Blank walls, such as those on the parking garage opposite the Macy's building and the downtown post office on the Union Street block could be broken up with murals and art installations. These visual identifiers would enhance the feeling on the street and showcase Third Avenue's unique identity as both a critical transit hub as well as a neighborhood.

**Curate a regular programming schedule in partnership with the community.** A consistent drumbeat of programming including pop-up cafes, outdoor concerts, sport tournaments, festivals, and other events would bring activity to the neighborhood and support retail.

The local community should be engaged to curate the programming schedule, so activations serve the needs and interests of residents and business owners, as well as potential visitors.

**Facilitate accountability and inspire stewardship.** Third Avenue property owners, businesses, and residents should all take an active role in maintaining and enhancing the corridor. The City can encourage a sense of ownership among local leaders by designating block captains. These individuals would serve as champions for specific blocks along the corridor, facilitating communication between the community and local agencies, advocating for resources, and notifying appropriate entities if criminal activity occurs. Informal stewardship is already happening along the corridor, but a formal program organized by the City would go a long way toward developing a sense of community and improving coordination among property owners, businesses, and residents.



PICTURED: NEWLY REOPENED CITY HALL PARK VISITED BY THE PANELISTS ON THEIR WALKING TOUR

#### **Streamline and expedite permitting processes.**

The complexity of the permit submittal and approval process, especially for changing uses along the corridor, has led to delays and other hurdles that frustrate and limit the success of small businesses and retailers. By streamlining these processes, Third Avenue can usher in a wave of new commercial activity as well as events and activations within the corridor.

**Encourage large employers to return to office.** Office workers are a key driver of downtown's economy. The City should continue to explore and invest in strategies and incentive programs, such as those outlined in the Downtown Activation Plan, to attract office workers back to downtown.

**Activate empty lots and vacant spaces.** Large undeveloped sites, including the full block at Third Avenue and Cherry Street owned by Bosa Development and the future site of The Net at Third Avenue and

Marion Street are contributing to a feeling of emptiness along the corridor. While these projects await their groundbreaking dates, the property owners/developers and the City could pursue interim uses to bring activity to these empty areas. Vacant storefronts near Pike/Pine should receive focused attention to promote a thriving retail environment. The City should also continue and expand investments in programs such as Seattle Restored, which fills Seattle's empty storefronts with pop-up shops, art installations, and events.

These changes are essential for creating a thriving Third Avenue corridor that represents the best of the city and is positioned to welcome the international community in summer 2026. Within a short period of time, this shared set of investments will translate to positive outcomes for all who use Third Avenue.

## Long Term

In the long term (2 – 5 years), a governing authority comprised of local stakeholders should be established to advance the Third Avenue vision and expand on the improvements implemented in the first two years. This entity could take the form of a Public Development Authority (PDA), which would manage the everyday coordination and management of activities along the corridor.

A PDA is the preferred governance model for Third Avenue because of its ability to organize stakeholders around a collective vision, collect membership dues, and procure consultants and other services. Representing the voices of businesses, property owners, and residents, the PDA would be uniquely focused on the issues and opportunities of Third Avenue. As a result, the organization could more effectively coordinate with public agencies that manage activities and provide services within the corridor, including the City, Metro, Sound Transit, and others. Other benefits might include entrepreneurial decision-making and expanded opportunities for citizen involvement and leadership.

The PDA's membership would be comprised of individuals and organizations that own property or do business along Third Avenue. As part of the PDA's charter, the organization would define a district boundary that would capture the corridor itself as well as a full block on either side of the street, cross streets, and considerations of frontages on Second and Fourth Avenues.

Organizationally, the PDA could be nested within the Downtown Seattle Association. The PDA, on behalf of the DSA, would collect DSA membership fees plus a small premium from Third Avenue members. DSA membership fees would be transferred back to the DSA, and the PDA would retain remaining revenue to fund amenities and services for the PDA members, such as an additional security force,

### **What is a Public Development Authority?**

A PDA is a quasi-municipal entity formed by a city or county to undertake a specific project or provide certain services. While formed by the city, a PDA is a legally separate entity from a city and is driven by a charter and managed by its own dedicated staff and volunteer council. By law, PDAs have authority to perform any public purpose or function that the creating municipality may undertake directly.

Washington is home to many PDAs, including the Pike Place Market PDA, the Seattle Chinatown/International District PDA, Community Roots Housing (previously Capitol Hill Housing), and others.

neighborhood events and programming, and advocacy. These additional services would augment those already being provided by the MID. This funding structure allows the PDA to increase or decrease financial investment on behalf of the Third Avenue stakeholders, providing the organization with flexibility to address specific challenges.

The PDA would oversee public realm maintenance and improvements, as well as business development, communications and marketing, and advocacy. PDA staff would likely include an executive director, government liaison, communications coordinator, and street activations lead to execute the multifaceted functions of the organization. The PDA could also provide additional security services for the corridor.

A less robust alternative to the PDA model would be a standing subcommittee within the DSA. This group would regularly convene stakeholders to champion issues, opportunities, and investments. This approach is less preferable because it lacks the formal organization, charter, and revenue stream associated with the PDA. However, it could be a good way to initially convene stakeholders on a regular basis to organize and coordinate activities in the next two years.



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## CONCLUSION

A thriving and functioning Third Avenue is essential for the continued growth and success of Seattle and the broader region. Addressing Third Avenue's challenges will require the alignment of public agencies, the private sector, residents, and other stakeholders to advance shared priorities and implement changes to programming, infrastructure, communications, and policy. In the short term (within the next two years), Third Avenue stakeholders should work together on immediate actions that improve the pedestrian experience, promote economic activity, and encourage stewardship. In the long term (over the next five years), the City should formalize a governing body, such as a Public Development Authority, that can implement the vision and oversee all aspects of the corridor's management and programming. Working together, the collaborative efforts of Third Avenue's stakeholders can achieve transformational change in the corridor and for the region at large.



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PICTURED: PANELISTS RIDING THE BUS DOWN THIRD AVENUE DURING THE FORUM

