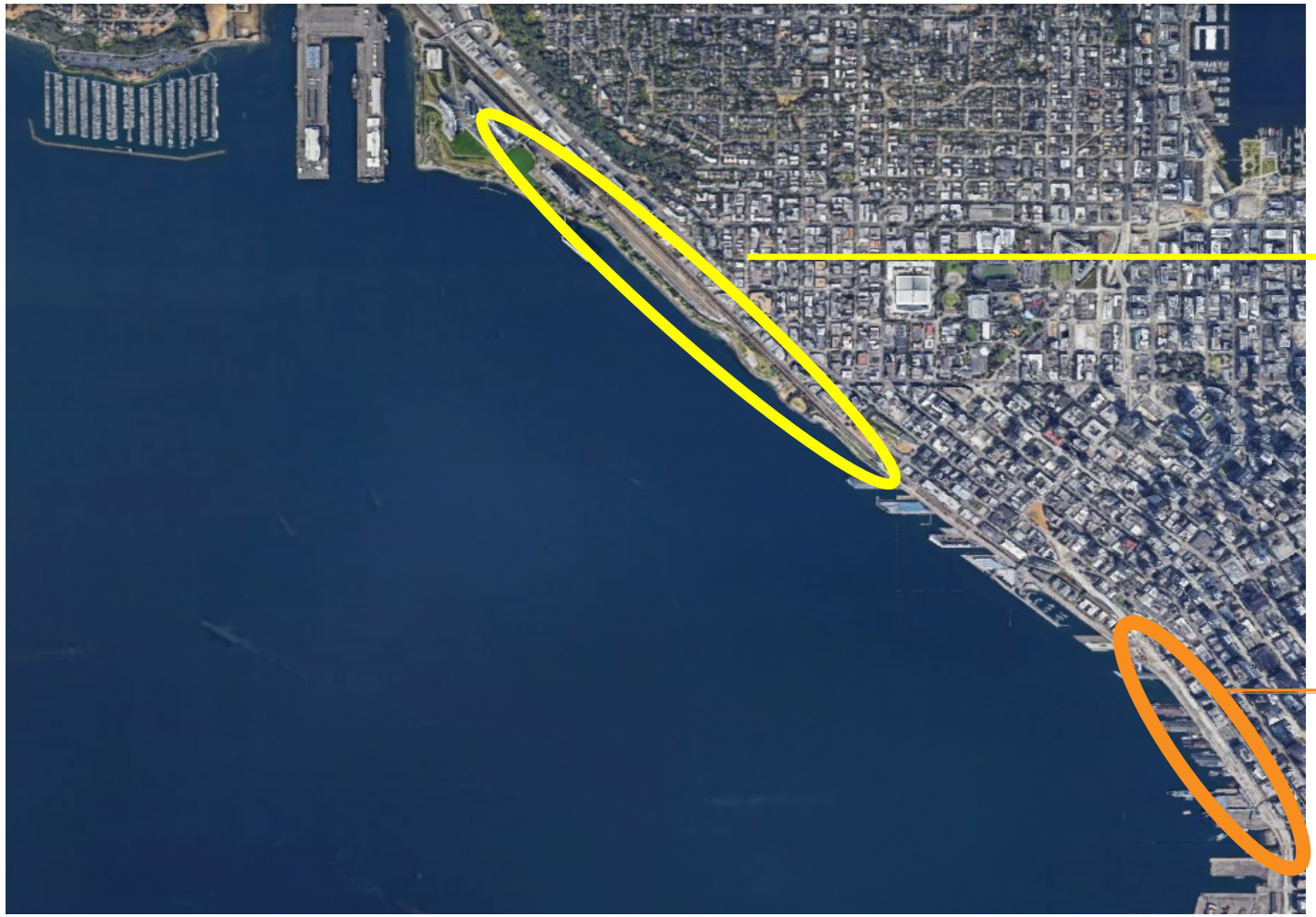
Studio Matthews Waterfront Signage Program

Request for Competition Exemption

Port of Seattle®

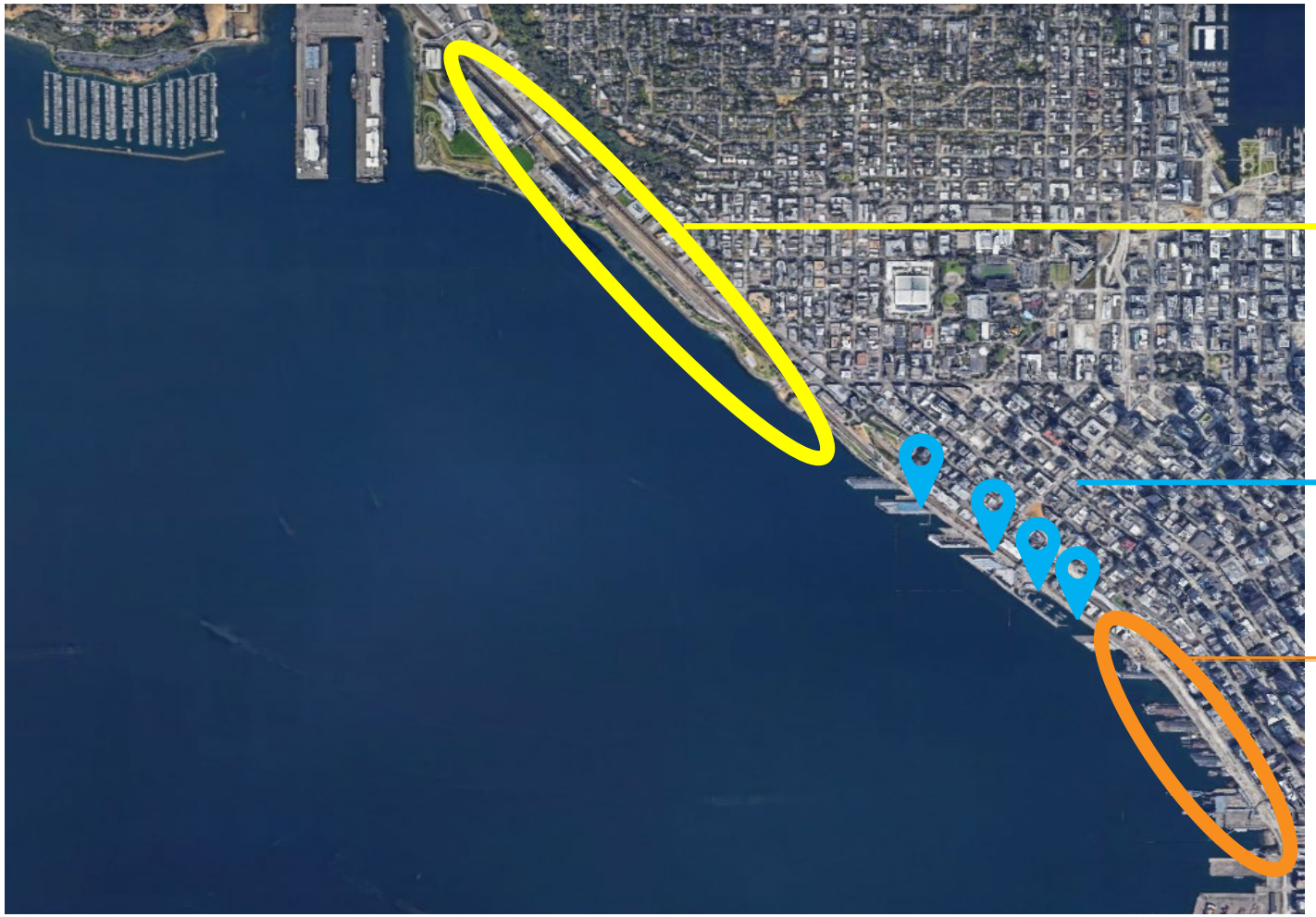
Planned Project Areas



Elliott Bay Connections Project Area

City of Seattle, Aquarium, Ferry Project Area

New and Revised Sign Locations



Elliott Bay Connections Planned Project Area

Port planned project area

City of Seattle, Aquarium, Ferry Planned Project Area

New City of Seattle Interpretive Signs

MOVING ALONG

Transportation routes running north and south along the waterfront long created a kind of "wall" that pedestrians and vehicles traveling east and west had to navigate. The answer? Tunnels.

TRAINS
1887–1986

Nine sets of railroad tracks on trestles over sea water once spanned the area between Western Avenue and the piers, forming noisy and dangerous Railroad Avenue.

ALASKAN WAY
1936–PRESENT

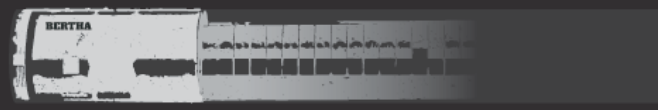
Alaskan Way offered north-south traffic a bypass around the core of downtown. But almost from the start, its popularity further congested the waterfront, giving planners a new puzzle to solve.

ALASKAN WAY VIADUCT
1953–2019

Designed to divert traffic from Alaskan Way, the viaduct cut off the waterfront from the rest of downtown—though it did offer a spectacular view across the Sound to the Olympic Mountains.

SR 99 TUNNEL
2019–PRESENT

Today, north-south vehicle traffic moves under downtown through a two-mile tunnel, opened in 2017, that was bored by a giant machine dubbed "Bertha" in honor of Bertha Landes, Seattle's first female mayor, elected in 1926.



AS VESSELS HAVE EVOLVED, SO HAS THE WATERFRONT

HUMAN-POWERED CRAFT

Canoes and rowboats were the first craft to ply the waters here, and were essential to the social and economic lives of Native people and early non-Native settlers. They could easily land at the shore—no docks necessary.

SAILING SHIPS

Sailing ships required large crews and held more passengers and cargo, so they needed sizable docks for loading and unloading. They also needed to tie up in deep water, so long piers were built to reach them. These piers changed the shape of Elliott Bay's shoreline and eventually led to construction of the seawall. The ships had a social impact, too, by bringing sailors to town.

STEAMSHIPS

Steamships could carry even more than sailing ships, so vast sheds for freight storage were added to the piers. Between the late 19th and early 20th century, a ragtag armada of smaller, privately operated "steamers," later called the Mosquito Fleet, ferried goods and passengers all around a largely roadless Puget Sound. Steamships were powered by coal, which accelerated the development of area mines and coal-handling facilities on the waterfront.

FERRIES

In the 1930s, the Mosquito Fleet was largely replaced by auto-ferry service provided by the private Black Ball Line. The state of Washington eventually purchased Black Ball's operations, and Puget Sound residents have traveled on a state-run system since 1951. Today, it's the largest ferry system in the United States, with 21 vessels (as of 2022) carrying 24 million people annually to 20 ports—including Colman Dock here on the central waterfront. Commuters, tourists, and businesses all depend on the state's "maritime highways."

CONTAINER SHIPS

The container ships that came into use during the 1960s required more space for stacking containers than was available on the central waterfront. As a result, cargo traffic moved south to the Duwamish Waterway, where the Port of Seattle's facilities are today. Container ships have grown exponentially: the Port's Terminal 5 can accommodate enormous container ships—large enough to carry 18,000 20-foot cargo containers.

FROM CANOE TO CONTAINER SHIP

Port Signs to Update