



Transportation

Chinese president's visit could wreak havoc on region's traffic



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Traffic restricted during Xi's visit

From Tuesday morning through Thursday morning, during the Chinese president's visit, these downtown Seattle streets will be closed to traffic: Fourth to Seventh avenues, between Lenora Street and Olive Way. Xi Jinping will be staying at the Westin hotel.



Source: city of Seattle

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The area from Fourth to Seventh avenues and from Lenora Street to Olive Way will be closed during the visit. Pedestrians will have to pass a police security checkpoint to enter the area. Even the South Lake Union streetcar will be affected.

By [Mike Lindblom](#)

Seattle Times transportation reporter

Downtown Seattle streets surrounding the Westin Hotel will close for two days next week to provide security for visiting Chinese President [Xi Jinping](#).

[Xi will land](#) at Paine Field on Tuesday morning and shuttle between the Westin and various sites, including Overlake and Tacoma, before leaving Thursday morning.



All streets from Fourth to Seventh avenues and from Lenora Street to Olive Way will be closed the whole time, announced Scott Kubly, director of the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT).

Those shutdowns will fall especially hard on Sound Transit and Community Transit commuters whose north-end buses customarily pass near the Westin. Transit agencies haven't yet announced detour plans.

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Westlake Station in the Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel will remain open as usual for Link light rail and buses, said Jeff Switzer, spokesman for King County Metro Transit.

However, pedestrians must pass through a police security checkpoint to walk along the affected streets, said Marybeth Turner, SDOT spokeswoman.

James Sedo, a spokesman for the Downtown Seattle Association, said as of Friday afternoon, he had not heard of any businesses closing in the zone around the hotel.

As for motorists, there will be some full-directional closures of highways, said Travis Phelps, spokesman for the state Department of Transportation. But those won't be revealed — not even on overhead freeway information signs — until moments before the motorcade approaches, he said.

Because of the recent boom in the economy and worsening traffic, Phelps expects traffic to take longer to recover from delays caused by motorcades, compared to past visits by U.S. presidents.

“This is where we need to have drivers pay attention all day long,” he said, by checking online traffic maps, news reports and social media such as [@wsdot_traffic](#), which will tweet updates while Xi is on the move.



In addition, drivers on Interstate 405 next week will be adapting to new road stripes that restrict where they can enter the high-occupancy lanes, which become express toll lanes Sept. 27, as well as to unfamiliar toll-system signs.

City officials encourage commuters to ride transit, or park outside the security area and walk.

A Sounders FC soccer match is scheduled Wednesday evening, adding to the congestion downtown.

The SDOT will alter its signal timing and establish an emergency-operations center, Kubly said.

“Seattle is honored to host President Xi and his delegation during his visit to the United States,” said a statement by Mayor Ed Murray. “With an international visit of this stature and the accompanying federal security requirements, we want all travelers to be advised of the impacts to business as usual. Everyone needs to be patient, re-evaluate their commute plans, add in extra travel time, and monitor traffic alerts for the latest information.”

Murray’s update and a collection of online information sources are posted at murray.seattle.gov.

Community Transit, which serves Snohomish County, is concerned not only about its downtown Seattle and university routes, which serve 10,000 daily passengers, but about how the Chinese leader’s travel via Paine Field will affect local lines, including Swift bus rapid transit on Highway 99, said spokesman Martin Munguia. A major bus-maintenance base sits next to the airport, and in

past events, such as union picketing of Boeing, buses needed to leave a half-hour early just to reach their routes, he said.

King County Metro estimates that 20 routes are directly affected near the Westin, and that traffic jams throughout the region will delay other buses, Switzer said. Metro is still working on detour plans and expects to issue rider alerts by Monday.

McGraw Plaza, the downtown terminus for the South Lake Union streetcar, will be closed, so streetcars will go south on Westlake Avenue only as far as Denny Way.

Similar conditions occur downtown the first Friday evening of December, when the Figgy Pudding caroling contest is held next to Westlake Center. But that snarls traffic for only three hours — not two days. Protests and security around the World Trade Organization gathering in November 1999 also blocked streets, as many shoppers and office workers avoided the area.

The Seattle Center Monorail will operate on a reduced schedule Tuesday and Wednesday, departing Westlake Center every 15 minutes instead of every 10 minutes, said marketing director Megan Ching. Riders can also expect a bag check and police at the stations.

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