

# **Hello Tunnel, Goodbye Viaduct**

**Seattle's Tunnel to Viaduct 8K**

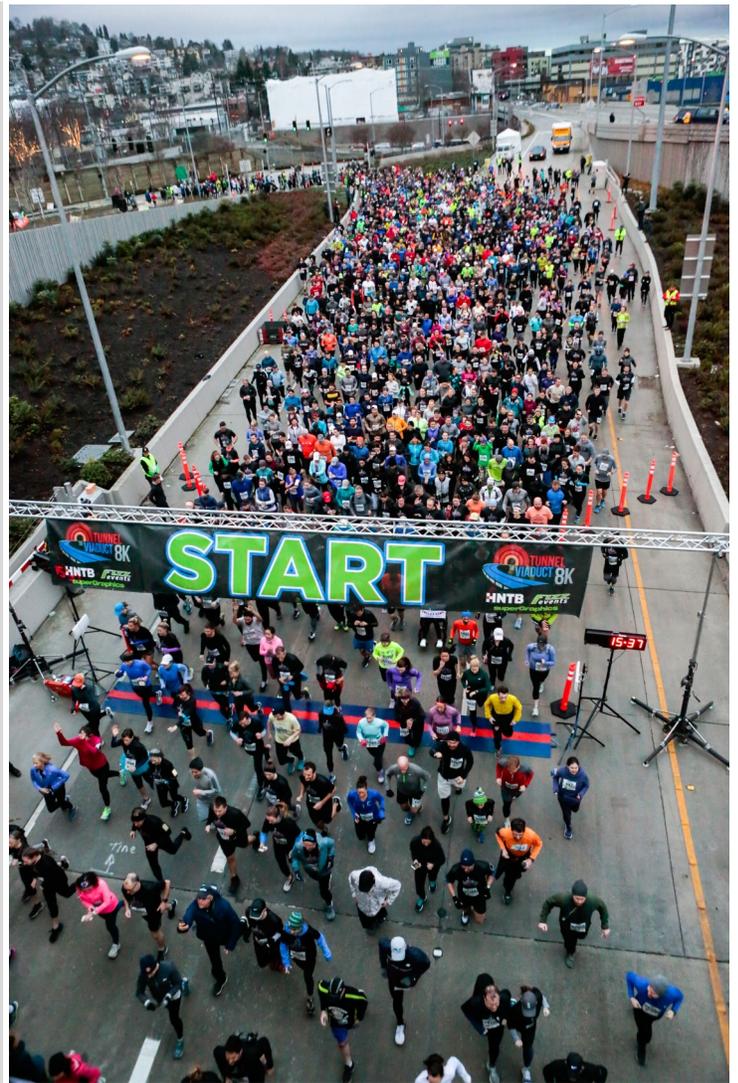
**By Jaren Loranger**

**Race Director – Tunnel to Viaduct 8K, Owner, Fizz Events**

This project started way back in April of 1953, when the first section of Seattle's now iconic Viaduct was complete, connecting the Seattle's north end to the south, providing 100,000 vehicles a day access through the city and countless running races a section of the city to gobble up miles with limited staffing, police and equipment needs. Hundreds of races have used all of part of the viaduct's roadway over the years including the Rock 'n' Roll Marathon, St. Patrick's Day Dash, Seafair Torchlight Run and more. Not only has it been a cheap, easily closable roadway but has always offered the best views of Seattle's skyline and waterfront at the same time – countless participants have captured selfies along this roadway, showing off their soon to be accomplishments to friends and family. In 2001 – the Nisqually Earthquake caused minor damages to the roadway, thus later concluding it vulnerable to collapse in the event of another. Because of this, Seattle and the state considered multiple options, finally settling on a tunnel to reopen the waterfront while providing relief to Seattle's growing traffic constraints.

Enter 2013 – “Bertha” began boring Seattle's new tunnel and would be completed in 2015. Well, so we all thought... Each year multiple running races dubbed their race “the last run on the viaduct” to not only boost participation but because they were convinced, this is it. It wasn't until 2018 (3 years after estimated completion) was there more clarity on the projects timeline. Estimates went from completion in 2015 to 2018 then late 2018, finally Feb 4, 2019 the tunnel opened!

Finally, once a date was locked in to, it was time to discuss how to open it. The state (after the success of the new 520 Floating Bridge opening) settled on a weekend long event to unveil the tunnel and give people one last chance to be on the viaduct. The weekend was set, the new SR 99 Tunnel would open with a running race, followed by a free daytime walk filled with art installations, music and more both through the tunnel and on the viaduct, and then finally the weekend's festivities would end with a bike ride. And that's how it was created, this would be the 99 Step Forward Event featuring the Tunnel to Viaduct 8K Run/Walk and Tunnel Ride.



Focusing on the running race now, as that was Fizz Events part in the event... with every large-scale event, you run into challenges. The first step in the process was actually our first challenge. Immediately the question arose, how do you market something that has never been done before, nobody has seen and won't happen again? We needed to get the word out to the public quickly (The Feb. 4, 2019 date was not settled on until October of 2018) in order to promote this event, while explaining what it is – And that's where the title came from “Tunnel to Viaduct 8K” and the slogan “Hello Tunnel, Goodbye Viaduct.” Our goal – come up with something simple that immediately explains the product, 1st ever run through the new tunnel and LAST run ever on the viaduct.

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After the success of the 520 Bridge opening run (13,000+ participants), WSDOT had lofty goals for this event (22,000 runners, another 60,000 during the free portion and 10,000 cyclist for a total of 92,000 people). We were immediately met with doubters from sponsors to general public, Seattle had never seen a race bigger than 22,000, there was no way this could be achieved they said with only a three month marketing timeframe and a not enjoyable date weather-wise (February in Seattle can be cold, and wet or worse – snow!). We pushed forward nonetheless. Registration opened November 1 with three months to attract participants while finalizing route plans, sponsorships, marketing and more. Thankfully with a strong early marketing push, paired with WSDOT's reach – we had over 1,000 registrants in the first day and 5,000 registrants in the first 5 days. From there, the event started to take off. We had marketing/advertising partnerships with television, radio and print but social media helped spread the word. By the second week, there were over 10,000 "interested" people following the Facebook event page and over 70,000 viewing it weekly. Social media quickly created an extremely social experience for attendees, friends, family and interested parties and

those individuals quickly helped us shape our marketing ideas. People were sharing their favorite race pictures, stories of times on the viaduct and excitement to see something (the new tunnel) that was delayed to a point people questioned would it happen.

Week after week, month after month, registrations climbed and climbed. We reached our 22,000-attendee goal by early January with our final registrant numbers over 29,000 registrants! The end result... The LARGEST race in Seattle's history and top 7 single distance races (in terms of size) in the country! Was everything easy? Nope. Were there challenges throughout? Of Course! We definitely aren't saying, "build a tunnel and participants will come." More importantly, with a solid product and the proper marketing, you can reach your goals.

**Happy Running!**  
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