

CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION ITEM

SUBJECT:

East Link: Continued discussion of alignment alternatives and City Council preferences

STAFF CONTACT:

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FISCAL IMPACT:

N/A

POLICY ISSUES:

The Bellevue Council has adopted a body of light rail policy (including light rail best practices policies adopted by Council in August 2008, other Comprehensive Plan policies, and Council interest statements) that articulates community values related to the development of light rail in Bellevue. This body of policy provides guidance and support for light rail transit investment in Bellevue and is complementary to the information provided in the East Link Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

The City Council has articulated its preferences and strong opinions regarding the East Link project through its communications to Sound Transit, amendments to the Comprehensive Plan, and other actions. These City actions provide the basis for addressing project issues cooperatively with Sound Transit.

DIRECTION NEEDED FROM COUNCIL:

- Action
- Discussion
- Information

The Sound Transit Board and Bellevue Council jointly met on February 11 to review and discuss analysis of four new downtown Bellevue (Segment C) alternatives. The City Council held additional discussions of the four new downtown Bellevue (Segment C) and south Bellevue (Segment B) light rail alignment and station location alternatives on February 16 and 22 and March 1. On March 1, Council directed staff to prepare a letter that would articulate the Council's position on a preferred B alignment to Sound Transit for Council discussion and consideration on March 8. A draft letter has been provided to Council for review and will be included in the Desk Packet for March 8.

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS:

On February 23, 2009 the Council selected a preferred East Link alignment and recommended it to the Sound Transit Board of Directors for its consideration. This decision was made after several months of intense Council deliberation and extensive public input, and after two years of detailed project work and a year of policy deliberation through the Bellevue Light Rail Best

Practices effort. On May 14, 2009 the Sound Transit Board of Directors identified a preferred alternative for the East Link project. This preference, and all other alternatives that have been studied to date, will continue to be evaluated in the East Link Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) that is expected to be complete in late 2010. Concurrently, the preferred alternative is being advanced through preliminary engineering, which is also expected to be complete by late 2010.

The Sound Transit Board of Directors' motion of May 2009 identifying their preferred alternative includes several components that require City action by early 2010. For the downtown Bellevue segment, the City is expected to:

- Develop a financing plan with Sound Transit for a downtown tunnel alternative;
- Join Sound Transit in a peer review of the downtown at-grade alternative (C4A couplet).

In October and November briefings, Sound Transit introduced additional downtown alternatives developed in response to revised financial forecasts and based on input from the at-grade peer review panel and the value analysis workshop. These new alternatives were a shorter downtown tunnel (C9T) and two shorter at-grade options (C9A and C11A), all exiting downtown and crossing I-405 at NE 6th Street. In early December, Council requested that Sound Transit also evaluate an elevated option along 114th Avenue Northeast (C14E). In mid-December, the Sound Transit Board directed staff to conduct additional evaluation of these four alternatives and articulated their intent to reconsider the downtown Bellevue preferred alternative by spring 2010. On January 25, Council approved sending a letter to Sound Transit requesting that they evaluate a new B7 modified option.

In December and January, Sound Transit and City staff developed the *Downtown Bellevue Light Rail Alternatives Concept Design Report*. This effort included refining the alternatives, defining evaluation criteria, developing visual simulations and technical data, and compiling the report.

On February 11, the Sound Transit Board and the Bellevue City Council held a joint meeting to review and discuss the analysis contained in the *Downtown Bellevue Light Rail Alternatives Concept Design Report*.

On February 16, the City Council reviewed the February 11 presentation and requested additional detail on traffic and ridership related issues for the C segment alternatives. Additionally, Council discussed south Bellevue issues and requested clarification of several routing and environmental issues. Bellevue staff discussed further analysis of these issues for both the B and C segments on February 22. Council raised numerous detailed questions at this meeting.

East Link Schedule:

Council has asked for a schedule of East Link decisions and discussions. Below is a tentative schedule based on information available at this time for Council discussion.

March	Description/Activity
3/8	Follow up study session to consider letter to ST regarding B segment
3/15	Council presentation/discussion of C segment, public comment opportunity and discussion of Council recommendation for C segment

April	
4/5	Continued Council discussion of C segment and Council recommendation
4/8	Sound Transit Capital Projects Committee
4/22	Tentative date for Sound Transit Board decision on preferred option for C segment