

Bellevue and Light Rail

What's happening now?

On July 24, the Sound Transit Board voted to place a Sound Transit 2 mass transit package on the November ballot. The measure will pass if more than 50 percent (a simple majority) of the voters in the Sound Transit district, which includes urban areas in King, Pierce and Snohomish counties, approve it. Currently, Sound Transit is preparing a draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) for the project. It's scheduled for release in late fall or winter 2008.

Money raised from a proposed 0.5 percent sales tax increase would pay for East Link – the extension of light rail from Seattle east over Interstate 90, through Bellevue and on to the Overlake Transit Center in Redmond by 2021. It would also extend light rail north to Northgate by 2020 and to Lynnwood and Federal Way by 2023. The package also calls for expansion of Sound Transit's express bus service, including a State Route 520 bus rapid transit system, expansion of Sounder commuter rail service and "partnership funding" for Eastside passenger rail on existing freight tracks.

Is this the same package that went before voters last year?

No. The main difference between the 2007 "Roads and Transit" package and the 2008 version is that last year's ballot measure included significant highway and bridge improvements, in addition to transit, while this year's Sound Transit 2 proposal calls for mass transit improvements only. Other differences between the two plans are cost, the number of miles of light rail line that would be added, and completion dates.

The 2008 plan includes 34 miles of new light rail line east to Overlake, north to Lynnwood and south to Federal Way, 100,000 hours of immediate regional express bus service with additional investments over time, bus rapid transit on SR 520, a 65 percent increase in Sounder commuter rail service, and planning for commuter rail service on the former Burlington Northern Santa Fe rail corridor.

What would the package cost me?

Agency officials estimate Sound Transit 2 will cost \$9.1 billion in 2007 dollars, or a total of \$17.9 billion through 2023, when inflation, operations, maintenance, reserves and debt service are included. It would be paid for through a 0.5 percent increase in the local sales tax over the next 15 years. That translates to an additional 5 cents on a \$10 purchase, or about \$69 dollars a year for each adult.

What would be impact of the measure on Bellevue?

The Sound Transit 2 package includes a light rail line in Bellevue. A light rail line between downtown Seattle and the SeaTac Airport is currently under construction. The proposed "East Link" would connect to that central line, running east from downtown Seattle along Interstate 90 to Bellevue, turning north to downtown and east through the Bel-Red area to Redmond.

The East Link line would have four to eight stations in Bellevue. A route through Bellevue has not been determined yet.

When would the system be built?

Construction on East Link light rail would begin in 2013. The Seattle to downtown Bellevue section would open in 2020; the downtown Bellevue to Overlake Transit Center section would open in 2021.

Who's in charge of planning for the proposed light rail line?

Sound Transit is the lead planning agency. The agency is governed by an appointed board made up of elected officials from King, Pierce and Snohomish counties.

Is Bellevue involved in the planning process in any way?

Bellevue is working closely with Sound Transit on the environmental impact statement and other planning components.

In addition, the City Council in 2007 appointed a Light Rail Best Practices Committee to study how well light rail systems work in other North American cities, how best practices from those cities can be applied in Bellevue and what actions the city should take to implement them. The year-long effort, which included extensive public involvement, was designed to assist the community and the Council in evaluating and planning for a proposed light rail system in Bellevue. The effort resulted in a report issued in June 2008. After the Planning Commission reviewed the report, it held a public hearing on proposed changes to the city's Comprehensive Plan and issued recommendations to the City Council. On Aug. 4, the Council voted to amend parts of the Comprehensive Plan related to light rail.

What is Bellevue's position on light rail?

The City Council has not taken a position on the Sound Transit 2 ballot measure yet. Previously, the City Council has endorsed light rail as the preferred option for high-capacity transit along the Interstate 90 corridor (http://www.bellevuewa.gov/pdf/Light_Rail_Endorsement.pdf). The Council also has supported high-capacity transit as a major component of the city's transportation and land-use strategy (http://www.bellevuewa.gov/pdf/HCT_Interest_Statement.pdf).

Where can I get more information about the Sound Transit 2 measure?

Sound Transit presentation on East Link to Bellevue City Council (June 2008):

http://www.bellevuewa.gov/pdf/Transportation/east_link_project_update.pdf

Light Rail Best Practices Final Report:

http://www.bellevuewa.gov/light_rail_best_practices_info.htm

Information on East Link, including maps of proposed routes:

<http://www.soundtransit.org/x3245.xml>

Map of East Link project area:

http://www.soundtransit.org/documents/pdf/projects/eastlink/ELProject_Area.pdf

How can I make my views known?

The Bellevue City Council wants to know what you think about the proposed light rail route in Bellevue. To tell them, use the online comment form at <http://www.bellevuewa.gov/light-rail-comment.htm> and an e-mail will be sent to all seven Council members. You can also telephone the Council at 425-452-7810, or write to City Council, 450 110th Ave. N.E., P.O. Box 90012, Bellevue, WA 98009. Questions and comments for Sound Transit may be e-mailed to main@soundtransit.org, phoned in to 206-398-5000, or mailed to Sound Transit, 401 S. Jackson St., Seattle, WA 98104.