



MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 1, 2009

TO: Transportation Commission

FROM: Maria Koengeter, Senior Planner
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SUBJECT: East Link Project Update

Purpose

This is an informational briefing to update the Commission on the status of the East Link Project. Staff will present an overview of the East Link Project timeline and the city's concurrent work planning efforts. No action is requested.

Background

The East Link light rail transit project will extend light rail from Downtown Seattle via I-90 to downtown Bellevue, Overlake, and downtown Redmond. The East Link extension will connect to the Central Link line that is under construction in Seattle to SeaTac airport and to planned extensions north to Lynnwood and south to Federal Way.

The East Link Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) was released on December 12, 2008, beginning a 75-day public comment period. Sound Transit held a series of open houses, solicited comments on-line and in writing, and held numerous meetings with interested groups to learn about public preferences for the East Link routing. The Bellevue City Council simultaneously undertook a process of reviewing the technical information provided in the DEIS, reviewing city policy direction for the development of light rail in Bellevue, and considering public input provided at Sound Transit and City Council public hearings to develop an alignment recommendation. Commission received a briefing on the DEIS findings in January 2009, and Commissioners were encouraged to participate in Sound Transit's and the City Council's public processes for developing a recommendation on a preferred alignment. The City Council submitted an alignment recommendation to the Sound Transit Board in February 2009, and Commission received a memo summarizing this action in March.

On May 14, the Sound Transit Board passed a motion (attached, with map) identifying the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) for light rail routes and stations for the East Link Project Final EIS. At the Commission meeting the same evening, Goran Sparrman, Transportation Department Director, provided a verbal overview of the Board's action earlier that day. The LPA and all of the other alternatives will continue to be evaluated in the East Link FEIS that is expected to be complete in late summer 2010.

Concurrently, the LPA will be advanced through preliminary engineering, which is also expected to be complete by summer 2010.

The Sound Transit Board's May 14 motion included several action items for the city, including:

- Join Sound Transit in a peer review of the downtown at-grade alternative (C4A Couplet);
- Develop a financing plan with Sound Transit for the cost increment of the downtown tunnel alternative (C3T 108th Tunnel);
- Jointly evaluate a south Bellevue B3 side running alternative (modified 112th Bypass Alternative), which is consistent with the Council's preference; and
- Consider an alternative 124th station design.

The City Council has consistently expressed a strong interest in actively participating in the development of the East Link Project. This interest has been expressed in communications to the Sound Transit Board, in adopted policies, and in the city's actions, such as undertaking the Bel-Red Subarea Plan Update and the Light Rail Best Practices Project in anticipation of light rail. These actions provide the basis for addressing project issues cooperatively with Sound Transit. Addressing the numerous and complex issues inherent in the East Link Project will require significant staff resources, supplemented by consultant expertise. Staff has developed a proposed approach to the city's East Link work program to respond to the Sound Transit Board direction and the city's interests. At the July 9 Commission meeting, staff will present an overview of the East Link Project timeline and the city's concurrent work planning efforts.

Next Steps

Staff will provide periodic updates on the East Link Project progress and the city's work program efforts.

SOUND TRANSIT

MOTION NO. M2009- 41

A motion of the Board of the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority identifying the preferred light rail routes and stations for the East Link Light Rail Project Final Environmental Impact Statement.

Background:

In November 2008, voters approved funding for the East Link project to provide light rail service between Seattle, Mercer Island, Bellevue, and the Overlake Transit Center in Redmond. The East Link Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) evaluates the impacts of constructing and operating light rail service from Seattle to the Overlake Transit Center, and the EIS also studies alignments from the Overlake Transit Center to downtown Redmond.

The evaluation of alternative route alignments, stations locations, and light-rail maintenance facility locations is being conducted in cooperation with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). Before committing federal funds to the East Link project, the FTA is required to undertake environmental review in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). As the public agency proposing the East Link project, Sound Transit is required to comply with the Washington State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA). The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is also a SEPA co-lead agency. The FTA, as the federal lead agency under NEPA, and Sound Transit, as the state lead agency under SEPA, have determined that alternative route alignments and station locations may have probable significant adverse environmental impacts. To satisfy both NEPA and SEPA requirements, the agencies are preparing a combined NEPA/SEPA environmental impact statement for the project.

Sound Transit, FTA, and WSDOT published a Draft EIS for the project on December 12, 2008. The 75-day comment period closed on February 25, 2009. To ensure adequate public and agency input, the comment period included five informational open house events. Public hearings were held at each open house event. The Board received copies of each of the 765 comments submitted during the comment period.

At its January 15, 2009 meeting, the Sound Transit Board reviewed the Draft EIS analysis of the potential environmental impacts, mitigation measures, and project benefits associated with the light-rail route alternatives. Sound Transit staff summarized the Draft EIS public and agency comments at the March 26, 2009 Board meeting. At the April 9, 2009 Board meeting, representatives from the cities of Bellevue, Mercer Island, and Redmond each made comments and recommendations regarding the alignments under consideration. On April 23, 2009 staff answered questions from the Board regarding the alignment alternatives. The Board also received public testimony at the March and April meetings.

NEPA requires that Sound Transit identify its preferred alternative in the Final EIS. Identification of the preferred alternative will also enable Sound Transit to report a "Locally Preferred Alternative" to the FTA, pursuant to the requirements of 23 CFR 771.123.

The identification of a preferred alternative for the Final EIS is a statement of the Board's current intent regarding the East Link Project based on the Board's review of the East Link Draft EIS, public comments from interested citizens, agencies, tribes and organizations, and other information developed to date; it is not a final decision. The Board will make a final decision on the East Link Project, including the route and station locations, after publication of the Final EIS.

Motion:

It is hereby moved by the Board of the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority as follows:

- Sound Transit staff will work with the City of Bellevue to identify additional external funding sources that the Sound Transit Board may consider prior to the completion of the Final EIS. A tunnel option could

offer higher ridership than the at-grade or elevated alternatives evaluated in the Draft EIS. However, a tunnel alternative is not financially feasible at this time without additional funding sources. Any additional funding sources should be formally identified by the City of Bellevue within one month after the completion of the 15% design cost-estimates, which Sound Transit anticipates to be completed in early 2010. The Board also requests interim reports from Sound Transit staff and the City of Bellevue. The reports should identify a list of potential additional funding sources by the third quarter of 2009, and state the potential value of such sources by the fourth quarter of 2009.

- Sound Transit encourages transit oriented development and design in the Bel-Red and Overlake neighborhood areas where transit supportive development is minimal or nonexistent. The regional cost to serve these areas is substantial, and light rail will play an important role in supporting the redevelopment planned by the cities of Bellevue and Redmond. Staff will explore opportunities for shared right-of-way construction and reconstruction, cities' dedication of right-of-way, and public-private partnerships, as funding sources for the regional investment. Additionally, staff will review the cities' station area planning processes for transit supportive facilities and design, reduced parking requirements and the implementation of transit overlay districts needed to ensure high levels of transit ridership.
- The preferred alternative for the Final East Link EIS is identified below:

Segment A

There is one route alternative between downtown Seattle and Bellevue. The route begins in the existing Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel and connects to the Central Link light rail system at the Chinatown/International District Station. It enters I-90 via the existing D2 roadway, a high occupancy vehicle (HOV) ramp between downtown Seattle and Rainier Avenue. The route is in the center reversible lanes of I-90 across Lake Washington and Mercer Island.

The preferred alternative for the D2 Roadway is:

- Joint bus-light rail operations

The preferred alternative for the Mercer Island station west entrance is at:

- 77th Avenue SE

A design option to study is:

- Evaluating proposed partnerships by the City of Mercer Island for new park-and-ride capacity in or near the Mercer Island Town Center

Segment B: I-90 to Downtown Bellevue:

The preferred alternative for Segment B is:

- Alternative B3: 112th SE Bypass

Design modifications to incorporate with B3 subject to further evaluation are:

- Touching down to an at-grade profile to the east of Bellevue Way south of the South Bellevue station
- At-grade station on the existing Park-and-Ride property with an approximately 1400 stall garage and mitigation necessary to restore traffic operations to the no-build condition
- At-grade along the east side of Bellevue Way and 112th Avenue SE
- Following the elevated B3 alignment behind the commercial structures on 112th Avenue SE as evaluated in the Draft EIS but with slight modifications when prudent to minimize property impacts.

The preferred alternative at Bellevue Way is:

- An elevated exit of the center roadway and preservation of the HOV direct access for south Bellevue Way to west I-90 and east I-90 to north Bellevue Way.

Segment C: Downtown Bellevue to Overlake Hospital

The preferred alternative in Segment C is:

- Alternative C4-A: Couplet with the Ashwood/Hospital Station located on the east side of I-405.

The Board recognizes the City of Bellevue's concern regarding potential traffic impacts with the C4-A: Couplet and directs staff to work the City of Bellevue to:

- Conduct a peer review of the effects on traffic and light rail operations of the C4-A alternative and consider sensitivity analyses of reasonably foreseeable changes over time such as increases in light rail frequency. If the City of Bellevue proceeds with current plans to perform a separate traffic analysis of C4-A, conduct a peer review of the City's analysis as well.
- Update in consultation with the Puget Sound Regional Council and the City of Bellevue, the underlying land use forecasts in the traffic analysis to reflect recently adopted plans in the adjacent Bel-Red subarea.

Additionally, the Board will give future consideration to a tunnel as the preferred alternative if additional funding sources are identified so that a tunnel alternative becomes financially feasible. The Board directs further evaluation on a tunnel alternative in parallel with efforts in cooperation with the City of Bellevue to identify additional funding. The tunnel alternative for further evaluation and future consideration as preferred is:

- Alternative C3-T: 108th NE Tunnel with the south tunnel portal at the southeast corner of 112th Avenue NE and Main Street (Red Lion site) and the Ashwood/Hospital Station located on the east side of I-405.

The Board furthermore recognizes the interest of the City of Bellevue in Alternative C2-T: 106th NE Tunnel. While C2-T is not the preferred tunnel alternative, the Board directs limited additional review to either revise or validate the draft EIS conclusion that C2-T would be more expensive than C3-T and that C2-T would have the potential for substantial construction impacts.

Specifically, the Board directs responses to the following questions posed by the City of Bellevue:

- Which parts of C2T and C3T are cut and cover construction and can any part of C2T be a bored tunnel?
- Could operational and construction impacts to the Bellevue Transit Center associated with the C2T alignment be minimized, for example, by staging the construction of the station at the current transit center?
- What mitigation measures can be implemented to address access impacts identified in the C2T option to the Meydenbauer Center and the Bravern?
- What are the cut and cover impacts associated with the C3T option at 108th Ave NE and NE 12th?
- What are the operational impacts to the Bellevue Transit center of the cut and cover station construction of the C3T alignment?
- What are the operational impacts on 108th and NE 12th due to the cut and cover and aerial construction associated with the C3T tunnel?
- How will mitigation for visual and access impacts to neighborhoods along NE 12th be achieved for C3T?
- Is the proposed at-grade crossing of the C3T option at 116th compatible with the recently adopted land use plans for the Bel Red corridor and the hospital district and how does it affect emergency vehicle access to the hospitals?
- How will accessibility to the C3T Ashwood/Hospital station located over I-405 or on the east side of 405 be accommodated (i.e. pick up and drop off)?

- How will the risks associated with building the Ashwood/Hospital station over I-405 be taken into account in costing this option?

A design option to study with both C3-T and C4-A is:

- Avoiding the full displacement of the Commons Medical Building, and
- Grade separating the light rail crossing of 116th Avenue and providing a pedestrian overpass to the Overlake Hospital Campus from the Ashwood/Hospital Station.

Segment D: Downtown Bellevue to Overlake Transit Center

The preferred alternative in Segment D is:

- Alternative D2-A: NE 16th At-Grade with both the 124th and 130th stations advanced for further design.

A design modification to incorporate with D2A subject to further evaluation is:

- Locating the D2-A alternative to the north rather than south side of NE 24th Street.

A design option to study with D2A is:

- Designing the 124th station as a retained cut and grade separating the intersection of 120th Avenue and 124th Avenue and pursue public/private partnerships if this becomes the preferred alternative.

Segment E: Overlake Transit Center to Downtown Redmond

The preferred alternative in Segment E is:

- Alternative E2: Marymoor

A design option to incorporate with E2 subject to further evaluation is:

- Terminating the Alternative at the Redmond Town Center station and shifting the station farther west to reduce the walking distance to the Redmond Transit Center and park and ride.

Maintenance Facility

The Board does not have a preferred maintenance facility location at this time.

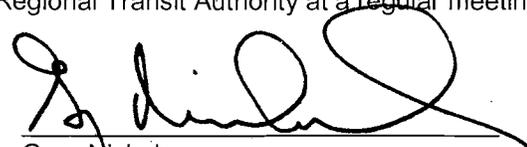
This motion also authorizes staff to complete the Final East Link EIS, using the preferred alternative identified above and the other alternatives in the Draft EIS. The Board will not make a final decision on the project to be built until after completion of the Final EIS, which is anticipated to be published in 2010.

APPROVED by the Board of the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority at a regular meeting thereof held on May 14, 2009.

ATTEST:



Marcia Walker
Board Administrator



Greg Nickels
Board Chair



City Limits

East Link Light Rail Alternatives

- East Link Segment
- Station

Route Profile

- At-Grade
- Elevated
- Tunnel
- Retained Cut

Central Link Light Rail

- Central Link Alignment and Station
- Central Link Extension

Scale: 0 0.5 1 Mile

East Link Project Preferred Alternatives
East Link Project