

SOUND TRANSIT

SUBSTITUTE MOTION NO. M2009- 41

**Prepared by Sound Transit Boardmembers:
Mary-Alyce Burleigh, Kirkland Councilmember
Fred Butler, Issaquah Deputy Council President
John Marchione, Redmond Mayor**

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.

Additionally, the Board directs further evaluation on the preservation of the HOV direct access for east I-90 to north Bellevue Way in coordination with the R-8A, I-90 Two-Way Transit and HOV Access Project. The Board directs staff to work with WSDOT to further evaluate the cost of preserving this option and the potential for efficiencies by combining some or all of the interchange modifications in the construction of R-8A Stage 2 or 3. Staff should also evaluate whether potential savings in other portions of the R-8A project could partially offset the cost of preserving east to north HOV access.

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.

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.

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 dependent upon funding from the developer of the station area and/or the City of Bellevue.

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 _____.

ATTEST:

Greg Nickels
Board Chair

Marcia Walker
Board Administrator