

North Corridor High Capacity Transit Project Early Scoping Information Report

September 2010



CENTRAL PUGET SOUND
REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY

1 EARLY SCOPING

1.1 Introduction

North Corridor High Capacity Transit Project Early Scoping: September 27, 2010 to October 27, 2010

Sound Transit and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) are conducting “Early Scoping” to start the public planning and environmental processes for the North Corridor High Capacity Transit (HCT) Project in King and Snohomish counties in the metropolitan Puget Sound region. The North Corridor HCT project is part of the Sound Transit 2 (ST2) Plan approved by voters in 2008. The proposed project would start at the regional light rail system in the Northgate neighborhood of Seattle and would extend northward to the cities of Shoreline, Mountlake Terrace, and Lynnwood.

Figure 1-1 shows where the North Corridor is located. The North Corridor HCT extension project is an element of the region’s Metropolitan Transportation Plan (the Puget Sound Regional Council’s *Transportation 2040*), and Sound Transit’s Long-Range Transit Plan. These plans anticipate the eventual extension of HCT service north to Everett. Figure 1-2 shows the Regional Transit System, including ST 2 projects.

About Early Scoping

Early scoping provides an initial opportunity for the public to learn about and provide comments on the project as it begins. This public and agency outreach effort supports the overall planning, public involvement, and state and federal environmental processes for the North Corridor HCT project, which will need to satisfy National Environmental Policy Act of 1970 (NEPA) and Washington’s State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) requirements, and will likely need an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). When the project alternatives are more fully defined, Sound Transit and the FTA will announce the type of environmental document they will prepare and offer further opportunities for public comment. If an EIS is to be prepared, FTA and Sound Transit will initiate an additional scoping process for the EIS.

The early scoping notice was announced in the Federal Register as well as the SEPA register, and links to the notices are provided at www.soundtransit.org/NorthHCT. Notices and project informational display advertisements announcing upcoming public early scoping meetings are appearing in the Seattle Times and local North Corridor area newspapers.

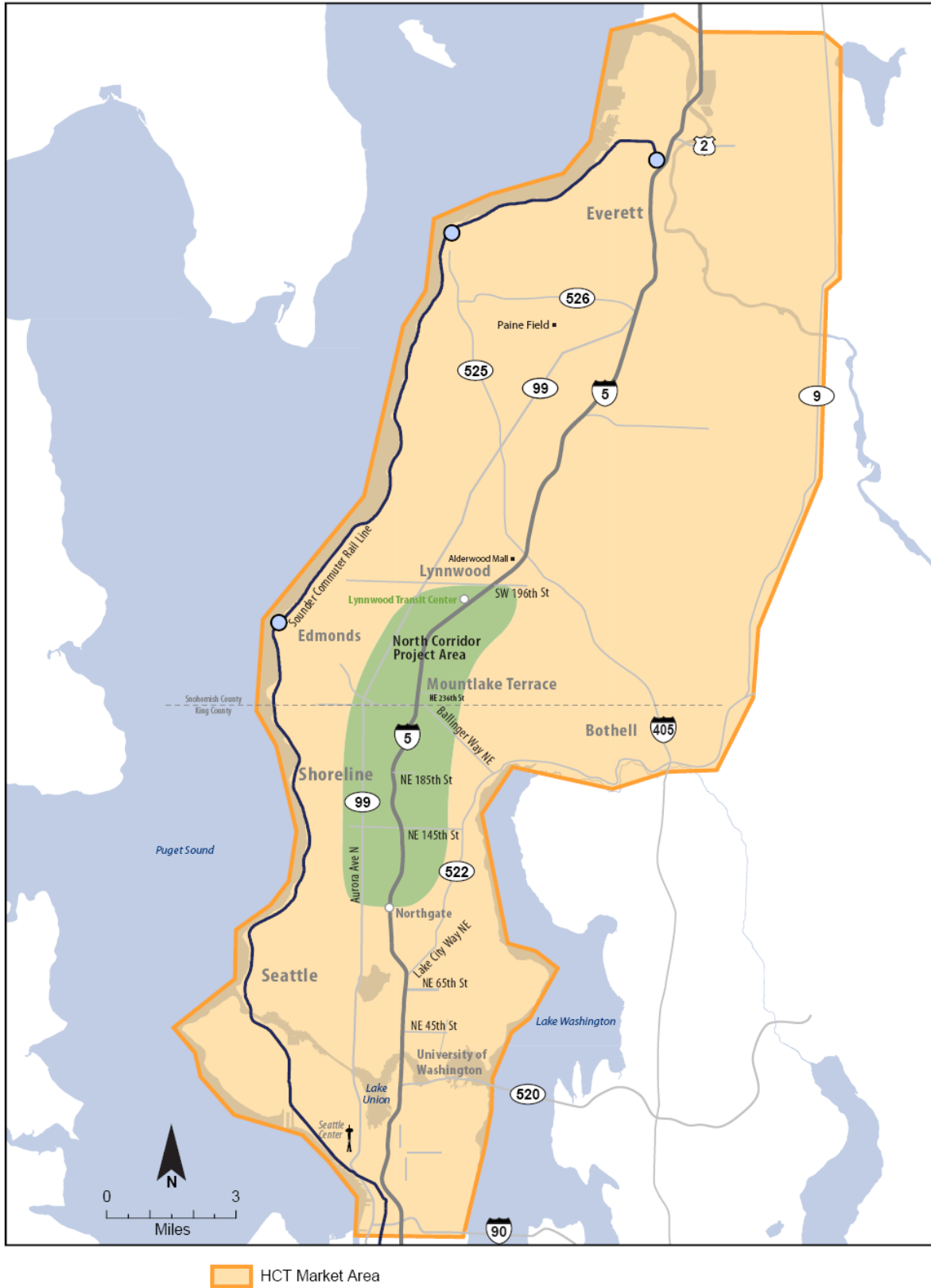


Figure 1-1. North Corridor Setting and Primary Market Area



Figure 1-2. Regional Transit System Map with ST 2 Projects

Because the North Corridor project is seeking federal funding, Sound Transit is conducting an Alternatives Analysis (AA), as required by FTA's New Starts major transit capital investment program.

As defined by federal law, an AA is the first step of the New Starts project development process. The AA provides a local forum for evaluating the costs, benefits, and impacts of a range of transportation alternatives designed to address mobility problems and other locally-identified objectives in a defined transportation corridor, and for determining which particular investment strategy should be advanced for more focused study and development. For AA studies that may result in the local selection of a project eligible for FTA New Starts or Small Starts funding, the AA further serves as the process for development of the technical information necessary to support a candidate project's approval into preliminary engineering. The AA concludes when a locally preferred alternative is identified for the project.

With early scoping, Sound Transit and FTA are seeking public comments on the scope of the AA for the North Corridor project, including the purpose of the project, the range of alternatives, and the environmental, transportation, and community impacts and benefits to be considered.

Public Comments and Meetings

Early scoping includes a public comment period that is open until October 27, 2010, with three public scoping meetings and an interagency meeting as outlined below.

Public Meetings

The public meetings will be held at the following locations from 6:00 to 8:30 pm:

- North Seattle: October 7, 2010—Ingraham High School, 1819 N. 135th Street, Seattle 98133
- Lynnwood: October 12, 2010—Lynnwood Convention Center, 3711 196th Street SW, Lynnwood 98036
- Shoreline: October 14, 2010—Shoreline Conference Center, 18560 1st Avenue NE, Shoreline 98155

A separate early scoping meeting will also be held with agencies to present project information and receive comments. Sound Transit has sent invitations for the meeting to local, state, and federal agencies as well as tribal governments.

Ways to Provide Comments

Written scoping comments are requested by October 27, 2010 and can be sent or e-mailed to the address below, submitted at the public meetings, or provided via the online comment form available at www.soundtransit.org/NorthHCT.

Comments can be addressed to:

Roger Iwata, North Corridor Project, Sound Transit, 401 S. Jackson Street, Seattle, WA 98104-2826, or by e-mail to roger.iwata@soundtransit.org

How Public and Agency Comments Will be Used

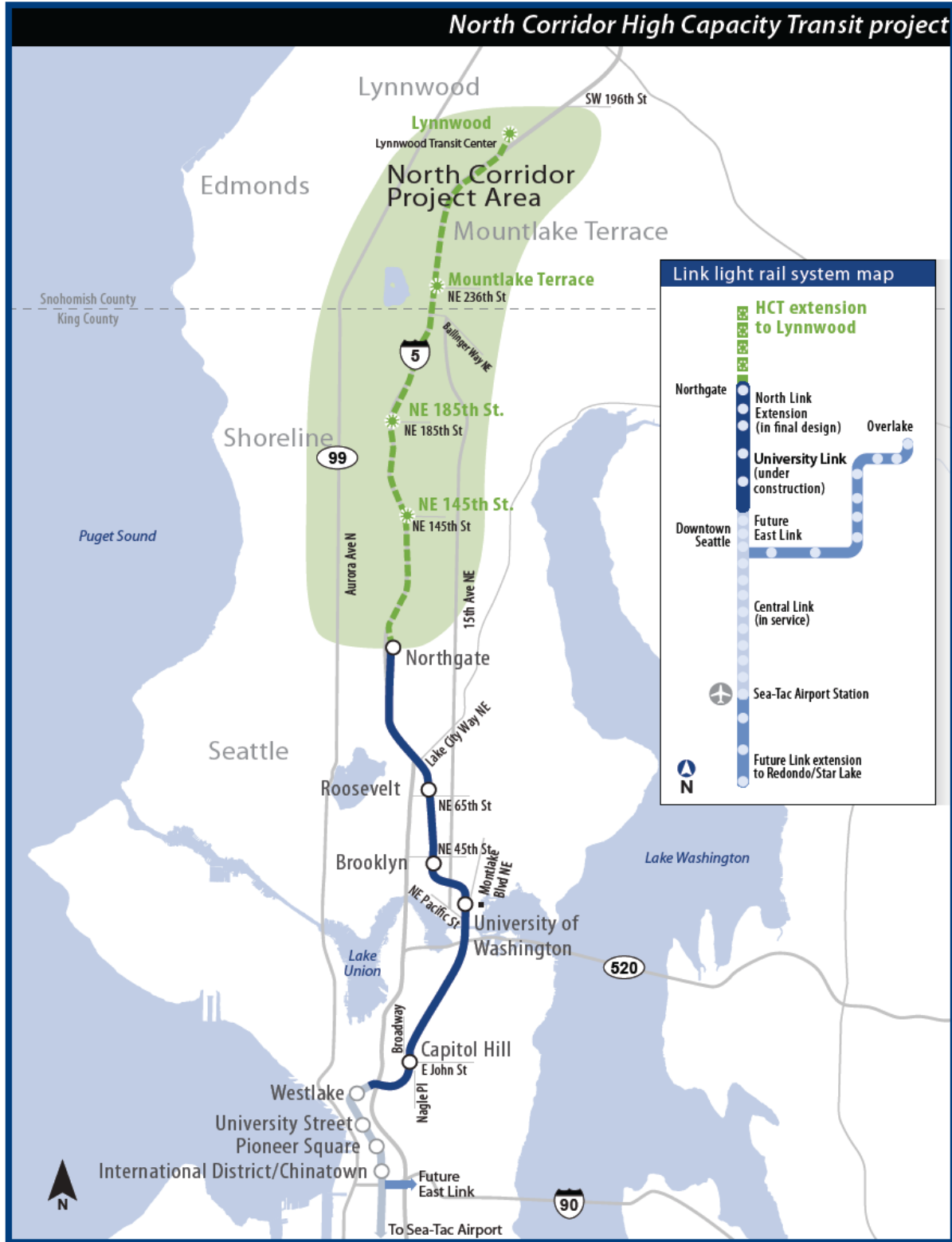
After the end of the 30 day comment period on October 27, 2010, Sound Transit will compile and carefully consider comments received during the early scoping period, including comments provided at the public meetings and through agency scoping. After the early scoping period ends, Sound Transit will prepare an Early Scoping Summary Report to summarize the comments and results of the early scoping process. The report will be made available to the public. The public and agency comments received will also help Sound Transit further define the purpose of the project, the range of alternatives to be considered, and the environmental, transportation, and community impacts and benefits to be measured.

The North Corridor

The North Corridor is about 8 to 9 miles long, depending on its alignment, starting at Northgate in north Seattle and ending in Lynnwood. The corridor generally follows Interstate 5 (I-5), the major north-south route through Washington State. There is a large commuter market in this area that travels between the communities in Snohomish and King counties, towards the City of Seattle or north to Everett, where many of the region's jobs are located.

There are only a few transportation routes that serve the North Corridor, which covers one of the most populated areas in the Pacific Northwest, and is part of a longer north-south transportation corridor connecting Tacoma, Seattle, and Everett. Geographic constraints also explain why most trips run north and south, because the North Corridor is bounded by Puget Sound to the west and Lake Washington to the east. These factors have helped make the North Corridor one of the region's most productive markets for transit. However, roadways in the North Corridor, including I-5, experience high levels of congestion throughout significant portions of the day, which creates long and unreliable travel times.

The North Corridor HCT service would connect to the Central Link light rail system at Northgate, as shown in Figure 1-3.



ST2 Plan representative light rail stations and alignment

Source: Sound Transit

Figure 1-3. North Corridor Connection to the Link Light Rail System

By connecting to Central Link at Northgate, the North Corridor HCT extension would serve the large and growing travel market between Lynnwood, Snohomish County, and north King County and the other major activity and/or urban growth centers to the south—including Northgate, the University of Washington, Capitol Hill, downtown Seattle, South Seattle, Tukwila, and SeaTac, as well as Bellevue and Redmond to the east.

Sound Transit and the Region's Mass Transit System

Sound Transit was created by the state legislature to build a mass transit system that connects major regional job and housing centers in King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties. Voters in 1996 approved *Sound Move*, the first phase of investment in a mass transit system that includes regional express buses, commuter rail, and light rail.

Sound Transit began operating the first phase of the Central Link light rail system with the line from downtown Seattle south to Tukwila in July 2009, and service to SeaTac began in December 2009. The line north from downtown Seattle to Capitol Hill and the University of Washington is now under construction and is scheduled to open in 2016. The final section from the University of Washington to Northgate is about to enter final design with operation to begin in 2020. When voters approved the ST2 Plan in 2008, the second phase of investment in the region's mass transit system began.

The North Corridor Communities

The North Corridor includes the cities of Seattle, Shoreline, Mountlake Terrace, and Lynnwood, with Edmonds to the west. These are all established cities that are continuing to grow. While much of the North Corridor area is residential, there are major regional centers at Northgate and Lynnwood, as well as town centers and other activity centers in each of the other cities. In 2008, the estimated population of the four cities within the corridor was over 700,000 and employment was almost 550,000.

Regional and local plans anticipate higher levels of growth within the corridor through 2030, continuing the trend of growth the corridor has seen over the past several decades. Population in the areas surrounding I-5 and State Route (SR) 99 between Northgate and Lynnwood is forecasted to grow 21 percent by 2040. Employment over the same period is forecasted to grow by 39 percent.

Mass Transit and the Region's Plans for Managing Growth

The Puget Sound region, which includes urbanized King, Pierce, Snohomish, and Kitsap counties, has a coordinated series of regional, county, and local plans and policies that are guiding how the region is managing its growth. The primary plans at the regional level are the Puget Sound Regional Council's VISION 2040 and *Transportation 2040*. Sound Transit's Long-

Range Plan (2005) serves as the regional transit element of *Transportation 2040*. These plans share land use, growth management, and transportation policies that assume the regional mass transit system will link the urban centers where the region's growth will be focused. County and local city comprehensive plan policies in the North Corridor and throughout the region reinforce the need for mass transit investments to support new population and employment developments, providing for vibrant urban communities that offer alternatives to the automobile.

1.2 Developing the Purpose and Need

To guide decision-making during the AA and to support the project's state and federal environmental reviews, Sound Transit has developed a draft statement of why this project is being proposed. This is known as the Purpose and Need. This statement is used to evaluate alternatives leading to the selection of a Locally Preferred Alternative.

The Purpose and Need statement will continue to be developed and refined to reflect public and agency comments as the project moves forward.

Purpose and Need of the North Corridor Project

The purpose of the project is to improve transit service from Seattle north into Snohomish County by:

1. Providing reliable, rapid, and efficient two-way, all-day transit service of sufficient capacity to meet the existing and projected demand between the communities and activity centers located in the North Corridor and the other urban centers in the central Puget Sound area by providing a mobility alternative to travel on congested roadways and improved connections to the regional multimodal transportation system;
2. Supporting North Corridor communities' and the region's land use, transportation, and economic development vision, which promotes the well-being of people and communities, ensures economic vitality, and preserves a healthy environment; and
3. Supporting the long-range vision, goals, and objectives for transit service established by Sound Transit's Long-Range Plan for high quality regional transit service connecting major activity centers in King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties.

The project is needed to:

- Meet the rapidly growing transportation needs of the corridor and the region's future residents and workers by increasing mobility, access, and transportation capacity to and from regional growth and activity centers in the North Corridor and the rest of the region, as called for in the region's adopted plans, including the Puget Sound Regional

Council's VISION 2040 and *Transportation 2040*, as well as related county and city comprehensive plans.

- Address the problems of increasing and unreliable travel times for transit users in the North Corridor, who are now dependent on the corridor's highly congested roadway and high-occupancy vehicle systems.
- Address overcrowding facing current and future North Corridor transit riders due to insufficient capacity of the infrastructure that supports the current transit system.
- Provide an alternative to automobile trips on I-5 and SR 99, the two primary highways serving the corridor, which are unreliable and over capacity throughout significant portions of the day.
- Implement the long-range vision for regional transit service established by Sound Transit's Long-Range Plan, with a transit investment that supports economic vitality, preserves the environment, preserves communities, and allows for the further extension of regional transit north to Everett.
- Ensure long-term regional mobility, multimodal connectivity, and convenience for North Corridor citizens and communities, including travel-disadvantaged residents and low income and minority populations.
- Provide the transit infrastructure needed to support the development of Northgate and Lynnwood as designated regional growth centers providing housing, employment, public services, and multimodal transportation connections.
- Help support the environmental and sustainability goals of the state and region, including state regulations setting goals for reducing annual per capita vehicle miles traveled by 2050, in accordance with RCW 47.01.440, and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions (Limiting Green House Gas Emissions, RCW Chapter 702.35).

1.3 Potential Alternatives

Early scoping will help shape the alternatives to be considered in the AA, building on Sound Transit's earlier planning efforts for the ST2 Plan. As part of the AA and in accordance with FTA guidance for New Starts projects, Sound Transit will explore alternative mode, alignment, station, and design configurations for improved transit in the North Corridor. Although voters have approved funding for light rail in this corridor, the project's financial plan also anticipates funding through FTA's New Starts grant program. To qualify the project for federal funds, the AA will need to consider other reasonable alternatives for addressing the transportation problems in this corridor. This process includes decisions about:

- The location of alignments and stations and the size of park-and-ride lots

- The design of facilities, including whether transit should be elevated, at-grade (ground level), or a combination of both
- Whether transit should be in its own exclusive right-of-way, or operating with other modes
- Whether transit for the North Corridor should be light rail or potentially bus rapid transit

All alternatives will be compared to a No Build Alternative, which represents the future transportation system through the year 2030 without North Corridor transit improvements, and a Transportation Systems Management (TSM)/Baseline Alternative, which will examine methods for improving transit in the North Corridor without a major new capital investment. Potential elements of a TSM/Baseline Alternative could include more frequent bus service, new or expanded park-and-ride capacity, or freeway or arterial transit priority improvements.

Sound Transit is inviting comments on the alternative transit modes, alignments, station locations, and design configurations to be studied, as well as comments on proposed evaluation measures to be used to compare alternatives. Routes that may be considered follow portions of SR 99, the Interurban Trail, I-5, and 15th Avenue NE. The definition of these alternatives will reflect a range of high and low cost capital improvements, including non-fixed guideway options that can serve as a "baseline" for measuring the merits of higher level investments. Measures for evaluating the relative merits of alternatives will be identified, as will technical methodologies for generating the information used to support such measures. These measures will typically include disciplines such as travel forecasting, capital and operation and maintenance costs, and environmental and land use analyses. Finally, costs, benefits, and impacts of each alternative will be developed and evaluated; and funding strategies will be analyzed.

At the conclusion of the AA process, Sound Transit and the FTA anticipate narrowing the range of alternatives for further evaluation in a draft EIS, if warranted, potentially including identification of a locally preferred alternative. If the resulting range of alternatives involves the potential for significant environmental impacts requiring an EIS, a Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS will be published in the Federal Register, and public and agency comment on the scope of the EIS will be invited and considered at that time.

Potential Routes

In planning for ST₂, Sound Transit developed a representative light rail alignment that helped establish the ridership potential and costs for the North Corridor project (see Figure 1-3). This alignment was assumed to be entirely elevated primarily along I-5. The project elements included a light rail guideway, as well as track and systems extending approximately 8.2 miles

north from the Northgate Station to Lynnwood Transit Center. After leaving Northgate Station, the representative alignment followed the east side of I-5 to about 48th Avenue West and then crossed to the west side of I-5 to enter Lynnwood Transit Center. Four new stations were anticipated at NE 145th Street, NE 185th Street, SW 236th Street, and the Lynnwood Transit Center (terminal station)—all sized to accommodate 4-car trains. Structured park-and-ride lots of 500 stalls each were identified for NE 145th Street, NE 185th Street, and Lynnwood Transit Center.

Other potential routes that were considered during the ST2 process included routes that followed portions of SR 99, or parts of other north/south arterial streets or other public rights-of-way, such as 15th Avenue NE or the Interurban Trail. The ST2 process also looked at options for operating transit at-grade, either in transit-only guideways, or with portions operating in rights-of-way that are shared with other transportation modes.

1.4 Project Timeline and Next Steps

Following early scoping, Sound Transit will develop and release an Early Scoping Summary Report and develop an initial list of potential alternatives, including alternatives that emerge as a result of public scoping comments. Next, the alternatives will be evaluated based on their ability to satisfy the project's purpose and need, using criteria such as transportation benefits, cost, ridership, communities and populations served, land use benefits, and environmental performance. The Sound Transit Board will then identify the alternatives to be studied in the project's federal and state environmental review process. If the alternatives to move forward have the potential for significant environmental impacts requiring an EIS, Sound Transit and FTA will issue a Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS, and public and agency scoping for the EIS will be invited and considered at that time. This would be followed by further engineering, environmental analysis, and public involvement work on the project, leading to final decisions about the project to be built and operated in the North Corridor.

Figure 1-4 shows the project's current general timeline and the major decision points.

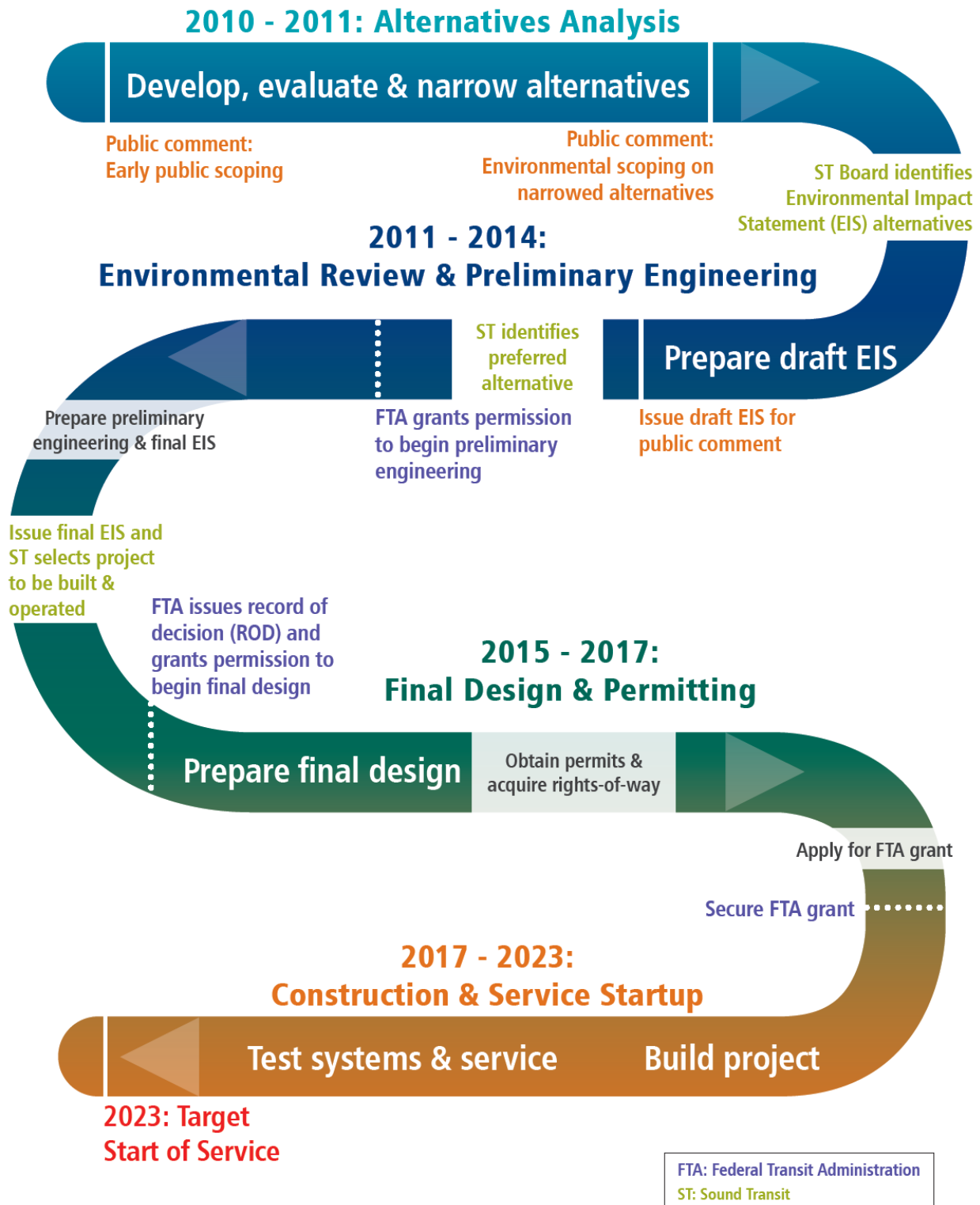


Figure 1-4. Project Timeline