

Summary of Written Comments Received

Each comment was reviewed using a consistent methodology, which is described at the end of this section. This section reviews the common themes that emerged from the review of comments. Sample comments were selected to illustrate each theme—these comments were selected based on clarity and conciseness, as well as to reflect the range of comment, from supportive to critical.

Statistical summary of written comments

Written comments were those comments received by mail, e-mail, public meeting comment form, or unstructured comment at the conclusion of the online survey. Sound Transit received a total of 2,824 written comments from around the Sound Transit District:

- 324 (11.5%) comments originating in Snohomish County subarea
- 839 (29.8%) comments originating in North King County subarea
- 540 (19.2%) comments originating in East King County subarea
- 214 (7.6%) comments originating in South King County subarea
- 351 (12.5%) comments originating in Pierce County subarea
- 556 (19.7%) comments designated “Regional” due to unknown origin, or origin outside Sound Transit boundary

These comments covered a wide range of topics. Of these, 937 comments (33.2%) expressed a preference for one of the three transit expansion options, along the following lines overall:

- 29.1% favor the Maximized Rail Extension.
- 2.7% favor the Medium Rail Extension.
- 1.4% favor the Bus/Rail Extension.

In addition:

- 18.9% favor all transit, but did not state a preferred option.
- 3.1% do not favor Sound Transit’s Mission and overall plan (e.g., did not support investment in transit and/or did not trust Sound Transit to execute Sound Transit 2 on time and within budget).

Common themes from written comments

Light rail in general

These comments show that light rail is favored in the Puget Sound Region as a mode of high capacity transit. Light rail was generally the most frequently-referenced topic – over 1,100 of the comments referenced rail - and a significant majority of comments supported the mode. Many who commented simply liked the comfort of a train, with its predictable

stops and dedicated right-of-way. Critical references to light rail, though in the minority, favored buses due to their flexibility in routing and lower capital cost.

A representative sampling of comments:

Trains trains trains trains. I don't like buses. Buses are uncomfortable and despite the HOV lanes, are still stuck in traffic.

It seems everybody just writes off buses. All light rail is a dedicated-glorified bus lane that costs 10-100 times as much.

We need to expand light rail throughout the metropolitan region. Without doing this our lifestyle in this area will continue to worsen. Mass transit is the answer!

The same bus left at the same time each day and arrived in Seattle anywhere from 8:25 to 8:50. The variation was similar or worse on the return trip. This experience tells me that any bus system which uses the regular highways lacks the predictability and reliability that a public transportation system needs. We need to concentrate on developing an effective regional rail system.

Maximized Rail Extension Option is preferred

Most comments identifying a preference among the three expansion options favored the Maximized Rail Extension. Of the 937 comments that noted an option preference, 821 (88%) favored the maximized system. Comments generally reflected a preference for this option for a few key reasons, including wanting to build the system for future generations and noting that the extra cost of the maximized option is worth the overall quality of life and/or environmental benefit.

It is in the greater Seattle area's best interest to achieve a maximized rail extension in the near future; this would benefit everyone, even if they do not ride rail directly.

I must urge you to go for the maximum rail build-out. Trains bring efficiency and long-term growth in a way that buses cannot. The greater the reach out into the region, the more useful the system will be and the greater the impact on the region.

We desperately need a long-range solution for the entire Puget Sound area, including the suburbs. I strongly favor the Maximized Rail Extension system because it is more comprehensive for the entire region.

I think the Maximized Rail Extension is the best plan of the three. Future generations will not only thank us, but will curse us if we do not make a responsible decision now about solving future traffic problems. ... We need to act now to lose traffic problems, and the Maximized Rail Extension Plan shows a

commitment to solve the problem for the long term, rather than a partial solution that will have to be modified further in the future.

We would like to see light rail cover as much an area as possible so people can get wherever with a lot less dependency on a car.

It is clear that eventually we are going to need comprehensive rail transit throughout our growing region – to wait is merely to increase the total cost, to further damage our quality of life and to increase the greenhouse gas emissions from automobiles—all in direct conflict with the stated goals of our elected leaders and with the will of the voters.

Some comments emphasized that the maximized plan does not significantly increase ridership above the medium option, resulting in diminishing returns for dollars spent. While some therefore preferred the medium option, others still said the maximized plan was preferred.

It looks to me like the medium option will give the maximum benefit for the cost, but I still support the maximum rail option for the long-term benefit.

I am in favor of the Maximized Rail Extension option among the three shown in your brochure. For only \$25 more per year than the medium option you get so much more.

From what I could tell the medium rail option had the better benefit/cost ratio.

While I would personally be willing to pay for the maximum light rail expansion, it looks like the medium expansion gets the most bang for the buck, according to the graphs and charts that were shared in this survey, and would therefore get the most public support.

Funding, costs and sequencing

Almost 33% (919) of all comments related to funding and costs in some way. Many people expressed interest in the cost of each of the options, noting whether projects were “worth the investment.” Several people urged Sound Transit to make a decision and start building as soon as possible because costs will only rise with time. Others were concerned that funding will mostly come from a sales tax hike, increasing a tax that is already one of the nation’s highest.

Please push hard for the largest and longest expansion project possible... Let’s move fast before the costs continue to get even more expensive than they are now.

The cost, whatever it turns out to be, is a worthwhile investment in our local economy. I think it’s a shame that our state’s regressive tax structure must be worsened to secure the environmental benefits we all need, but I am willing to sacrifice a little more until we get an income tax.

Although I do not favor sales tax increases, I would gladly pay to relieve our transportation congestion...I favor the Maximized Rail Extension. Anything less would just prolong the inevitable and increase the cost at a later date.

Build it and they will come! Let's spend whatever is necessary to get the best mass transit system in the country and move as many cars off the roads as possible.

Concerns and Opposition

Some of the written comments received were categorized under the label “Opposes Sound Transit’s mission.” To warrant grouping in this category, a comment opposed transit in general, further investment in the transit system, or any additional tax increase to support expansion. Comments in this category also expressed skepticism that Sound Transit would effectively deliver Sound Transit 2 projects, often linked to the opinion that Sound Transit did not deliver on some promises made in *Sound Move*.

The following sampling represents many (but not all) of the critiques heard:

- Frustration that proposed options do not provide benefit to certain areas in the district, prompting the question: “What’s in it for me?” Most frequently mentioned areas include Burien, West Seattle, Ballard, Issaquah, Tacoma, Sammamish, and the I-405 corridor. Boeing employees also felt they were underrepresented.
- Significant opposition to using sales tax to fund system expansion, though many people suggested alternative forms of taxes and funding.
- Opposition to light rail technology due to its high capital cost and fixed route as compared to buses. Specific concerns to building light rail across I-90 were also noted because of the elimination of HOV lane access. Many requested that light rail be included on SR 520 instead of, or in addition to, using I-90 as a light rail corridor.
- Discouragement that Sound Transit 2 will take too long to deliver.
- Perception that our region still has virtually no mass transit system, and that even the maximum package proposed will not adequately meet regional needs.
- Frustration with the limited transit options and schedules available today that hinder, if not eliminate, the opportunity for some to use current services.
- Indignation that the road and transit packages will be linked in the November 2007 ballot (i.e., being forced to vote for roads funding in order to guarantee transit success, or vice versa).
- Requests for improved ADA accessibility, convenience and safety on existing and future services.

Sample comments include:

I can't support the proposal to fund an expansion of Sound Transit and roads. I don't see enough benefit to the residents of Pierce County to justify supporting an increase in the sales tax to fund these projects.

When a tax hike is made for a proposed project that has a completion date 10 years in the future, it creates a fair amount of skepticism. Because of that, shorter expansions to the transit system, along with highly public visibility into the status of those deliverables, are a must.

The roads are what will solve the transportation problem at the lowest and best cost.

I am opposed to adding any additional light rail. This region needs a system of bus rapid transit not light rail.

You have waited until transportation is nearly impossible and now it will take many years before even this inadequate transportation system is in place – 2016, many of us will be dead by then.

We enjoy our cars. We ENJOY driving. You are not concentrating on serving the masses when your only option to reduce traffic is to IGNORE the bumper to bumper cars and built a rail system. You aren't getting the message...we want to DRIVE without congestion. Add lanes...you can add lanes to every existing freeway and expand numerous secondary roads for less than what this system costs. That's what the residents want.

I am in favor of developing an expanded transit system. However, Sound Transit has a very large credibility gap due to incredible mismanagement early on in development – at times the actions taken to protect the program were abusive and warranted shutting down the program. Taking ownership of the past and showing that it is now acting as a wise custodian efficiently using public funds is crucial to improving credibility.

As time draws nearer though, I will not support a plan that includes rebuilding 520 or the Alaskan Way Viaduct as well.

Traffic and congestion

Approximately 23% (649) of all comments received referenced increasing traffic and congestion in the Puget Sound Region. These comments spanned the region and ranged from general observations to corridor- and location-specific concerns (e.g., north-south concerns on I-5 and I-405, and east-west concerns across Lake Washington). Some people emphasized any of the investments simply would not do enough, while others questioned whether light rail is the best option to address traffic concerns.

I am for the Maximized Rail Extension. Traffic in the Puget Sound area will just get worse as time goes on.

Nothing will ever stop the traffic congestion we are facing. But by having public transit, it allows more people to access the same facilities by providing an alternative.

Commuter and light rail are the worst option. They are expensive up front, expensive to operate and maintain, and extremely inflexible. It is difficult to predict the evolution of traffic patterns over the timeframe needed to get a return on such colossal and narrow investments.

The region's population is only going to increase, making the transportation situation that much worse, unless we start doing something now.

Anything that does not address the east-west commute nightmare is very short-sighted.

I think the most important thing that Sound Transit should be doing is investing in a system that will reduce traffic congestion, which means connecting the "bedroom communities" to the employment centers, preferably by rail... We need a fast, high capacity backbone, and we need it yesterday. The faster you can build rail, the better.

I want to help reduce congestion and pollution, but the current public transit system isn't giving me that option.

Schedule, frequency and system integration

Three combined categories talked about a similar theme: that schedule, frequency and system integration make a difference in their utilization of a system. Many commenters indicated that if a frequent, efficient transit system were available today, they would use it. They expressed frustration with current schedules and transfers needed to complete their daily commutes, and often noted that commuting by transit would take far longer than driving a car (or may not even be an option depending on their route or schedule). These individuals emphasized that as the transit system is expanded in the Puget Sound Region, it must be integrated and (ideally) more efficient and convenient than driving a car, requiring as few transfers as possible.

My husband and I would become regular users of light rail, especially if the trains were frequent. Because the express buses are usually quite crowded, I think many other people would also take advantage of light rail.

It's all about convenience! A few times I've visited your web site and mapped out a plan wherein I would use a combination of train and buses to get to my work place but each time it would take upwards to 1½ to 2 hours to make the trip one

way. I can jump in my car and get to work in 35 minutes in the morning and 1 hour in the afternoon – this is more convenient.

Cumulative impacts and the environment

Two combined categories of comments reflected a link between transit and the environment. These comments often reflected a desire for improved (or maintained) quality of life in the Puget Sound region. In addition, many comments addressed the need to provide bike access to transit systems, and encouraged including this “non-motorized” transport in planning.

This is what I am choosing because of pollution. We need to get spent carbons out of the air!

I think it is very important to our way of life to get the carbon out of the air and more people in transit than cars. We must act now to save our way of life and so much we value.

It would be great for our transportation infrastructure to support bicycling as a viable means of transportation, especially for hybrid commutes involving mass transit.

Keeping pace with other cities

Many people (423) emphasized that a comprehensive transit system will help the Puget Sound region keep pace economically with other cities around the globe, or simply compared a future transit system to other cities. They mourned the fact that the Puget Sound region does not have a full-fledged transit system in place already. Frequent comparisons were made to the Portland MAX line, Denver’s T-Rex package, and to cities in Europe and Asia. These comments often noted that the Puget Sound region is well behind other similar cities in terms of infrastructure, and warn that it will be difficult to remain competitive if a good transit system is not built as fast as possible.

Let’s get it done! We’re 20 years behind already...Denver’s light rail has been operational for 8 years or so, and it’s being widely expanded.

I often visit Portland, Oregon, and over the years observed Oregonians adding Max lines and by the time each branch is finished all lines get used a lot. My relatives enjoy using Max in Oregon, and I see myself using Sound Transit here in the Puget Sound area.

Maximized Rail Extension. After being in Vancouver, B.C. for several days, a rail system is the only way to go.

The only choice that makes any sense to me is the maximized rail extension. This is both from the perspective of my potential use of the system, as well as my experience with excellent light rail in Wash DC, Boston, Paris, London, etc.

Specific routing and projects

Approximately 705 comments related to specific potential or existing routes for buses and/or light rail, cities connected and potential stations. Also contained in this theme were frequent questions regarding specific omissions and possibilities for inclusion in the final Sound Transit 2 plan, focusing on specific routes and locations to be served by future public transit. Some of these comments were general in nature, while others noted specific projects. Several people asked why they should support a package that did not appear to offer their particular area any benefit (e.g., Burien, West Seattle, Ballard, Issaquah, and Sammamish residents, to name a few). Other comments, especially those directly related to Tacoma, reflected on the difference between the three packages, noting how projects were eliminated when taxation was increased.

Below are some sample routing and specific project topics, with example comments:

East Link & Transit on the Eastside (469)

The most important thing is to get as much of the Eastside on light rail. That way traffic congestion is reduced and pollution is reduced.

My highest priority would be getting light rail across Lake Washington to Bellevue.

It's vital that the blossoming business centers on the Eastside in downtown Bellevue, Microsoft and Redmond are served by rail links to and from Seattle and SeaTac Airport.

Sounder—stations and frequency (399 total commuter rail comments)

More trains at different times are needed for the Sounder.

Are there any plans to establish a Sounder station in Ballard (near Golden Gardens)?

I would take the Sounder train downtown every day were there a Ballard stop.

Meanwhile, if the Sounder could run more frequently we and many others we know would ride it during the day (not just to work and back).

In Sounder's north corridor for example, why Broad Street, but not Shoreline?

I would like to see the Broad Street Sounder Station added to all the plans because it makes the biggest difference in influencing people from farther out to come to downtown by train because of its offering a better station location.

I am very interested in riding the Sounder, but need an option for getting off the train at Broad Street.

I-405 (177), especially with regard to Renton (104)

I am really disappointed that none of the options address the horrendous traffic problem on the 405 corridor. Between Renton and Bellevue northbound is worse than I-5 in the morning, and both directions going north and south from 520, due to Microsoft traffic, is horrible in the evenings. ...While I generally support improvements to transit/roads, I will vote against any plan that ignores the 405 corridor.

405, the "S-curves" are the worst in all the nation. It is much worse than I-5 rush hour south. Please remember the people who live in Kent/Auburn/Covington/Renton when you make plans.

Making connections to the Eastside is very important. The employment centers are shifting to the Eastside and I-405 is a serious bottleneck that will not improve without investment.

I am really disappointed that NONE of the options address the horrendous traffic problem on the 405 corridor.

Issaquah, Sammamish and light rail (76)

You need to include a rail extension to the Issaquah area and the via I-90 corridor, with planning to go beyond, as that is a very fast and large developing area.

While our plans seem to address issues up and down the I-5 corridor, they leave those of us living on the Eastside sitting in traffic jams. There is a lot of development in Sammamish and eastward and only two main channels to get into Seattle or Bellevue: 520 or I-90.

Why are we not looking at Issaquah? What about east of Redmond?

I support that the proposed light-rail plan to Bellevue should extend to Issaquah. I am sure you're well aware that the morning commute from Issaquah to either Bellevue and Seattle is intolerable today.

West Seattle/Ballard (especially as relates to former Monorail route) (65)

We desperately need rail from West Seattle to downtown so we can use the rest of the rail system. Leaving us out is a huge mistake.

Why is there nothing planned to address the transit needs of West Seattle residents? Particularly with the inevitable removal of the viaduct and during the construction of its replacement (in whatever form that takes), the opportunity to convert many drivers to transit riders couldn't be better.

Tacoma Link extensions (56)

I think a light rail system linking the Tacoma Community College area to downtown would be extremely beneficial to both areas.

I am in favor of the extension to TCC but would be willing to support a larger package if it contained that project. If it does not I will not support it.

Please extend light rail as far as possible. And don't short change Tacoma, as seems to be the plan in the middle and high cost plans.

Eastside BNSF right-of-way (15)

Could the existing 'Dinner train' route that follows I-405 through Bellevue not be used to somehow decrease the cost and roll-out schedules for the light rail projects?

Should we abandon the BNSF right-of-way east of the lake (the "Dinner Train") or reserve it for our future use?

Burien park & ride (8)

The Burien TOD project should definitely be put back into the overall project funding. Our existing park and ride lot is always full.

Please put the Burien Parking Garage back into the ST Phase 2 plan! For many reasons, we consider this crucial to making the community healthier, and one in which we want to live.

Since Burien's incorporation, the community has articulated a strong vision of a pedestrian friendly place that was connected to Seattle and elsewhere through an excellent transportation system. Our vision for downtown Burien has been linked to yours which reconfigured the Burien Park & Ride into a TOD.

Summary of comments from public meeting comment forms

Sound Transit received a total of approximately 172 comment forms during the five joint Roads & Transit open houses. Because these comments came in the context of joint outreach with the Regional Transportation Investment District and sought response for the Roads & Transit ballot measure, these comments were also reviewed separately.

Respondents were asked four questions to inform the creation of the final ballot measure to appear in November 2007:

- 1) Regional Road Investments: Which road investments are most important to you? Why?
- 2) Regional Transit Investments: How should Sound Transit expand our regional system? Which of the three mass transit options do you prefer? Why?

- 3) What should we consider when choosing projects for the final Roads & Transit package?
- 4) Do you have additional comments?

For the purposes of this summary, responses to questions 2, 3, and 4 were reviewed, and common themes are presented below. (All comment forms were also provided to RTID to ensure that input related to roads projects was captured and provided to appropriate decision-makers).

In general, feedback received at the meeting reflected the common themes described above for the entire universe of input. For example:

	Public Meeting Comment Forms Stating Transit Option Preference (51 total)	All Written Comments Stating Transit Option Preference (896 total)
Favor Bus/Rail Extension	6%	4%
Favor Medium Rail Extension	14%	10%
Favor Maximized Rail Extension	80%	86%

Each public meeting had its own set of common themes, informed by the issues most pertinent to that part of the region:

Bellevue (September 13, 2006): A majority of people attending the meeting in Bellevue supported light rail, including the Maximum Rail Extension, though specific support for bus-only transit expansion was stronger in Bellevue than at other meetings. Several people suggested acquiring the BNSF tracks to supplement mass transit services, while many others emphasized integrating local and regional transit systems to increase efficiency and convenience.

Seattle (September 20, 2006): The most common themes noted on comment forms from the Seattle meeting were support for extending light rail as far as possible (strong support for Maximized Rail Extension), increasing the number of Sounder stations and runs, integrating regional and local modal systems, and increasing the frequency and duration of daily service.

Tacoma (September 25, 2006): Many people in Tacoma emphasized that extending Central Link light rail from Seattle to Tacoma is crucial, and a few warned that Tacoma residents will not vote for a package that does not appear to provide tangible benefits to Pierce County. (There was confusion over why the Tacoma Link extension to Tacoma Community College disappeared under the medium and maximum options.)

Several people noted their fondness for Sounder and asked for expanded, everyday service, while a similar number complimented the flexibility of bus service. Three people asked that the park-and-ride at 176th and Meridian be funded, while the same number of

people suggested exploring Ultra Light Rail as a technological alternative. Several people thanked Sound Transit for offering the chance to voice their opinions.

Federal Way (September 27, 2006): Strong support for the Maximum Rail Extension was expressed in Federal Way, as well as encouragement to start building as soon as possible. In addition to touching on many of the common themes discussed earlier in this summary, one commenter noted the need to expand and revise traffic flow at the Auburn parking garage.

Everett (October 3, 2006): In addition to strong support for the Maximized Rail Extension, more specific suggestions were made to extend light rail from Everett to Seattle and Tacoma. A few people emphasized the importance of ridership and getting the most “bang for the buck” for transit investments, while others emphasized system integration. A few people commented on the upcoming ballot, one suggesting that there be only one united ballot, while two others recommended that roads and transit be separate and not contingent upon each other. Again, several people encouraged Sound Transit to build now and build fast – the 2030 time horizon was seen as too long.

Methodology for evaluation of written comments

All comments logged. All written comments, from all sources, received during this three-month period have been logged in a comment database, and categorized to illuminate the themes, origins, and projects that were frequently referenced (or not). Most comments covered multiple topics, and each comment was therefore coded for any appropriate themes or categories.

Comment evaluation subjected to quality control process. Categorizing and summarizing comments is a qualitative and, at times, subjective exercise. In order to most consistently and accurately identify and analyze common themes and input, all comments were initially entered into the database and categorized. A second round of quality assurance/quality control was performed after all comments had been entered. Project team members reviewed each comment a second time, double-checking categorization against a list of common definitions to ensure that common themes would emerge regardless of which staff member entered the comments. Frequently-referenced topics and themes were then identified, as detailed above.