

PROJECT TIMELINE FAQs

SOUND TRANSIT 3

APRIL 2016

Sound Transit is currently focusing on opportunities to improve on the draft plan by speeding up project timelines where feasible. If jurisdictions and other partners come together to work closely with Sound Transit we can deliver projects quicker.

The ST3 Draft Plan delivers a constant succession of major projects across 25 years. The timelines in the plan reflect Sound Transit's real-world experience that planning and building major takes 12-17 years, and longer for more complex underground work. A factor influencing the timeline of some projects is the fact a 25-year package is necessary for the affordability of all the projects, with some projects coming toward the end.

Why do light rail projects take so long to build?

Sound Transit has heard loud and clear strong interest from around the region for shortening project timelines where feasible, and is exploring options for schedule savings. Major infrastructure projects require significant time to plan, design and build. Variables can include lengthy environmental review and coordination with local jurisdictions. The Puget Sound region's high level of existing development and its challenging geography and geology further adds to project complexity and timelines.

Due to these factors, planning and building major light rail projects typically takes 12-17 years, and longer for projects that are particularly complex due to design, construction and permitting challenges, such as the extensive underground construction through downtown Seattle for extending light rail to Ballard.

How can Sound Transit potentially speed up projects?

There is very strong potential for close collaboration with local jurisdictions to streamline the planning, permitting and approval timeline for projects. Early and ongoing community engagement prevents time delays later in the schedule. Sound Transit is exploring potential time savings of combining multiple environmental studies together rather than doing that work sequentially, as well as expediting procurement processes to facilitate earlier start times.

Given that cash flow constraints can limit the speed of project delivery, Sound Transit will research other financing tools and funding partnerships that might be available to the agency, including work with local and state governments as well as with the private sector. Work to speed up projects and save money will continue throughout every phase of project delivery. The project dates in the final measure should be considered targets that Sound Transit will constantly work to beat.

Finally, Sound Transit will pursue alternative delivery mechanisms, such as Public-Private Partnership and Design Build to determine what impact these might have on the construction timelines.

Why does it take 22 years to get to Ballard?

Sound Transit recognizes the strong interest in reaching Ballard sooner and is exploring options for trimming the timeline. Schedule assumptions are based on the fact the project is by far the largest and most complex in the plan. It includes 3.5 miles of tunnel through the Downtown Seattle, the West Coast's most densely developed area north of San Francisco.

There are six subway stations. Four are assumed to use cut-and-cover construction techniques to excavate station areas approximately 560 feet long, each almost long enough to lay the Space Needle on its side. Two subway stations will require sophisticated underground mining techniques because they are too deep to excavate from the top down. There is also a crossing of the ship canal required to reach Ballard.

These factors have shaped the currently assumed 22 years of planning, engineering and construction time to reach Ballard. While the construction timeframe is less subject to acceleration, Sound Transit will put particular focus on working with the City of Seattle to identify options for speeding up the environmental review, planning and permitting. However, in addition to the technical requirements, Sound Transit would also have to resolve cash flow limitations.

How does cash flow affect project timelines?

Delivery of the ST3 Draft Package spans a 25-year period in order for all of the projects to be affordable. Dollars are generated over the course of the program rather than available all at the outset. Cash flows during the 25 year period and constraints on issuing debt contribute to the longer timelines for some projects.

Sound Transit will look for opportunities to increase and move up available funding where possible. The agency has benefitted from financial partnerships with the federal government. Lynnwood Link, for example, is on track to earn a \$1.2 billion grant from the Federal Transit Administration. One constraint is that to obtain similar funding for ST3 projects, timelines will be influenced by the need to conform to the federal granting process.

Why does it take 25 years to deliver the light rail segment to downtown Everett?

The draft plan's timeline for extending light rail from Mariner Station to Everett is delayed until the end of ST3 because of the cost associated with diverting the line from I-5 to serve the Southwest Everett Industrial and Manufacturing Center, or Paine Field. A route along I-5 with a bus rapid transit loop serving Paine Field could be completed within 15 years.

How can downtown Redmond and Federal Way be completed more quickly than the others?

Sound Transit already has a federal record of decision on the route to Redmond and is currently working to obtain one for the preferred alternative alignment that has been identified for Federal Way. That work enables these projects to be completed by 2028.

What can be done to increase regional mobility before light rail projects are completed?

The ST3 Draft Plan recognizes that travelers in our region face increasing challenges daily, and mobility improvements need to be made right away. The plan includes an Early Deliverables Program that focuses on establishing relief in key corridors while longer-term projects are planned and constructed. The program includes but is not limited to bus rapid transit (BRT) on I-405 and SR-522) as well as capital investments on Metro's RapidRide C and D lines to bring earlier improvements to Ballard and West Seattle.