



Lake Forest Park Information Session

Meeting Summary

September 2023



Table of Contents

- 1 INTRODUCTION2**
 - 1.1 Overview2

- 2 SOUND TRANSIT PRESENTATION.....2**
 - 2.1 Stride Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) overview.....2
 - 2.2 Environmental review2
 - 2.3 Current design and design refinements3
 - 2.4 Clarifying community comments.....3
 - 2.4.1 Stride station size3
 - 2.4.2 Trees3
 - 2.4.3 BAT lanes vs. queue jumps4
 - 2.4.4 Westward shift4
 - 2.4.5 Retaining walls.....4

- 3 QUESTION AND ANSWER.....4**
 - 3.1 Question and Answers4
 - 3.2 Verbal Comments.....8

- 4 SUMMARY OF WRITTEN COMMENTS9**

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

Sound Transit hosted an in-person S3 Line information session at Lake Forest Park Elementary on Aug. 2, 2023. The meeting included an overview of the Stride S3 Line and its design progression. A facilitator moderated questions from the audience to project staff and subject matter experts.

2 SOUND TRANSIT PRESENTATION

2.1 Stride Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) overview

Like light rail service, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is designed for fast arrivals and departures, featuring off-board fare payment and multiple-door entry and exit. New bus lanes and transit priority improvements help riders avoid traffic and travel faster. Sound Transit is designing and building a BRT service called Stride that will connect communities around Lake Washington to the regional Link light rail system. There will be three Stride lines:

- The S1 Line will operate from Burien to Bellevue via I-405.
- The S2 Line will operate from Bellevue to Lynnwood via I-405.
- The S3 Line will operate from Shoreline to Bothell via NE 145th St and SR 522.

The S3 Line is in the property acquisition phase—Sound Transit is working to acquire property, as needed, to build the project. Overall construction of the S3 Line will take two to three years. More information about the construction schedule in Lake Forest Park will be available once the project reaches final design.

2.2 Environmental review

Sound Transit completed its environmental review of the S3 Line consistent with the requirements of the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA). A SEPA checklist was prepared to identify and evaluate probable effects on the natural and built environment, including several technical studies. Based on the completed SEPA checklist, which included the westward shift of SR 522, Sound Transit determined that the project would likely not result in any significant adverse environmental impacts, so an environmental impact statement (EIS) was not required. Sound Transit published a SEPA Determination of Nonsignificance in March 2021, provided public notice of the DNS, and held a 14-day public comment period, all as required by SEPA.

As part of the environmental review process, Sound Transit completed a technical noise study using the Federal Transit Administration methods and criteria for transit project–related noise. This noise analysis focused on noise resulting from the project. The analysis determined that the S3 Line will not require noise mitigation. Sound Transit’s noise study and all SEPA documentation can be found on the [project website](#).

2.3 Current design and design refinements

Project elements of the S3 Line include more reliable bus service on SR 522, sustainable travel using battery-electric buses, improving pedestrian and bicyclist safety, improving stormwater management, and making infrastructure less susceptible to weather. The design plans for the S3 Line in Lake Forest Park include:

- Stations at NE 153rd Street, NE 165th Street, and Lake Forest Park Town Center.
- Widening the road to include an eastbound Business Access and Transit (BAT) lane.
- Retaining walls on the SR 522 corridor.
- Continuous sidewalks on the east side of the corridor.
- Removing the turn lanes at various places to reduce widening.

Project designs have reached 90% completion and will reach final design by early 2024. Design refinements are being coordinated with Lake Forest Park city staff, WSDOT, affected property owners, and other partner agencies. The project team is taking a parcel-by-parcel approach to reduce negative effects on the surrounding areas. Other design refinements include:

- Shifting the road widening to the west to reduce the number of anticipated single-family residence relocations.
- Eliminating the planting strip in some key locations to reduce effects on trees and buildings.
- Accommodating vehicle access to properties (driveways and turnarounds).

Sound Transit is continuing conversations with WSDOT and Lake Forest Park city staff on the retaining wall design and maintenance.

2.4 Clarifying community comments

Sound Transit has received and heard comments and concerns from the community about several project topics, and we've provided clarification and responses below.

2.4.1 Stride station size

The project team received comments about the size of the Stride bus stations and heard a desire for smaller stations at several locations. The Stride bus stations will have a similar look and feel to some other transit agencies' BRT stations in the region (e.g., Community Transit's Swift stations) and include ADA features such as curb ramps and near-level boarding for those who use wheelchairs or walkers. Stride stations will be sized to accommodate two buses at a time so there is adequate space for people to board and deboard at the same time and include ADA features. BRT stations will be approximately 150 feet long. For comparison, Link light rail station platforms are approximately 400 feet long.

2.4.2 Trees

The project team received comments about the number of affected trees changing because we are recounting trees. To clarify, the number of affected trees is **reduced** because the project team is taking a parcel-by-parcel approach to reduce the number of trees affected in collaboration with Lake Forest Park city staff. The project team acknowledges that the SR 522 corridor will look different with the removal of tree canopy for the addition of bus lanes, stations,

and sidewalks as part of the Stride S3 Line project. Sound Transit and the city are developing a tree replacement strategy to mitigate these unavoidable losses.

2.4.3 BAT lanes vs. queue jumps

The project team received comments about queue jumps being as effective as BAT lanes and that the BAT lanes only provide a 2-minute time savings. It is true that the BAT lanes will save approximately 2 minutes on average when traveling through Lake Forest Park. Traffic congestion in Lake Forest Park varies considerably from day to day, and therefore the continuous eastbound BAT lane will allow for consistent and reliable transit travel at the most congested times, saving over 10 minutes as passengers ride through the city. Part of the rationale for using BAT lanes now instead of queue jumps is to complete the planned system of BAT lanes that was conceptualized by a coalition of cities along the corridor before the ST3 vote. Building BAT lanes on SR 522 also improves the reliability of the S3 Line since buses will have their own travel lane to bypass congestion on SR 522.

2.4.4 Westward shift

The project team received comments saying there was no public outreach for westward shift and that the Sheridan Beach Community Club was the driving force behind the decision. The westward shift was not due to lobbying by any neighborhood group. The project team began engaging property owners in 2019/2020 and learned that the original design would displace more property owners. As an agency, Sound Transit tries its best to avoid residential displacements wherever possible. Shifting the project to the west into the hillside does affect more property owners but does not displace any property owners. The westward shift was analyzed during the S3 Line's environmental review process and will continue to be in the design.

2.4.5 Retaining walls

The project team received comments concerning the retaining wall height and design. The retaining wall is on a state highway that passes through Lake Forest Park, so the retaining wall must meet both WSDOT's requirements and Lake Forest Park's requirements. Sound Transit is continuing conversations with WSDOT and Lake Forest Park city staff on the retaining wall design, maintenance, and landscaping to make sure it meets jurisdictional requirements and fits within the community. So far, the retaining wall design has changed to include cut-outs in the wall so vines can grow upward along the wall.

3 QUESTION AND ANSWER

Following the Sound Transit presentation, a facilitated Q&A was held to answer questions from the audience. Attendees could also comment on the project and presentation.

3.1 Question and Answers

Question: Why are you building walls on SR 522?

- Because we are expanding the road into the western hill side to build BAT lanes, we are building retaining walls for structural support of the hill side.

Question: When you cut down trees, do you take bird nesting season into account?

- Sound Transit does take bird nesting season into account, as well as other seasonal happenings, when developing construction schedules. We will work with the contractor to use best management practices (BMPs) to make sure construction activities do not hurt the environment as we build the project.

Question: Do you (Julie Timm) own a home? How would you react if someone were to cut into 4-8 feet of your backyard?

- Julie understands the Lake Forest Park community's concerns and the effect the S3 Line has on them and their homes. As Sound Transit builds a multi-generational regional transit system that will connect cities across the Puget Sound for decades to come, community members may need to make sacrifices in the short-term to for their entire neighborhood and community to benefit in the long-term. Sound Transit is making every effort and step to avoid and minimize affecting our neighbors as much as possible.

Question: We heard Lake Forest Park City Council sent you a letter requesting to pause the project. Why haven't you responded to their letter?

- Julie Timm and the Sound Transit Board of Directors received Lake Forest Park City Council's letter and have begun to draft a response. Julie takes responsibility for not responding to Lake Forest Park City Council's letter, but she wanted to listen to the City Council and the Lake Forest Park community before finalizing her response.

Question: The BAT lanes are the biggest point of contention in Lake Forest Park. On NE 145th Street, you're using queue jumps. Why is Shoreline getting queue jumps, but not Lake Forest Park?

- The NE 145th Street corridor is a different environment compared to SR 522. The NE 145th Street corridor is narrower, has sidewalks on both sides of the road, and has both businesses and apartment buildings abutting the road. If BAT lanes were to be used on the NE 145th Street corridor, the effect would displace all businesses and apartment buildings that are not set back from the road. Using queue jumps on NE 145th Street was the best way to provide some improvement to transit speed and reliability while avoiding displacement of businesses and apartment building tenants.

Question: Why did you not study queue jumps in Lake Forest Park and compare the effect to BAT lanes?

- BAT lanes are part of the project to improve and sustain transit speed and reliability. Julie Timm committed to following up with the community about the merits of queue jumps in lieu of continuous BAT lanes.

Question: Why do you believe that all your project assumptions are correct? How can you assume that your ridership projections are right when the world and technology are moving at such a fast pace?

- The project team is using the tools they have available to design a project that is accessible, reliable, and equitable. Sound Transit cannot see the future but is looking at transit and population trends to get a sense of where ridership demands are and what they will be in the near future.

Question: Why can't you pause the project? Hesitating to respond to the Lake Forest Park City Council's letter is not a valid excuse for not pausing the project.

- The Sound Transit Board of Directors reviewed Lake Forest Park City Council's letter requesting the S3 Line pause design work. There is a trade-off of short-term losses for the long-term gain of accessible, sustainable transit. The Board of Directors mandated the project move forward as they oversee multi-generational projects in alignment with Sound Transit's mission to create accessible, equitable, and sustainable transit. Projects like the S3 Line create opportunities where people can use reliable transit to get to and from their destinations rather than using personal vehicles, and the agency believes that this goal is worth short-term sacrifice.

Question: Are you getting permits to cut down trees?

- Yes, the project team will acquire permits to cut down trees. Part of the permitting process is to review every tree affected and evaluate possible design changes that could minimize the number of trees cut down. We are continuing to review every tree with the Lake Forest Park staff to see where design changes can be made to reduce the number of trees affected by the project.

Question: Was a heat map study done for the project?

- Sound Transit did not complete a heat study as part of the S3 Line's environmental review process.

Question: How many trees will be cut down for 2 minutes of time savings?

- So far, we've reduced our number of affected trees from over 500 to 394, which includes both non-significant trees and significant trees¹. We understand what you're saying when you say we have to look beyond the individual tree count. Our project arborists and engineers are looking at individual areas to see where they can change the design to reduce the number of affected trees. We will also advise the contractor to save as many trees as possible during construction.

Question: How can Lake Forest Park help Sound Transit achieve its goal of a smaller footprint while accomplishing our goal of lowering the speed limit?

- We acknowledge what the community is saying about the project footprint; the project team has and will continue to work with Lake Forest Park city staff and WSDOT to reduce the project footprint where feasible. Reducing speed limits is a process between the city and WSDOT. Sound Transit does not oppose WSDOT reducing speed limits in Lake Forest Park.

Question: Why can't you (Sound Transit) do an elevated lane in the middle of SR 522?

- The project did not evaluate elevated bus lanes in the middle of SR 522.

¹ Non-significant and significant trees are defined by the City of Lake Forest Park Tree code. Other jurisdictions may have their own definitions. "Significant tree" means a tree six inches or greater in diameter (DBH) or a required replacement tree of any size." A non-significant tree is a tree less than six inches in diameter (DBH). More information can be found here: <https://bit.ly/3Ly2Fyp>

Question: We are concerned about project impacts on nature and animals. Why haven't you done a traffic study on streets aside from SR 522? Are you planning on doing a SEPA analysis without the parking garage?

- Sound Transit evaluated the potential impacts of the project to animals and plants as stated in the checklist. While there may be animals (wildlife or other) crossing or attempting to cross SR 522/NE 145th Street, the project is not anticipated to change those movements from existing conditions.

Sound Transit completed a traffic study as part of the SEPA environmental review. The traffic forecasting and simulation modeling study area extended along the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) corridor from 5th Avenue NE/NE 148th Street in Shoreline to NE 180th St/Campus Way NE at the University of Washington – Bothell Campus. Sound Transit evaluated likely access to and from the new BRT system along the area's roadways to determine where riders were likely to come from and return to. The study intersections include 33 signalized intersections and 24 unsignalized intersections. The traffic analysis methodologies used for bus and general-purpose traffic operations (including roadways requiring study) were reviewed by the cities of Seattle, Shoreline, Lake Forest Park, Kenmore, and Bothell, and by King County Metro, Community Transit, and WSDOT.

The analysis found that the proposed roadway improvements, intersection improvements, and park-and-ride garages would result in traffic conditions that are similar to, or improved compared to, conditions today. In the Lake Forest Park segment on SR 522, study intersections would operate at an acceptable level of service (LOS) and operations, and the project would result in the same or improved traffic conditions compared to the Future No-Build condition. We anticipate no adverse effects on transportation as a result of this project.

In August of 2021, the Sound Transit Board of Directors deferred the Stride parking garage in Lake Forest Park to 2044. Sound Transit is evaluating the current project design and existing conditions to determine whether there are any changes that would require additional environmental analysis or documentation. Sound Transit tracks all projects through final design to evaluate potential adverse effects resulting from design or other project changes or new information for a project. We will update the project website with any relevant findings prior to construction.

Question: Does Sound Transit have an ethics problem if David Baker, Kenmore City Council and Sound Transit Boardmember, is able to draw support for the project and voice his opinion while Jon Lebo, Lake Forest Park City Councilmember, can't?

- The Sound Transit Board of Directors is composed of 17 elected officials that represent city interests and jurisdictional interests. David Baker's support for the project aligns with the constituents he represents. Jon Lebo recuses himself in Lake Forest Park City Council meetings whenever the S3 Line project is discussed due to his conflict of interest since Jon is a Sound Transit employee.

Question: One of the issues you have is pedestrian safety. The sidewalk will be a benefit to the community; however, there's no lighting as part of your project. It'd be irresponsible to not add lighting to the corridor.

- The project team is working with Lake Forest Park city staff to make sure lighting in the corridor is adequate. The project team wants to make sure the lighting is properly sized for the corridor and community.

Question: Why are you building a bus project when I see no one riding them?

- Not every bus will be full when passing through Lake Forest Park. We are building the S3 Line to meet the projected demand for transit and to provide an environmentally friendly alternative to using personal vehicles for travel.

Question: Is there anything that would make you abandon plans for BAT lanes?

- The project team does not plan to abandon the design that includes BAT lanes on SR 522.

Question: Was a wildlife study done for mammals?

- A wildlife study was done as part of the S3 Line's environmental review process.

Question: Does the design include wildlife crossings?

- Wildlife crossings are not included in the S3 Line project design. SR 522 is a state highway, and a wildlife crossing does not fit the existing characteristics of the corridor.

Question: Why can't Sound Transit try using queue jumps now and see how they work before building BAT lanes?

- If we fragment the project into separate pieces, it will take longer to build the full project and the cost will increase.

Question: Have you (Sound Transit) already signed construction contracts?

- No, Sound Transit has not yet signed construction contracts for the Stride S3 Line project.

Question: If money was raised for an independent study comparing BAT lanes and queue jumps to each other, would Sound Transit look at it?

- Yes, Sound Transit would review the independent study.

3.2 Verbal Comments

Comment: We keep hearing you have a mandate to keep the project moving forward. Lake Forest Park has a mandate to preserve tree canopy. I had to go through a lot of red tape from the city when I wanted to cut down a tree in my own backyard. I think the city could stop the project by not giving Sound Transit the permits to build the project. We know you can change the project design. We saw it happen in Bothell when the community asked you to change the design to avoid impacting the Yakima Market. You listened then and changed the design. Listen to us now and change your design.

Comment: When SR 520 was tolled, people started to use used SR 522 as an alternative route. There's an opportunity here to get back to a quieter state. I'm aware that the noise levels are bad and that the project won't make it worse. I'd like Sound Transit to work with WSDOT to lower the speed limit and calm the traffic.

Comment: Our community is upset and hurt. We would like you (Sound Transit) to walk in Lake Forest Park's shoes. Think outside of the box and design changes that can actually fit in our community.

Comment: Who is this project really for? Does Sound Transit really need to spend all this money when we don't really want the project? (rhetorical question)

Comment: I don't live on SR 522 but use it to commute. Everyone wants a successful transit system. We want a legitimate study of the queue jumps versus BAT lanes. Please show us the study if it exists. If not, please study it. If you can show us legitimate data about BAT lanes being better than queue jumps, we will believe you.

Comment: There's a master plan about adding housing in King County. Lake Forest Park is not Bothell or Kenmore where it is commercial [on the main corridor]. There's the continual theme of creating a commerce corridor when Lake Forest Park doesn't want that.

Comment: I'm concerned about the side streets being filled with traffic once construction starts. The neighborhood streets aren't designed to be used by cut-through traffic. I know the project needs to be done, but please look at all options.

Comment: I believe in mass transit and riding it. Because you have a mandate to deliver the project doesn't mean you have to do it one way.

Comment: I think we're wasting a lot of our time. I get that time and labor has been spent developing the project. We all think there's still time to study the queue jumps vs BAT lanes. It's in your benefit to do the study now. If you can't do the study, have a consultant do it. Looking at the study may give you more design options.

Comment: The parking garage isn't happening anytime soon, right? When the bus comes, where will people park to get on it? Your project is cutting into my backyard and I'm losing my privacy.

Comment: Why are you building a 100-year project? We would rather you build a 20-year project since you'll have to redo things in 20 years anyway.

4 SUMMARY OF WRITTEN COMMENTS

Some members of the public provided written comments to the project team during and after the meeting. 49 written comments were received from the audience. Below is a summary of the written comments that were received.

- Concerns the project's design process is moving too quickly.
- Requests for the project to pause design and consider other design options.
- Requests for the project to work with the Lake Forest Park City Council and community to find a design option that works for Lake Forest Park.
- Concern and frustration about the loss of the tree canopy and removal of mature trees.
- Frustration that the Lake Forest Park community is not being listened to.
- Questioning the project need and trade-offs for the Lake Forest Park community.
- Belief that the project is not necessary and that tax dollars are being wasted.
- Belief that the project will not benefit the Lake Forest Park community.
- Belief that the project is ignoring Lake Forest Park community concerns.
- Questioning the project's use of BAT lanes without studying the effect of queue jumps.

