

SCOPING

EAST LINK PROJECT

# Environmental Scoping Information Report

Seattle to Bellevue  
to Redmond

September 2006



CENTRAL PUGET SOUND  
REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY

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### **Attachments**

East Link Transit Project Preliminary Purpose and Need Statement  
East Link Project Scoping Comment Form

## **Introduction**

The East Link project is an element of the proposed Sound Transit 2 package of mass transit projects currently being considered by Sound Transit, consistent with the agency's recently adopted Long-Range Plan update. East Link is a proposed extension of the Central Link Light Rail Transit project from Seattle to Bellevue and Redmond via I-90 and Mercer Island (see Figure 1: Project Area).

After adoption of the Long-Range Plan, Sound Transit began developing the next phase of transit investments for implementation, which is called Sound Transit 2. On July 13th, 2006, the Sound Transit Board of Directors identified three capital investment options for expanding the regional transit system under Sound Transit 2. In each option light rail transit is identified as the preferred transportation mode for high capacity transit in the Seattle to Bellevue and Redmond via I-90 and Mercer Island (East Link) corridor. The three capital investment options have been issued for public and agency review and comment. After consideration of public and agency comment, the Sound Transit Board will select a final Sound Transit 2 package. Funding to implement Sound Transit 2 will be submitted to the voters within the Sound Transit District in November 2007 alongside a companion package of regional road investments.

As the public agency proposing the East Link project, Sound Transit is required to comply with the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) and is the lead agency under SEPA. In addition, WSDOT, which has jurisdiction over I-90, State Road 520 (SR 520), and I-405 and would approve any activities on its facilities, will serve as a SEPA co-lead agency along with Sound Transit. The project will also pursue federal funding from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). As a result, the FTA is required to undertake environmental review in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The FTA, as the federal lead agency under NEPA, and Sound Transit and WSDOT, as the state lead agencies under SEPA, have determined that the East Link project may have probable significant adverse environmental impacts. To satisfy both NEPA and SEPA requirements, the agencies are preparing a combined EIS for the East Link project.

## **What is Scoping?**

Scoping is the first step in the NEPA/SEPA EIS process. Scoping is designed to inform the public, interest groups, affected tribes and government agencies of the EIS (including opportunities for public involvement) and to present the proposed actions, alternatives and impacts for public and agency review early in the process.

The purpose of scoping is to determine the range of alternatives and identify the potentially significant issues to be analyzed in depth in the EIS. The scoping process is also intended to eliminate detailed study of those issues that are not significant and those issues that have been addressed by prior studies. This scoping process includes public meetings at which anyone may have their oral comments recorded and/or provide written comments. Written comments are encouraged throughout the scoping period.

Scoping comments should focus on what alternatives and probable significant environmental impacts should be considered. The proposed range of alternatives for consideration and a list of elements of the built and natural environment that will be evaluated for project impacts are provided in this report. Comments on the preliminary Purpose and Need Statement are also being solicited during the scoping period, and the preliminary statement is attached to this report.

**This environmental scoping information report describes:**

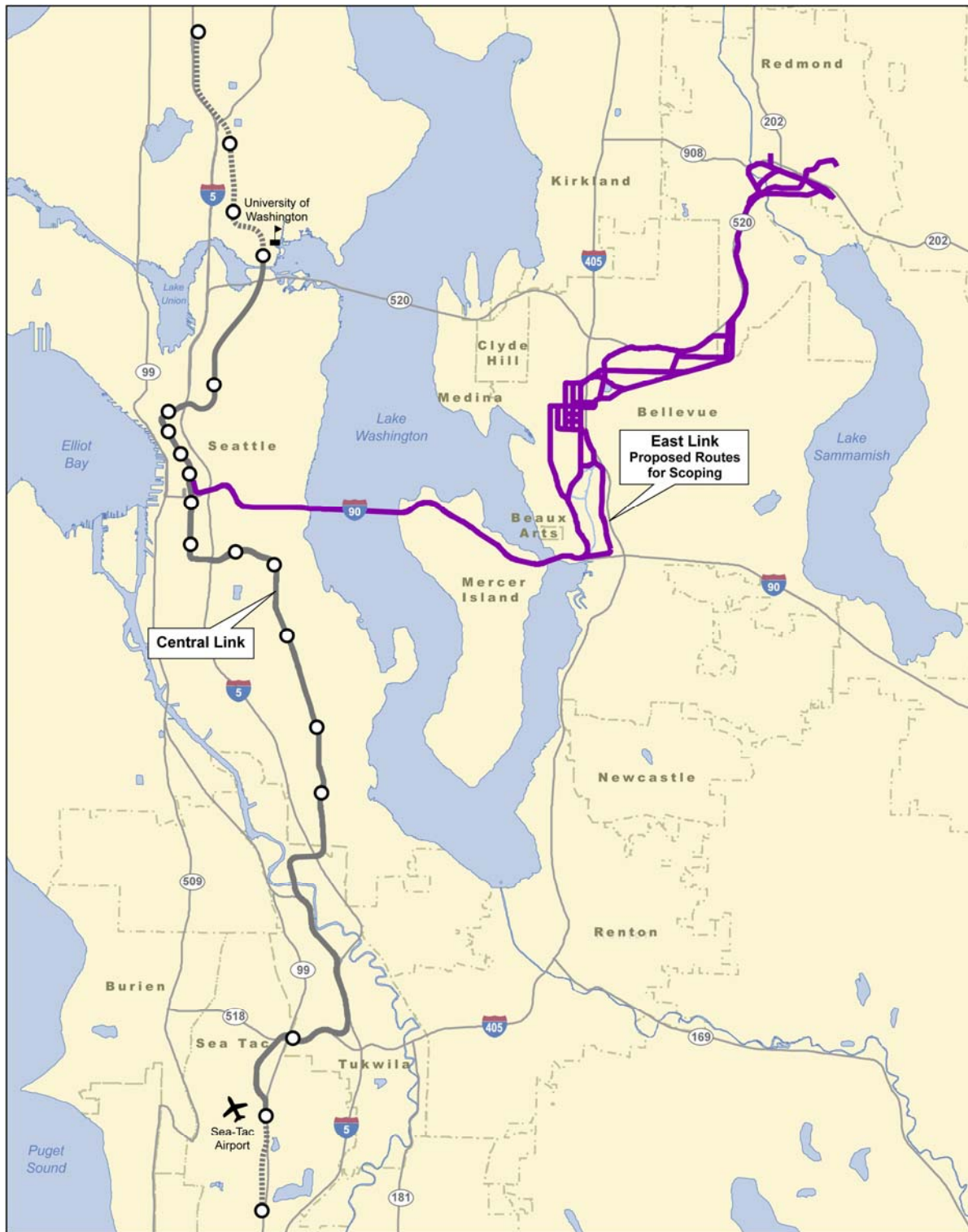
- The Scoping Process
- Project Preliminary Purpose and Need Statement (attachment)
- East Link EIS Schedule
- Public Involvement
- Scoping Meeting Dates and Locations
- Project Background
- Description of East Link Alternatives
- Environmental Elements to be Evaluated

## **The Scoping Process**

This scoping process will be conducted in consultation with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the cities of Bellevue, Mercer Island, Redmond, and Seattle; King County; affected tribes; regional, state and federal agencies; interest groups; businesses; affected communities; individuals and the public. The scoping process will include the following:

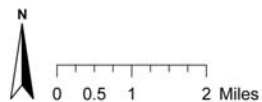
- Developing (1) proposed route alternatives for evaluation, (2) environmental issues to be addressed, and (3) project preliminary purpose and need.
- Releasing this environmental scoping information report
- A 30-day public scoping comment period and scoping meetings to present information and receive comments.
- Meeting, corresponding, and/or consulting with affected local, regional, state and federal agencies, tribes and other organizations regarding issues within their jurisdiction or concern.
- Carefully considering written or oral comments made at the scoping meetings or received during the scoping period, and, as appropriate, refining the proposed alternatives, issues and coordination plan.
- Preparing a Scoping Summary Report that summarizes the results of the scoping process, including comments received, and making the report available to the public.

After completion of the 30-day scoping comment period on October 2, 2006, the lead agencies for the EIS will consider all scoping comments received and, in consultation with participating agencies, will finalize the Purpose and Need and determine the range of alternatives to be evaluated in the EIS. Additional reasonable alternatives suggested during the scoping process, including those involving other transit modes or route alignments, will be considered.



August 3, 2006 File Path: \\bianca\Proj\SoundTransit\341526\GIS\MapDocuments\Scope\Routes\A\_SystemWideOverview8X11\LDLabels.mxd , Scoping , Fig 1 v8 Project Area.gr

- East Link Proposed Routes for Scoping
- Central Link Alignment and Stations
- ⋯ Central Link Extensions
- - - City Limits



**Figure 1. Project Area**  
East Link Project

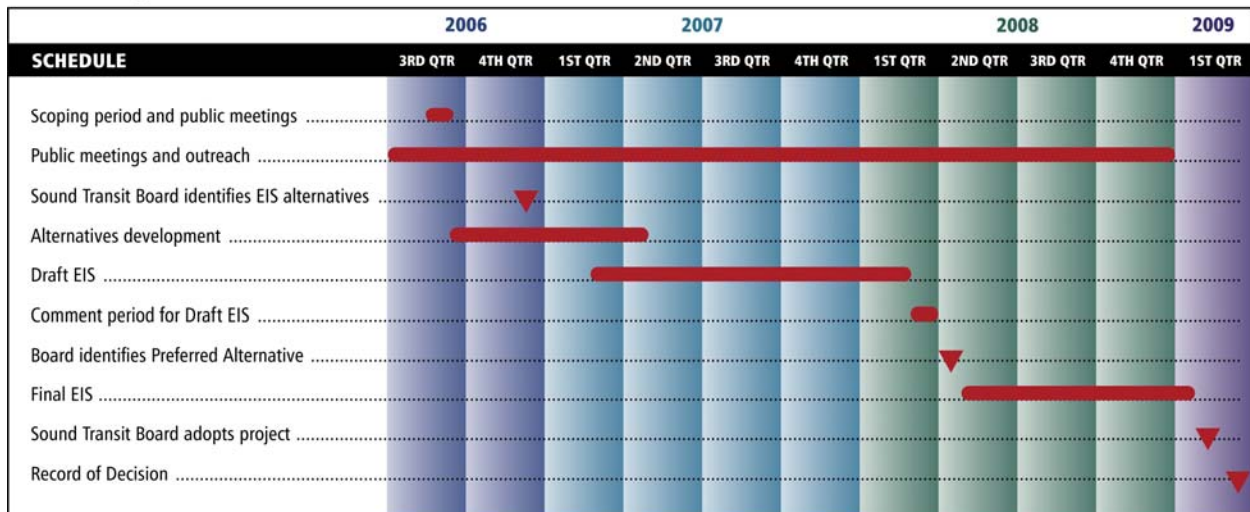
## Project Preliminary Purpose and Need Statement

The Purpose and Need Statement is an important component of an EIS. It is intended to briefly explain the underlying purpose and need to which the agency is responding in proposing the project. The recently enacted Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) federal legislation states that lead agencies will provide an opportunity for agency and public comment on the preliminary purpose and need statement early in the environmental review process. The attached East Link preliminary Purpose and Need Statement is provided for public and agency review, and comments on the statement will be accepted during the 30-day scoping period.

## East Link EIS Schedule

The proposed schedule for the East Link environmental review process is shown below. The proposed schedule is subject to revision based on Sound Transit Board decision making and funding availability.

**East Link Project EIS Schedule**



## Public Involvement: How can I be part of the project?

Anyone who has an interest in the East Link project alternatives and potential environmental impacts is encouraged to take part in the scoping process. First, read this document. It describes current assumptions regarding the East Link project and the route alternatives to be evaluated. Second, attend a scoping meeting. Third, tell us what you think should be studied. Comments and suggestions are encouraged on any or all of the material contained in this document or presented at the scoping meetings. Input can be presented orally at the scoping meetings or received in writing no later than October 2, 2006. A public comment sheet is attached to this report. A draft Coordination Plan that addresses how Sound Transit will involve the public and agencies throughout the EIS process will be available at the scoping meetings and is also available on the Sound Transit website or by contacting Brooke Belman as provided below.

Although the formal scoping period ends October 2, 2006, opportunities for public involvement in project development will continue after that time. Involvement opportunities will include ongoing meetings with members of the public, tribes, business and community groups and government agencies; written materials and project updates; and a project website. In addition, Sound Transit will hold public meetings/hearings on the draft EIS during a public comment period when it is issued.

## **Scoping Meeting Dates and Locations**

Scoping meetings have been scheduled for the East Link project. The meetings will consist of an open house and also include a separate room to provide oral comments. The scoping meetings are being combined with the Sound Transit 2 public comment process and information on the Sound Transit 2 capital improvement options will also be available at the meetings. Both oral and written comments on East Link scoping and the Sound Transit 2 investment options will be accepted at these meetings. Auxiliary aids, services and communication materials in accessible formats and languages other than English can be arranged with sufficient notice by calling 800-201-4900 (voice) or 206-398-5410 (TTY).

**Comments may also be submitted in writing by mail, fax, or email to be received by 5:00 p.m. October 2, 2006, to:**

**James Irish, Link Environmental Manager**  
**Sound Transit**  
**401 S. Jackson Street**  
**Seattle, WA 98104-2826**  
**FAX: 206-398-5217**  
**Email: [eastlinkscopingcomments@soundtransit.org](mailto:eastlinkscopingcomments@soundtransit.org)**

For more information on the scoping process, contact Brooke Belman at 206-398-5238, [belmanb@soundtransit.org](mailto:belmanb@soundtransit.org), or write her at the address above.

### **Public Scoping Meetings:**

**Each public scoping meeting will be held from 4:30 to 7:30 p.m.**

#### **Bellevue**

Wednesday, September 13, 2006  
Meydenbauer Center  
11100 NE 6<sup>th</sup> Street, Room #407  
Bellevue, WA 98004

#### **Redmond**

Thursday, September 14, 2006  
Old Redmond School House Community Center  
16600 NE 80<sup>th</sup> Street  
Redmond, WA 98073

#### **Seattle**

Wednesday, September 20, 2006  
Union Station  
Ruth Fisher Board Room  
401 S. Jackson Street  
Seattle, WA 98104

#### **Mercer Island**

Thursday, September 21, 2006  
Community Center at Mercer View  
Clarke Room  
8236 SE 24th Street  
Mercer Island, WA 98040

Materials used at the public scoping meetings will be available on the Sound Transit website at [www.soundtransit.org/eastlink](http://www.soundtransit.org/eastlink).

## Project Background

Sound Transit and other transportation entities have studied many different high capacity transit modes across I-90 to the East Side over the last 40 years. The history of this work can be found in the *East Corridor High Capacity Transit Mode Analysis History* (August 2006), and this report is available on the Sound Transit website, local libraries, or can be requested from Sound Transit by contacting Brooke Belman as provided above.

In May 2004, Sound Transit began planning work for Sound Transit 2 (ST2), a second phase of transit investments for the Puget Sound region through the year 2030. A SEPA Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) on the Regional Transit Long-Range Plan was published in June 2005. This document evaluated the impacts of various regional transit system plan alternatives, updating and building upon environmental analyses conducted for the Regional Transit System Plan EIS of 1993 that was the basis of Sound Transit's first long-range plan, *Sound Move*. *Sound Move* was the first phase of transportation investments for the region and included regional express bus service, commuter rail, and light rail.

Sound Transit's Long-Range Plan was updated based on the SEIS and public and agency involvement and adopted by the Sound Transit Board in July 2005. Based on the Long Range Plan update, the Sound Transit Board is expected to identify a package of projects, known as Sound Transit 2 (ST2), in the fall of 2006 to be put before the voters for funding in November 2007. ST2 would implement a second phase of transportation investments for the region included in the Long-Range Plan.

The Long-Range Plan includes:

- Light Rail - connecting the four major regional centers – Everett, Seattle, Tacoma, and Bellevue, prioritizing light rail investment funds for the completion of the Everett-Seattle-Tacoma Link light rail system and the HCT system directly connecting Bellevue with that north-south rail spine. The Long-Range Plan identifies the East Link corridor as High Capacity Transit (HCT) in the form of Light Rail or Rail Convertible Bus Rapid Transit (BRT).
- Sounder Commuter Rail – adding two-way commuter rail service on existing tracks, expanding the current service from Seattle to Tacoma and Lakewood and back and from Seattle to Everett and back.
- Bus Rapid Transit - a regional bus network comprised of a variety of service types to provide commuting options in the designated corridors. Service types include several types of bus rapid transit (BRT) with varying levels of priority over other traffic, as well as regional express bus routes operating with limited or no priority.
- Regional Express Bus –connecting centers where demand is not sufficient to justify BRT service, or where needed as supporting services to HCT investments. ST Express buses will serve major regional centers and destinations and provide connection to other transportation components of the regional transit system.



Following adoption of the Long-Range Plan in July 2005, the Board identified two transportation modes for further analysis in the Seattle to Bellevue and Redmond via I-90 corridor: Light Rail Transit and Rail-Convertible Bus Rapid Transit. The Board also directed staff to conduct further transportation analysis in the corridor and present the results of that analysis to the Board for consideration in ST2 planning. Further analysis was conducted, including a full scale “load test” that simulated light rail operations on the I-90 floating bridge and elevated superstructure confirming its capacity to support light rail, and a planning level analysis of the feasibility of the “rail joint: necessary for the construction and operation of light rail on the I-90 bridge, and a Washington State Department of Transportation report detailing future congestion on I-90 and projected traffic effects on I-90 resulting from converting the center roadway to exclusive transit use, and a historical review of the more than 40 years of planning studies and agreements relevant to the I-90 corridor between the Eastside and Seattle. Based on the results of this information, the SEIS, and the technical reports and issue papers on alternative transportation modes, on July 13, 2006, the Sound Transit Board identified light rail as the preferred transportation mode for the East Link project.

## **Description of the East Link Alternatives**

The following is a brief description of the station and route alternatives for each project segment to be investigated during the initial stage of the East Link project. This description is neither definitive nor final. It is intended to promote discussion during the scoping process. Design innovation and community input during project development will affect the alternatives ultimately studied in the EIS.

The East Link project consists of an approximately 11 to 19-mile corridor between downtown Seattle, Bellevue, and Redmond via I-90 and Mercer Island. The study area has been defined in five segments for evaluation purposes: Seattle to south Bellevue; south Bellevue to Downtown Bellevue; Downtown Bellevue east to 116<sup>th</sup> NE Ave; Downtown Bellevue to Overlake Transit Center; and Overlake Transit Center to downtown Redmond (see Figure 1). In addition to the build alternatives described, the EIS will also evaluate the no-build alternative and alternative maintenance facility locations. The project will serve the transit destinations of downtown Seattle, Mercer Island, downtown Bellevue, Overlake and downtown Redmond. Additional transit markets to be served include Rainier Avenue, Mercer Island, south Bellevue, and the Bel-Red Corridor.

In general, alternatives presented for Scoping will be evaluated as at-grade (surface) or elevated profiles as alternative development continues. In addition, routes in downtown Bellevue would also be considered for tunnel profiles as well as at-grade and elevated. The route from Seattle to south Bellevue would be along the Interstate 90 roadway at-grade. At this stage, route identification reflects general corridors rather than specific alignments within the corridor. Specific alignments will place the light rail in the middle or sides of each corridor. Refinement of alternatives to specifically address the profile and alignment within each corridor will develop as engineering and environmental analysis progress. After considering the Scoping comments received, the lead agencies for the EIS will, in consultation with participating agencies, finalize the Purpose and Need and determine the range of alternatives to be evaluated in the EIS.

Project length could vary between 11 and 19 miles, depending on whether the project is phased, ending at an interim location or is constructed all the way to downtown Redmond. Potential project termini are in Bellevue and Redmond and include Overlake Hospital, Overlake Transit Center (Redmond), and downtown Redmond depending upon project cost and available funding.

### **Segment A: Seattle to South Bellevue**

Segment A consists of one route alternative from the existing Central Link light rail Chinatown/International District Station on to I-90 via the D2 roadway, a high occupancy vehicle (HOV) ramp between downtown Seattle and Rainier Avenue. The route would be in the center lanes of I-90 across Lake Washington and Mercer Island.

Segment A includes two potential stations:

- I-90 at Rainier Avenue
- I-90 on Mercer Island between 77<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE and 80<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE

Figure 2 depicts the proposed route alternatives and potential station areas.

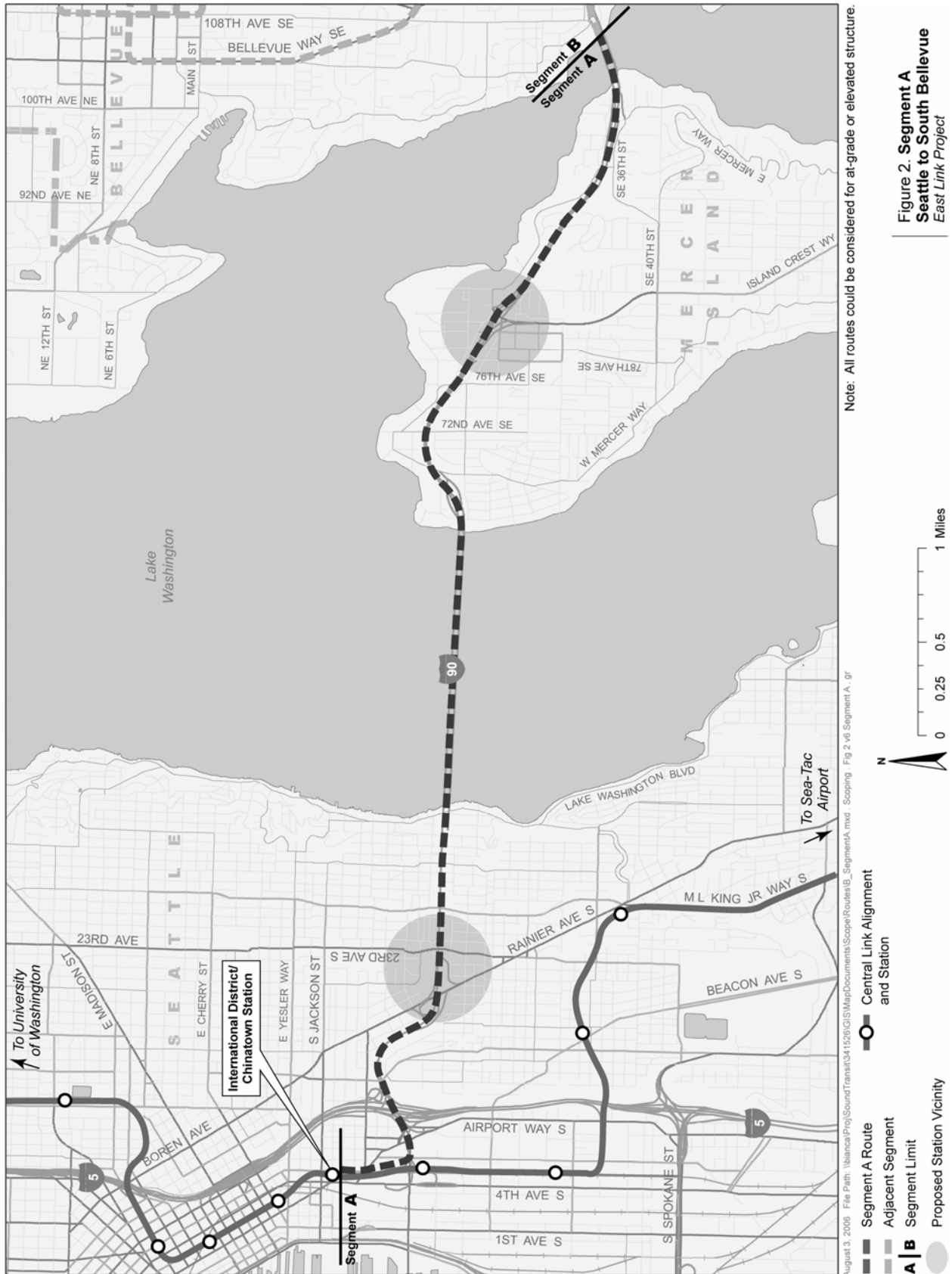
### **Segment B: South Bellevue to Downtown Bellevue**

Three Segment B alternatives leave I-90 at Bellevue Way SE and follow Bellevue Way SE north. One route continues along Bellevue Way SE north all the way to downtown Bellevue. Another route alternative diverges from Bellevue Way SE following 112<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE to downtown Bellevue, and a third option turns east from 112<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE to SE 8<sup>th</sup> Street and then follows I-405 north to downtown Bellevue. Two Segment B alternatives would continue east from Bellevue Way on the north side of I-90, one heading north in the vicinity of Lake Washington Boulevard/118<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE and one heading north in the vicinity of the BNSF railroad. At SE 8<sup>th</sup> Street, either alternative could continue north near I-405 or turn west on SE 8<sup>th</sup> Street and then head north on 112<sup>th</sup> Avenue to downtown Bellevue.

Potential station options include:

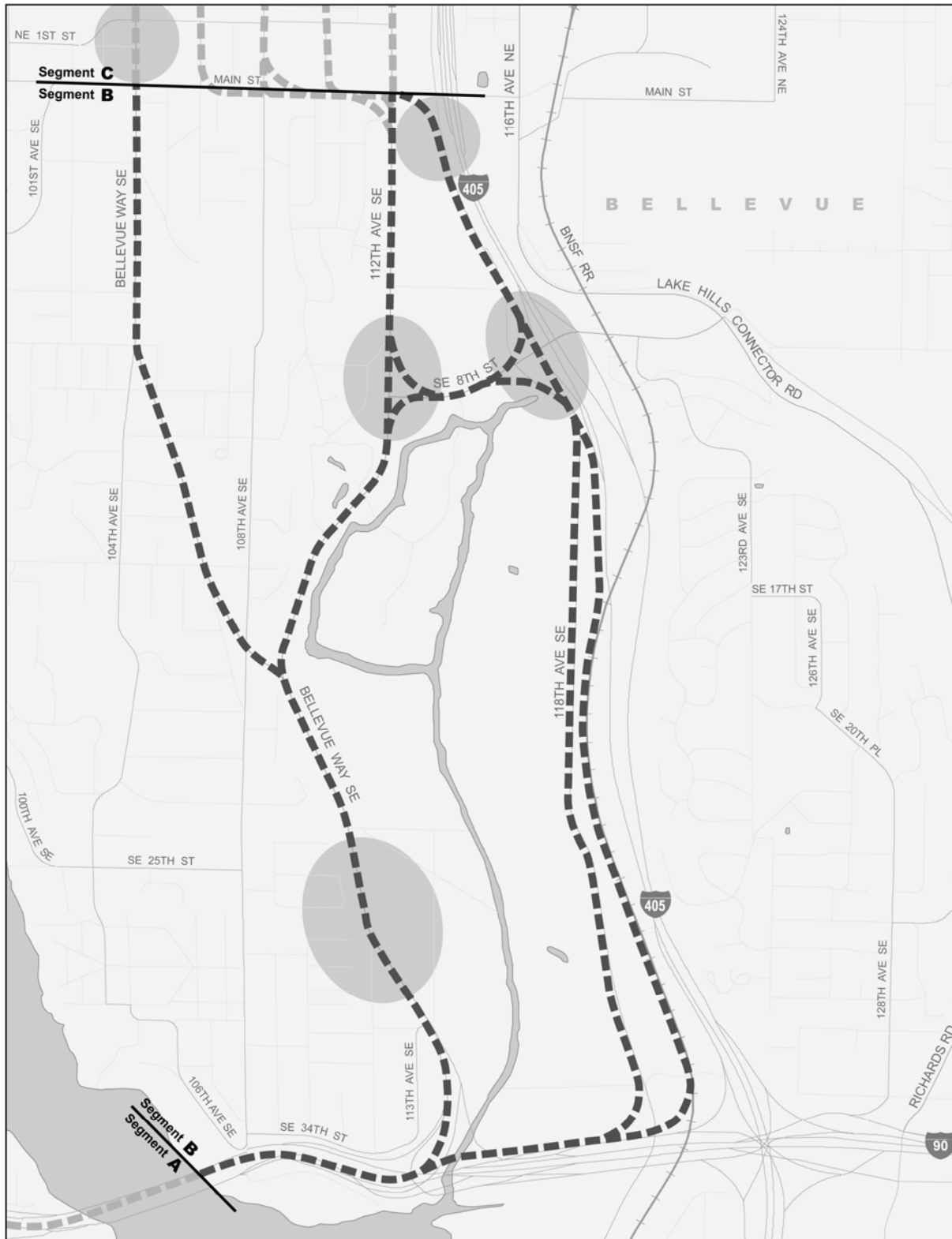
- South Bellevue Park and Ride
- Near SE 8<sup>th</sup> Street at either 112<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE or 118<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE
- Near 114<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE and Main Street

Figure 3 depicts the proposed route alternatives and potential station areas.



Note: All routes could be considered for at-grade or elevated structure.

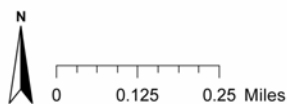
**Figure 2. Segment A  
Seattle to South Bellevue  
East Link Project**



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Note: All routes could be considered for at-grade or elevated structure.

- Segment B Alternative Route
- Adjacent Segment
- A | B Segment Limit
- Proposed Station Vicinity



**Figure 3. Segment B**  
**South Bellevue to Main**  
**Street**  
*East Link Project*

### **Segment C: Downtown Bellevue**

Route alternatives in downtown Bellevue approach from the south, pass near the Bellevue Transit Center, and turn east toward Overlake Hospital and on to Redmond. The Segment B route that follows Bellevue Way SE all the way downtown would continue along Bellevue Way NE and turn east toward the center of downtown and the Bellevue Transit Center in the vicinity of NE 6<sup>th</sup> Street. Other routes approaching downtown along 112<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE or I-405 would follow 106<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE, 108<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE, 110<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE, or 112<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE. Routes would turn east and cross I-405 near NE 6<sup>th</sup> or NE 7<sup>th</sup> Streets or continue through downtown, turning east and crossing I-405 at NE 12<sup>th</sup> Street.

Potential station options include:

- Bellevue Way NE in the vicinity of Main Street and NE 2<sup>nd</sup> Street
- Near the Bellevue Transit Center
- East of I-405 in the Overlake Hospital area near 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE and NE 8<sup>th</sup> Street or NE 12<sup>th</sup> Street

Figure 4 depicts the proposed route alternatives and potential station areas.

### **Segment D: Downtown Bellevue to Overlake Transit Center**

Segment D alternatives begin at either NE 6<sup>th</sup>, NE 7<sup>th</sup>, or NE 12<sup>th</sup> Streets and head east through the Bel-Red corridor toward the Overlake neighborhood of Redmond. There are several route options beginning from Segment C at NE 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE. Alternatives follow Bel-Red Road, SR 520, or a new corridor aligned with NE 16<sup>th</sup> Street. In the eastern half of Segment D, route alternatives may also follow 136<sup>th</sup> Place NE and NE 20<sup>th</sup> Street. Alternatives then turn north along 151<sup>st</sup> Place NE, 152<sup>nd</sup> Avenue NE, or SR 520 and follow SR 520 to the Overlake Transit Center.

Potential station options include:

- vicinity of 136<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE at Bel-Red Road
- vicinity of 132<sup>nd</sup> Avenue NE at NE 16<sup>th</sup> Street
- near Overlake Park and Ride in the vicinity of 152<sup>nd</sup> Avenue NE and NE 24<sup>th</sup> Street
- Overlake Transit Center at SR 520 and NE 40<sup>th</sup> Street

Figure 5 depicts the proposed route alternatives and potential station areas.

### **Segment E: Overlake Transit Center to Redmond**

All route options in Segment E follow SR 520 towards downtown Redmond. Three alternatives utilize the BNSF railroad corridor through downtown Redmond, accessing it from either West Lake Sammamish Parkway and Redmond Way, Leary Way, or near the SR 202 and SR 520 interchange. A fourth route option veers east from SR 520 toward NE 72<sup>nd</sup> Street to Bear Creek Parkway, crossing Redmond Way to the Bear Creek Park and Ride via Avondale Road NE.

Two of the BNSF corridor alternatives continue to the east along the corridor past the Redmond Town Center ending near NE 70<sup>th</sup> Street and 176<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE. The route from the SR 202

interchange heads west along the BNSF corridor and then turns north at 161<sup>st</sup> Avenue NE to the Redmond Park and Ride at NE 83<sup>rd</sup> Street.

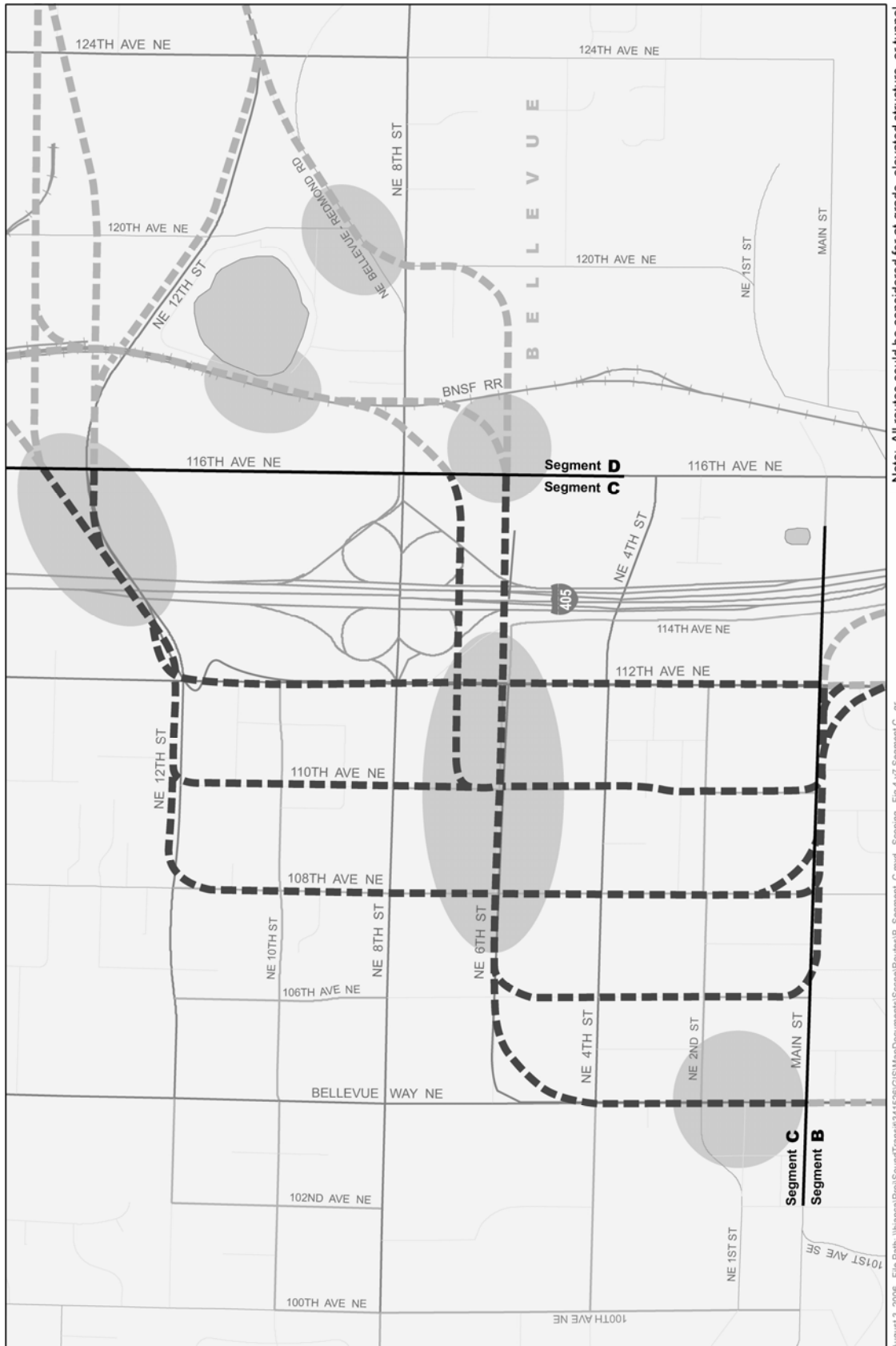
Potential station options include:

- Redmond Park and Ride at NE 83<sup>rd</sup> Street and 161<sup>st</sup> Avenue NE
- Redmond Town Center along either the BNSF corridor or Bear Creek Parkway
- Bear Creek Park and Ride at 178<sup>th</sup> Place NE and NE Union
- Near the intersection of SR 520 and SR 202

Figure 6 depicts the proposed route alternatives and potential station areas.

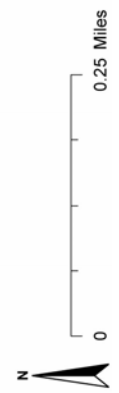
### **Maintenance Base Alternatives**

The East Link project will likely include a maintenance base facility. Activities at the maintenance base would include light rail vehicle storage, operator report facilities, light vehicle maintenance, and maintenance of way facilities. A track leading from the mainline to the maintenance base would also be required. The East Link maintenance base is proposed to be located on a 15 to 20 acre site in the Bel-Red corridor area or in the City of Redmond. Specific sites for analysis in the draft EIS will be identified by the Sound Transit Board at the end of 2006 or in early 2007.



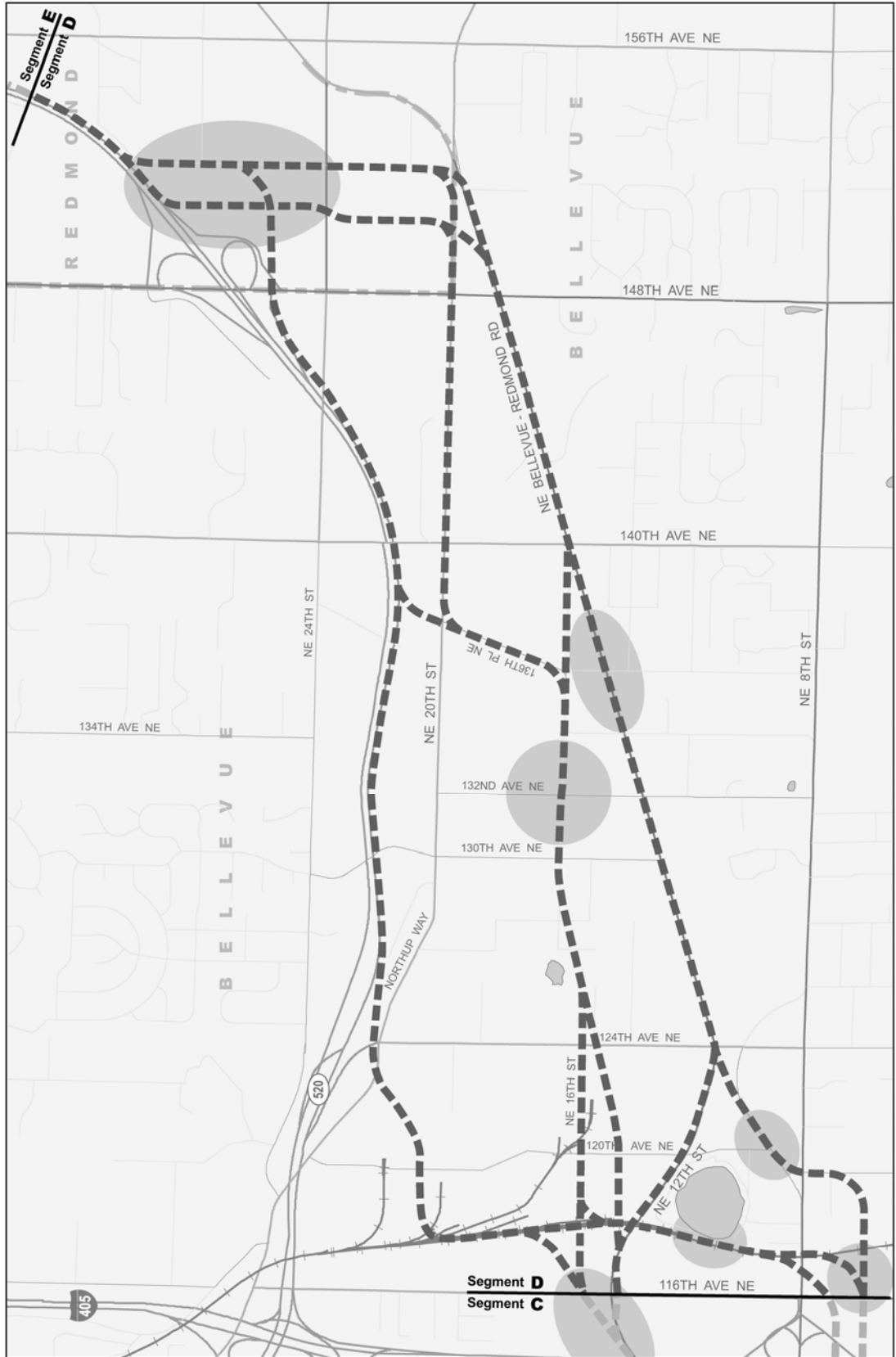
Note: All routes could be considered for at-grade, elevated structure, or tunnel.

**Figure 4. Segment C  
Downtown Bellevue (Main  
Street to 116th NE Avenue)  
East Link Project**



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- Segment C Alternative Route
- Adjacent Segment
- B | C Segment Limit
- Proposed Station Vicinity



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Note: All routes could be considered for at-grade or elevated structure.

**Figure 5. Segment D  
Downtown Bellevue (116th NE Avenue) to  
Overlake Station (NE 36th Street/SR 520)  
East Link Project**

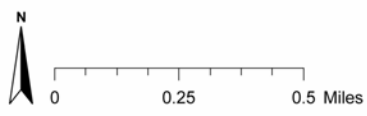




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Note: All routes could be considered for at-grade or elevated structure.

- Segment E Alternative Route
- Adjacent Segment
- D | E Segment Limit
- City Limits
- Proposed Station Vicinity



**Figure 6. Segment E**  
**Overlake Station**  
**to Redmond**  
*East Link Project*

## Environmental Elements to be Evaluated

Impacts to the following environmental elements will be analyzed in the EIS.

- Transportation
  - Regional travel
  - Transit
  - Arterials and Local Streets (traffic, access and circulation, safety, non-motorized facilities, parking)
  - Freight Movement
  - Navigable Waterways
- Land Use and Economic Activity
- Acquisitions, Displacements and Relocations
- Neighborhoods and Populations
- Visual Resources and Aesthetics
- Air Quality
- Noise and Vibration
- Ecosystems
- Water Resources
- Energy
- Geology and Soils
- Hazardous Materials
- Electromagnetic Fields
- Public Services
- Utilities
- Historic and Archaeological Resources
- Parklands
- Construction Impacts
- Cumulative Effects
- Financial Analysis
- Environmental Justice
- Section 4(f)

The analysis will identify impacts for the construction period and for the long-term operation of the alternatives including direct, indirect and cumulative impacts. Results of initial evaluations of impacts will also be used to modify routes stations, and other facilities to reduce impacts or improve performance. Environmental analysis will also propose potential mitigation measures to further reduce identified impacts.

**Attachment:**  
**East Link Project**  
**Preliminary Purpose and Need Statement**



## Preliminary Purpose and Need Statement

*The following is a Preliminary Purpose and Need Statement for review during this Scoping process. This statement reflects the Sound Transit Board decision of July 13, 2006 identifying light rail as the preferred transportation mode for the high-capacity transit corridor from Seattle to Bellevue and Redmond via Interstate-90 and across Mercer Island. Additional reasonable alternatives suggested during the Scoping process, including those involving other transit modes or route alignments, will be considered. After considering the Scoping comments received, the lead agencies for the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act, the Federal Transit Administration and Sound Transit (and Washington State Department of Transportation under the State Environmental Policy Act) will, in consultation with participating agencies, finalize the Purpose and Need and determine the range of alternatives to be evaluated in the EIS.*

### **Purpose of the East Link Project**

The purpose of the East Link Project is to expand the Sound Transit (ST) Central Link light-rail system from Seattle to Bellevue and Redmond, via Interstate 90 (I-90) and across Mercer Island, to provide a reliable and efficient alternative for moving people throughout the region.

The following are supporting project objectives:

- Improve speed and reliability and expand capacity for people traveling on the region's increasingly congested transportation corridors, while preserving the environment through an exclusive light rail high capacity transit right-of-way
- Increase mobility and accessibility to and from the region's highest employment and housing concentrations by providing a transportation alternative
- Support VISION 2020 and Destination 2030 regional transportation plans to encourage directing growth into high-density urban and manufacturing centers in downtown Bellevue, Overlake, and Redmond by providing high-capacity transit connection between these centers and with other regional destinations

- Fulfill Sound Transit’s legislative mandate to meet public transportation and mobility needs for high-capacity transportation infrastructure in the central Puget Sound region, as established by the State High-Capacity Transportation Systems Act (Ch. 81.104 RCW)
- Continue to implement the goals and objectives identified in Sound Transit’s Long-Range Plan, which guides the development of the regional high-capacity transportation system. The main transportation goal is to “provide a public transportation system that helps ensure long-term mobility, connectivity, and convenience for the citizens of the Puget Sound Region for generations to come” and to “provide reliable, convenient, and safe public transportation services between regional growth centers and create an integrated system of transit services.”
- Implement the high-capacity transit (HCT) element of the I-90 Two Way Transit and HOV Operations Project Final EIS dated May 21, 2004; the Federal Highway Administration Record of Decision of September 28, 2004; and the August 2004 Amendment to the 1976 Memorandum Agreement between King County, City of Bellevue, City of Seattle, City of Mercer Island, Washington State Transportation Commission, and Sound Transit. These documents stipulate that the ultimate configuration of I-90 should accommodate HCT in the center lanes and the Amendment directs the agencies to “to provide high-capacity transit in the center lanes of I-90 between Bellevue and Seattle as quickly as possible.” The Amendment and FHWA Final EIS define HCT as “...a transit system operating in dedicated right-of-way such as light rail, monorail or a substantially equivalent system.”
- More fully develop a regional transit system that would integrate with the Central Link light-rail line, providing direct connections among the largest urban centers in King County, including Bellevue, Overlake, Redmond, downtown Seattle, Capitol Hill, and the University District.

### **Need for the East Link Project**

Current and future trends – detailed below – reveal a need to provide high-capacity light rail transit between Seattle and the Bellevue and Redmond urban centers:

- **Growth and increased demand for transit services:** Transit demand across Lake Washington is expected to nearly double in the next 30-years as residential and employment growth continues on both sides of the Lake. Additionally, regional transit models project a 30 percent increase in transit demand between Bellevue and Redmond through 2030. This is a result of strong population and employment growth in the region. Between 2000 and 2030, Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) projections show that the region’s population will increase almost 40 percent (an additional 1.2 million people), and employment will grow approximately 45 percent (more than 850,000 new jobs). Corridor-specific

population projections show Seattle growing by 28 percent, Mercer Island by 14 percent, Bellevue by 30 percent, and Redmond growing in excess of 50 percent by 2030. Without investments in efficient, reliable transportation alternatives, this population and employment growth will exacerbate growing deficiencies in mobility.

- **Regional urban center density plans assume HCT investments:** In response to the state Growth Management Act (GMA), to concentrate growth in existing urbanized areas, Destination 2030 (Puget Sound’s metropolitan transportation plan) established policies that prioritize the provision of additional transportation services to areas accepting an increased share of growth. Seattle, Bellevue, and Redmond are recognized as urban centers under Destination 2030. Each city has adopted plans to create concentrated centers of high-density, mixed-use, pedestrian-scale development assuming that they will receive high-capacity transit to support their changing transportation needs. Today, both Redmond and Bellevue are developing and expanding rapidly, causing them to meet density goals earlier than expected, thereby increasing the pressure to implement efficient transportation alternatives to improve connections between regional urban centers.
- **Increased congestion on I-90:** Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT) predicts that the I-90 corridor will reach maximum vehicle capacity as early as year 2015 during peak-hour travel, thereafter limiting roadway performance<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, roadway capacity of the I-90 bridge is constrained by bottlenecks at the I-405/I-90 and Bellevue Way/I-90 interchanges on the eastside and the I-90/I-5 interchange in Seattle (which limits access eastbound on to I-90). Even with planned improvements on both State Route (SR) 520 and I-90 Lake Washington bridge crossings, westbound travel time on I-90 is expected to double during peak commute hours by year 2030, thus reducing the volume of vehicles crossing I-90 during peak hour<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, in order to maintain and expand the number of person trips across Lake Washington investments in high-capacity transit are necessary.
- **Operating deficiencies in transit service:** As density in multiple urban centers throughout the region increases, it is imperative to examine options and take action to overcome the inherent limitations in the existing regional bus system due to lower speeds, decreasing reliability and service capacity constraints.
  - a) **Reliability.** Reliability is the degree to which transit service can be counted on for consistent on time performance. The reliability of current transit service in the east corridor is poor due to congestion on

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<sup>1</sup> *I-90 Travel Analysis, Preliminary Data and Discussion: Report to the Sound Transit Board of Directors*, WSDOT, April 27, 2006

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

local arterials and I-90<sup>3</sup>. For instance, according to the Transit Capacity and Quality of Service Manual 2003 standards<sup>4</sup>, delays on Sound Transit Express bus service Route 550 between Seattle and Bellevue in the peak direction is at the lowest reliability rating (Level of Service F). Someone wishing to be late no more than twice a month on Express bus 550 would need to build an additional 15 minutes into their daily schedule. This lack of reliability makes it difficult for users to confidently reach their destinations on time and reduces the attractiveness of transit service throughout the east corridor. An exclusive right-of-way for high-capacity transit is needed to maximize transit reliability and improve transit rider confidence.

**b) Speed of travel.** Bus speeds from Seattle to Bellevue and Bellevue to Redmond are projected to decrease by 20 percent or more<sup>5</sup>. Transit patronage is highly sensitive to travel time expectancy. Increasing usage of HOV lanes and other congested elements in the corridor threatens to further worsen bus travel times. In addition, recent WSDOT study indicates that the duration of congestion periods along I-90 in the AM and PM peak periods is expected to lengthen by more than an hour in both directions by year 2025<sup>6</sup>. Since HOV-lane speeds are affected by congestion in adjacent lanes, poor transit travel time will likely mirror congestion periods, thus reducing the advantage of transit travel. Currently, actual bus travel times in the corridor approach 30 minutes between the International District/Chinatown Station and the Bellevue Transit Center in the PM peak at an average bus speed of 20 miles per hour. By year 2030, the same bus route speeds are expected to decrease to 18 miles per hour based on Sound Transit model projections<sup>7</sup>. An exclusive right-of-way for high-capacity transit is needed to improve transit speeds and to present a viable alternative to single-occupancy vehicular travel.

- **Limited transit capacity and connectivity between major employment centers:** One-third of the region's total employment is within the downtown Seattle, Bellevue, and Redmond/Overlake centers. These employment centers generate a demand for reliable daily business and commuter travel that is not well served by the existing transit system because of its poor reliability and speed in the east corridor.

Bus transit infrastructure capacity is also limited within the central business districts. Bus operations in the downtown Seattle transit tunnel will decrease and eventually be eliminated as light-rail ridership and

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<sup>3</sup> King County Metro Transit AVL data, Fall 2005

<sup>4</sup> Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) Report 100, Transit Capacity and Quality of Service Manual, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition; Washington DC; 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Sound Transit ridership model 2030 Projections

<sup>6</sup> HNTB, 2002, I-90 Two-Way Transit & HOV Operations

<sup>7</sup> King County Metro Transit AVL data, Fall 2005 and Sound Transit ridership model 2030 projections, 2006

train frequencies increase. Redirecting buses to already congested urban surface streets in downtown Seattle increases travel time and decreases reliability. In downtown Bellevue, the 14 transit bays at the Bellevue Transit Center must accommodate multiple bus routes running on tight schedules during peak travel periods. Frequently, on-schedule buses must wait while delayed buses are still boarding passengers. In addition, increased bus service frequency from this center will be limited by the arterial capacity for additional bus traffic and on-street stops. Exclusive high-capacity transit right-of-way is needed to carry more passengers at dependable intervals.



# SCOPING COMMENT FORM

## East Link Project

### Seattle to Bellevue and Redmond

Please help us determine what should be evaluated in the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the East Link project from downtown Seattle to Bellevue and Redmond via I-90 and Mercer Island. In this scoping process you can help define the alternatives for study in the EIS, identify any significant social, economic, or environmental issues for evaluation in the EIS, and comment on the preliminary project Purpose and Need statement. The 30-day scoping period ends **October 2, 2006**, and all comments must be received by 5:00. **Please include a return mailing address with all comments.** A summary of scoping comments received will be available on Sound Transit's website within a few weeks after the close of the scoping period.

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CENTRAL PUGET SOUND REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY

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Place First  
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Here

**James Irish, Link Environmental Manager**  
**Sound Transit**  
**401 S. Jackson St.**  
**Seattle, WA 98104**

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