

Purpose and Need for the East Link Project

1.1 Purpose and Need

The purpose and need for the East Link Project remains the same as that stated in the 2008 Draft EIS. In brief, the purpose is to expand the Sound Transit Link light rail system from Seattle to Mercer Island, Bellevue, and Redmond via I-90 and to provide a reliable and efficient alternative for moving people throughout the region. Current and projected population and employment trends reveal a need to provide light rail transit between Seattle and the urban centers of Bellevue and Redmond. Sound Transit is addressing the regional needs related to the following:

- Increased demand for transit services across Lake Washington, which is expected to double over the next 30 years
- Regional urban center growth plans that require high-capacity transit (HCT) improvements
- Increased congestion on I-90, which will further limit transit performance
- Operating deficiencies in regional bus transit service, which will continue to occur due to lower speeds and decreased reliability
- Limited transit capacity and connectivity between the areas of highest employment density

By constructing the East Link Project, Sound Transit would meet the needs stated above by providing greater capacity and reliability and improving travel time for people traveling between Seattle and Redmond. To meet planned growth in the corridor, Seattle, Mercer Island, Bellevue, and Redmond have made land use and planning decisions based upon increased employment and residential density, which would be more fully realized with a HCT system.

Light rail travel between Seattle and Downtown Bellevue would take less than 20 minutes, with service to Redmond taking approximately 35 minutes. East Link would also provide connections to Central Link, which travels between Downtown Seattle and Seattle-Tacoma International Airport (Sea-Tac Airport) and, beginning in 2016, to

the University of Washington. In addition to the reliable travel times, the frequency of transit would be improved by operating 20 hours every day.

1.2 East Link Project Planning Goals and Objectives

Based on the project purpose, Sound Transit developed evaluation criteria. Sound Transit applied the following goals and objectives in evaluating potential alternatives for the East Link Project; these goals and objectives uphold Sound Transit's legislative mandate to meet public transportation and mobility needs for HCT infrastructure while also being a responsible steward of the environment and being considerate of affected agencies and community members when planning a fiscally responsible project:

1. Transportation goal: Improve transit mobility in the East Link Corridor.
 - a. Improve the quality of transit service
 - b. Increase transit accessibility
 - c. Maximize East Link ridership
2. Environmental goal: Preserve environmental quality in the corridor.
 - a. Minimize potential adverse operating impacts on the natural and built environment
 - b. Minimize potential adverse construction impacts on the natural and built environment
3. Land use goal: Support regional and local land use goals and objectives.
 - a. Support adopted land use and transportation plans
4. Implementation goal: Minimize risk in the corridor.
 - a. Enhance stakeholder and community support
 - b. Design system to reduce construction risk
5. Provide a financially feasible solution.
 - a. Build a system within project budget
 - b. Build a system that can be operated and maintained within available revenue
 - c. Build a system that is cost effective

