

October 2012

FEDERAL WAY TRANSIT EXTENSION

Early Scoping Information Report



CENTRAL PUGET SOUND
REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY

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1 EARLY SCOPING

1.1. Introduction

Federal Way Transit Extension Early Scoping: October 18, 2012 to November 19, 2012

Sound Transit and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) are conducting “Early Scoping” to start the public planning and environmental processes for the Federal Way Transit Extension in South King County in the metropolitan Puget Sound region. The Federal Way Transit Extension is part of the Sound Transit 2 (ST2) Plan approved by voters in 2008. The proposed project would start at the regional light rail system at the future S. 200th Street Station in the City of SeaTac.

Figure 1-1 shows where the Federal Way Transit Extension is located. The Federal Way Transit Extension is an element of the region’s Metropolitan Transportation Plan (the Puget Sound Regional Council’s *Transportation 2040*), and Sound Transit’s Long-Range Transit Plan. These plans anticipate the eventual extension of high capacity transit (HCT) service south to Tacoma. Figure 1-2 shows Sound Transit’s current service and future projects.

About Early Scoping

Early scoping provides an initial opportunity for the public to learn about and provide comments on the project as it begins. This public and agency outreach effort supports the overall planning, public involvement, and state and federal environmental processes for the Federal Way Transit Extension, which will need to satisfy National Environmental Policy Act of 1970 (NEPA) and Washington’s State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) requirements. When the project alternatives are more fully defined, Sound Transit and the FTA will announce the type of environmental document they will prepare and offer further opportunities for public comment. If an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is to be prepared, FTA and Sound Transit will initiate an additional scoping process for the EIS.

In addition, the early scoping process supports FTA planning requirements associated with the New Starts (“Section 5309”) funding program for certain kinds of major capital investments. While recent legislation may lead to changes in the New Starts process, Sound Transit will comply with relevant FTA requirements relating to planning and project development to help it analyze and screen alternatives in preparation for the NEPA process. During early scoping, Sound Transit and FTA are seeking public comments on the scope of the alternatives analysis for the Federal Way Transit Extension, including the purpose and need for the project, the

range of alternatives, and the transportation and community impacts and benefits to be considered.

Figure 1-1. Federal Way Transit Extension Project Area

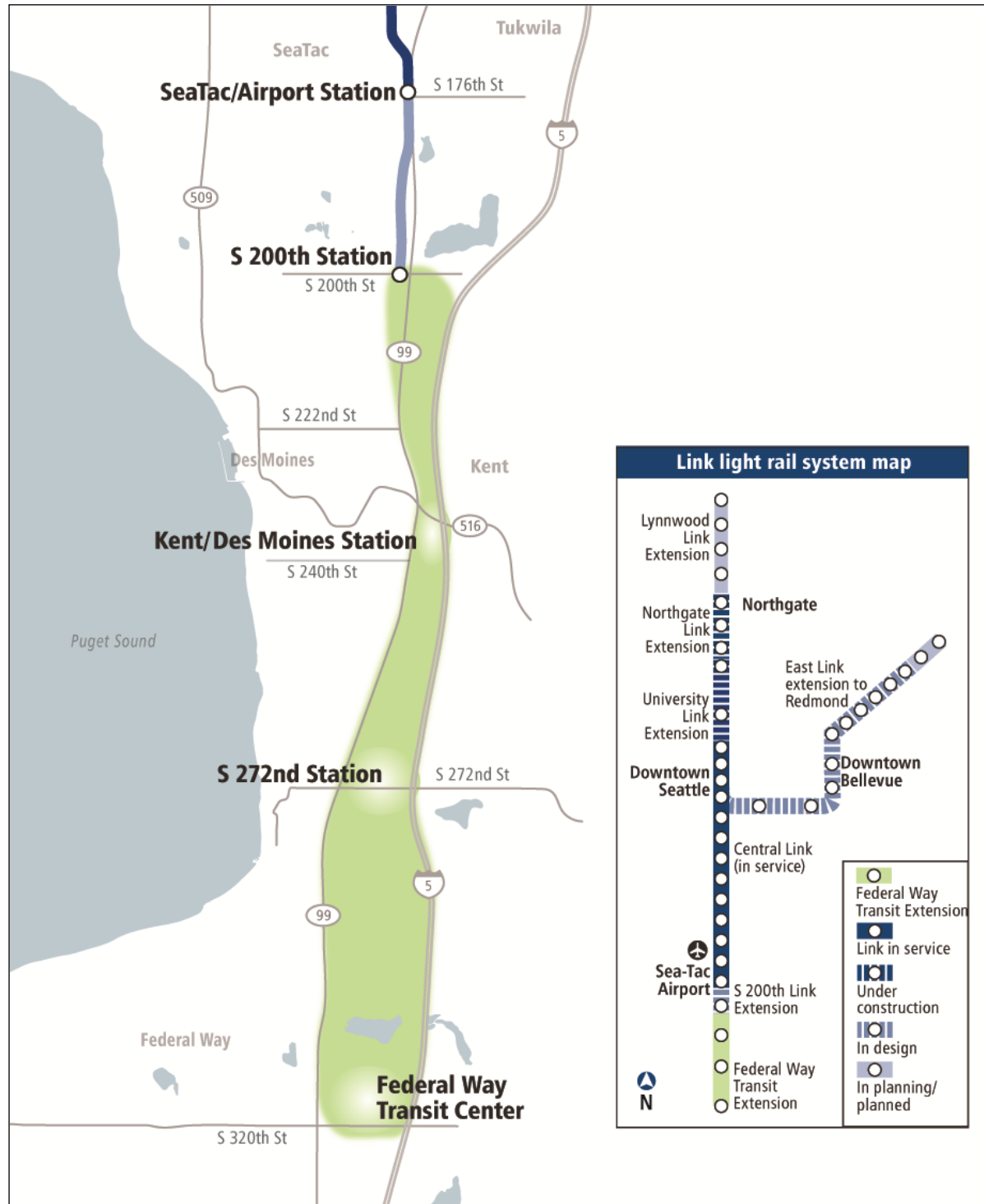


Figure 1-2.
Sound
Transit:
Current
Service
and
Future
Projects



Public and Agency Early Scoping Meetings

Early scoping includes a public comment period that is open until November 19, 2012 with two public meetings. The public meetings will be held at the following locations from 4:00 pm to 7:00 pm:

- Des Moines: November 8, 2012 – Highline Community College, Building 2
2400 S. 240th Street, Des Moines, WA 98198
- Federal Way: November 13, 2012 – Harry S. Truman High School
31455 28th Avenue, Federal Way, WA 98003

A separate early scoping meeting will also be conducted in a webinar format with agencies and tribes to present project information and receive comments. Invitations to the on-line agency scoping meeting and the public scoping meetings will be sent to the appropriate federal, tribal, state, and local governmental units.

Ways to Provide Comments

Written scoping comments are requested by November 19, 2012 and can be sent or e-mailed to the address below, submitted at the public meetings, or provided via the online comment form available at www.soundtransit.org/FWextension.

Comments can be addressed to:

Federal Way Transit Extension (c/o Kent Hale), Sound Transit, 401 S. Jackson Street,
Seattle, WA 98104-2826, or by e-mail to FWTE@soundtransit.org.

1.2. The Federal Way Transit Extension and the Regional Transit System

The Federal Way Transit Extension Project Area

The Federal Way Transit Extension corridor is approximately 7.6 miles long and extends from the future S. 200th Street Link light rail station in SeaTac, Washington to the Federal Way Transit Center in Federal Way, Washington. The project corridor parallels State Route 99 (SR 99) and Interstate 5 (I-5) and generally follows a topographic ridge between Puget Sound and the Green River Valley.

The project area includes the cities of SeaTac, Kent, Des Moines, and Federal Way. These are all established cities that are continuing to grow. While much of the project area is residential, there are a number of town centers and other activity centers. In particular, the areas around Sea-Tac Airport and the Federal Way Transit Center are designated as regional growth centers and serve as the primary hubs of employment and commercial activity within the project area.

Sound Transit and the Region's Mass Transit System

Sound Move, the first phase of regional transit investments, was approved and funded by voters in 1996. Sound Transit is now completing its implementation. It includes light rail, commuter rail and regional express bus infrastructure and service, including the Central Link light rail system. In 2009, Sound Transit began light rail operations between downtown Seattle and Sea-Tac Airport and an extension to the University of Washington is under construction and scheduled to open in 2016.

In 2004, Sound Transit began planning for the next phase of investment to follow *Sound Move*. This work included updating Sound Transit's Long-Range Plan and associated environmental review. Following several years of system planning work to detail, evaluate and prioritize the next round of regional transit system expansion, voters in 2008 authorized funding to extend the regional light rail system south to Federal Way as part of the Sound Transit 2 (ST2) Plan. Link light rail south from Sea-Tac Airport to S. 200th Street is now under construction and is scheduled to open in 2016. The ST2 Plan also extends light rail from downtown Seattle to Bellevue and Redmond to the east, and to Northgate and Lynnwood to the north.

Mass Transit and the Region's Plans for Managing Growth

The Puget Sound region, which includes urbanized King, Pierce, Snohomish, and Kitsap counties, has a coordinated series of regional, county, and local plans and policies that are guiding how the region is managing its growth. The primary plans at the regional level are the Puget Sound Regional Council's *VISION 2040* and *Transportation 2040*. Sound Transit's Long-Range Plan (2005) is reflected in *Transportation 2040*. These plans share land use, growth management, and transportation policies that assume the regional mass transit system will link the urban centers where the region's growth will be focused. County and local city comprehensive plan policies in the Federal Way Transit Extension project area and throughout the region reinforce the need for mass transit investments to support new population and employment developments, providing for vibrant urban communities that offer alternatives to the automobile.

1.3. Developing the "Purpose and Need"

To guide decision-making during the alternatives analysis and to support the project's state and federal environmental reviews, Sound Transit has developed a draft statement of why this project is being proposed. This is known as the "Purpose and Need." This statement is used to evaluate alternatives leading to the identification of alternatives to study further during the environmental review process.

The Purpose and Need statement will continue to be developed and refined to reflect public and agency comments as the project moves forward.

Purpose and Need of the Federal Way Transit Extension

The purpose of the project is to:

- Provide a reliable and efficient two-way, peak and off-peak transit service of sufficient capacity to meet the projected demand between the communities and activity centers between the cities of SeaTac and Federal Way and the other urban centers in the Central Puget Sound area;
- Provide a mobility alternative to travel on congested roadways and improve connections to the Central Puget Sound regional multimodal transportation system;
- Support South King County communities and the region's adopted vision for land use, transportation and economic development, a vision that promotes the well-being of people and communities, ensures economic vitality and preserves a healthy environment;
- Support the long-range vision, goals, and objectives for transit service established by Sound Transit's Regional Transit Long-Range Plan for high quality regional transit service between Seattle and Tacoma.

The project is needed to:

- Meet the growing needs of the corridor and of the region's future residents and workers by increasing mobility, access, and transportation capacity connecting regional growth and activity centers in the study area and the rest of the region, as called for in the region's adopted plans, including the PSRC's VISION 2040 and Transportation 2040, as well as related county and city comprehensive plans;
- Address the problems of increasing and unreliable travel times for transit users in the study area, who are now dependent on the corridor's highly congested roadway and HOV systems;
- Provide an alternative to automobile trips on I-5 and SR 99, the two primary highways serving the corridor, which provide unreliable travel times throughout the day;
- Help implement Sound Transit's Regional Transit Long-Range Plan and allow the future extension of HCT south to Tacoma;

- Expand and enhance transit options serving transit-dependent residents and low-income and minority populations concentrated in the study area;
- Provide the transit infrastructure needed to support SeaTac and Federal Way, two designated regional growth centers that provide housing, employment, public services, and multimodal transportation connections;
- Help the state and region reduce transportation-related energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, consistent with goals established in RCW 47.01.440, and Chapter 70.235 RCW.

1.4. Potential Alternatives

Previous planning work in development of the ST2 Plan examined conceptual light rail alignments between SeaTac and Federal Way along portions of SR 99 and I-5 for the purpose of developing cost estimates and to help establish ridership potential for transit improvements in the project corridor. General station locations in the vicinity of Highline Community College, Redondo/Star Lake, and the Federal Way Transit Center were also identified.

As part of this alternatives analysis, Sound Transit will explore alternative alignment, station, and design configurations that could meet the project's purpose and need. Alternatives could include alternatives on SR 99 or I-5, or other alternatives that arise during the early scoping comment period. The alternatives will reflect a range of high- and low-cost capital improvements, including a "no-build" alternative which can serve as a "baseline" for measuring the merits of higher level investments. Sound Transit will identify measures for evaluating the relative merits of alternatives, and technical methodologies for generating the information used to support such measures. These measures typically include disciplines such as travel forecasting, capital and operations and maintenance costs, and corridor-level environmental and land use analyses. Sound Transit invites comments on the alternative transit alignments, and station locations to be studied, and on the proposed evaluation framework and criteria to be used to compare alternatives.

1.5. Project Timeline and Next Steps

Following early scoping, Sound Transit will develop and release an Early Scoping Summary Report and develop an initial list of potential alternatives, including alternatives that emerge as a result of public scoping comments. Next, the alternatives will be evaluated based on their ability to satisfy the project's purpose and need, using criteria such as transportation benefits, cost, ridership, communities and populations served, land use benefits, and environmental performance.

At the end of the alternatives analysis process, Sound Transit and the FTA anticipate narrowing the range of alternatives for further evaluation in a NEPA document. If the resulting range of alternatives involves the potential for significant environmental impacts requiring an environmental impact statement (EIS), FTA and Sound Transit will publish a Notice of Intent to Prepare an EIS in the Federal Register, and invite public and agency comment on the scope of the EIS at that time.

After the EIS scoping period, the Sound Transit Board will identify the alternatives to be studied in the project's federal and state environmental review process. This would be followed by further engineering, environmental analysis, and public involvement work on the project, leading to final decisions about the project to be built and operated in the Federal Way Transit Extension project area.

Figure 1-3 shows the project's current general timeline and the major decision points leading to an environmental Record of Decision.

Figure 1-3. Project Timeline

