

June 14, 2012

TO: Sound Transit Board Capital Committee

FROM: Ron Endlich
North Link Deputy Project Director

SUBJECT: Public Outreach Feedback on Northgate Station Access and Parking Mitigation

During construction of the Northgate light rail station Sound Transit will displace 451 surface parking stalls at Northgate Mall, owned by Simon Property Group (SPG). In addition, construction will displace an additional 428 existing stalls in Northgate park-and-ride lots. After construction 62 stalls of parking for Northgate Mall and 117 park-and-ride stalls will be permanently displaced.

A steering committee comprised of representatives from Sound Transit, King County Metro, and the City of Seattle was formed last year to review options for providing access to the Northgate Transit Center and mitigating the park-and-ride impacts. From this process Sound Transit and King County Metro direction was to advance an integrated access plan that would accommodate all modes of transportation access to the station. One element of that proposal was to pursue a public-private partnership with SPG to build a shared use parking garage with 600 to 900 stalls to serve both mall and transit users.

The proposed shared use parking garage would fulfill certain legal requirements and at the same time help achieve the vision of Northgate as an urban center. The proposed shared use garage would:

- Compensate Northgate Mall as required by federal law for light rail construction impacts and permanent light rail facilities in the mall parking lot.
- Make up for the loss of 28 percent of existing Northgate Transit Center park-and-ride spaces during six years of construction and for permanent light rail facilities in a park-and-ride lot.
- Enable King County Metro to redevelop nearly six acres of surface park-and-ride lots as transit-oriented development, while maintaining existing park-and-ride capacity.

After presenting the proposed integrated access plan to the Sound Transit Board on May 24, 2012, staff sought additional public input on the issues surrounding station access and parking mitigation at Northgate.

Methods of Outreach

Options for parking mitigation, including a parking garage, were first presented at an open house about Northgate construction plans on March 21, 2012. Approximately 120 people attended this

meeting. Public comment was received through written comment forms, verbal questions after the presentation, and e-mail correspondence before and after the meeting.

After the presentation to the Sound Transit Board on May 24th, the agency hosted a second construction update meeting on June 4, 2012 to further discuss station access and parking mitigation plans with the community. Sound Transit and King County Metro staff presented Northgate project information. Approximately 115 people attended the meeting. Public comment was received through written comment forms, verbal questions after the presentation, and e-mail correspondence before and after the meeting.

Staff also prepared a “Frequently Asked Questions” factsheet to summarize the current proposal and correct mis-information about Northgate plans; this document was added to the Sound Transit project website and was distributed at the June 4th public meeting.

In addition, Sound Transit staff met recently with the Cascade Bicycle Club and Feet First to brief them on the access plan and parking mitigation proposal.

Community Feedback

Public feedback regarding the proposed parking mitigation plan was generally initially negative; but more recently public feedback has become more mixed.

Before Sound Transit and King County Metro staff presented the integrated access plan, including proposed parking mitigation, to the Board or to the public, the Cascade Bicycle Club asked their members to contact the Board to oppose the plan. The agency received 380+ e-mails that generally followed a template describing the organization’s opposition to the plan and requesting the Board to reconsider the structured parking proposal in favor of more bicycle and pedestrian amenities around the station.

The Board also received a letters opposing the access and parking mitigation plan from Feet First in April and from several neighborhood and advocacy groups on May 22nd.

The Cascade Bicycle Club organized their members to attend the June 4 open house. Representatives from the organization stood at the entrance to the meeting distributing flyers and stickers encouraging attendees to support their position on the issue.

During the question and answer period following the presentation, a number of community members expressed opposition to the plan for parking mitigation and access improvements. Many comment forms also expressed opposition to the plan.

Several other people spoke with staff or provided written comments that supported investing in the parking facilities. Some indicated they did not feel comfortable speaking up during the Q&A on June 4th because of the vocal opposition to the parking garage.

Following the meeting, project staff received several additional e-mails, most supporting the parking mitigation. The Board also received an additional 150+ e-mails following a template from the Cascade Bicycle Club opposing the access plan.

Subsequent to the June 4th open house, this issue also received significant media coverage in community and transit blogs, local and major newspapers, and television newscasts. As the conversation has grown to a larger audience, the range of opinions has become more diverse and more support for the proposed access plan and the parking mitigation has emerged.

Opposition to the access plan and proposed parking mitigation often includes the following reasoning:

- Sound Transit should be investing in pedestrian, bicycle and transit improvements in the neighborhood instead of building parking, because the fraction of riders using non-motorized access to the transit center is projected to grow.
- The parking garage is a “back room deal”.
- Build a pedestrian bridge across I-5 instead of parking.
- Sound Transit should not increase parking.
- Users should be charged to park at the park-and-ride.
- Build the smallest possible legally required garage.

Support for the access plan and proposed mitigation often includes the following reasoning:

- Northgate park-and-ride lots are fully utilized; park-and-ride capacity needs to be maintained.
- All modes of access should be supported, including maintaining park-and-ride capacity for people for whom it is difficult or impossible to walk, bike or take transit to the transit center.
- Sound Transit needs to fulfill its legal obligations.
- The proposed parking mitigation creates a great opportunity for transit-oriented development.