

## Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

### **Q: *Why did Sound Transit initially choose line color names for Link light rail?***

Using colors for line names is the most common practice for North American transit systems, used by cities such as Boston, Chicago, Washington, D.C., Dallas, Houston, Calgary and Montreal. The most common color names used by transit systems are red, blue and green.

The Sound Transit Board passed [a resolution in 2012](#) directing Link light rail to use end-of-line designations and have associated line colors. The resolution included a recommendation that “Central Link” become the “Red Line” and “East Link” become the “Blue Line,” and left staff with discretion about when to introduce the lines by name. Since 2012, red has represented Link on all line maps, but without reference to the line by its intended “Red Line” name. In 2014, we surveyed riders and tested the proposed Red Line and Blue Line names.

After ST3 passed in 2016, we revised the line color plan to accommodate new lines to West Seattle, Ballard, Issaquah and Kirkland, as well as extensions to Everett and Tacoma. The plan designated that the system operate with the Red and Blue lines until introducing the Green Line in 2035 with the opening of the Ballard Extension. At that time, Rainier Valley, South King County and Pierce County stations would have changed from Red to Green.

We started using the line color names in summer 2019. We did so because we thought it was the right time to familiarize riders with these long-planned line names as we began marketing the Blue Line as part of Connect 2020 construction.

### **Q: *Why did Sound Transit remove the Red Line name?***

After introducing the name “Red Line” in 2019, community members and groups gave us feedback that the name served as a painful reminder of the history of “redlining” — a combination of widespread discriminatory financial practices from the 1930s–1970s that denied mortgages, insurance, or other loans to people explicitly based on race. Redlining reinforced segregation and poverty in communities of color by denying them opportunities to build generational wealth.

To recognize the experience, perspective and wishes of our communities, we promptly removed the “Red Line” designation and began a process to reevaluate our transit line naming system.

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**Q: *What are Sound Transit's criteria for naming lines?***

Beyond the direction given by the Board resolution, we are committed to a naming system that is:

- Intuitive for all riders and across all audio, visual and tactile touchpoints.
- ADA compliant.
- Easy to understand for riders with limited English proficiency.
- Scalable and adaptable as the system grows.
- Well-integrated with partner agency line and route names.

**Q: *The community objected to the Red Line running through the Rainier Valley. Why not use the Red Line in another area?***

Redlining severely affected Southeast Seattle and the Rainier Valley, but it occurred in other neighborhoods as well. Future Sound Transit lines include stops in other historically redlined neighborhoods, such as Judkins Park Station near Seattle's Central District and Delridge Station in West Seattle. We have decided that the right thing to do is to remove both the Red Line term and the color red from our system's color palette.

**Q: *Why is Sound Transit moving away from using line color names?***

While line colors are a simple and strong way to differentiate lines, removing the color red creates long-term problems as the system grows.

Removing red while retaining color-based names would increase reliance on secondary or non-standard colors, reducing options for parallel or intersecting lines that maintain the required 70% color contrast for individuals with color vision deficiencies. For instance, displaying orange and gold together would not pass this test.

Non-standard color *names* (Teal, Aqua, Magenta, etc.) are more complex and harder to remember, especially for those with limited English proficiency.

Many cities that use line colors have legacy systems (e.g. Boston and Chicago) whose line designations exist without controversy, even when running through historically redlined neighborhoods. Meanwhile, agencies building new systems are increasingly moving away from line color designations due to various problematic associations

Other agencies have moved away from gold or yellow line names because those lines run through predominantly Asian neighborhoods, and Brown or Black lines could cause similar controversy. Gold and Silver lines can also carry associations with either hierarchy ('gold' as best and 'silver' as second best) or gentrification ('gold' as gilded, wealthy, etc.).

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Lastly, moving away from line color names avoids confusion with Community Transit's *Swift* bus rapid transit lines. As planned, our Link Blue Line would have connected with the *Swift* Blue Line at Shoreline North/185<sup>th</sup> Station, and our Link Red Line would have connected with the *Swift* Red Line at Everett Station.

**Q: *Why not use local names such as the Chinook Line or Duwamish Line?***

Though many systems use themed names for their rapid transit lines, including Vancouver, B.C. ("Expo Line") and London ("Piccadilly Line"), we believe that locally iconographic names are less accessible to visitors or occasional riders, especially those with limited English proficiency. They are less intuitive, increase complexity and are more difficult to pronounce and remember.

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# Transit line naming

April 2020

**Q: What are the new names and colors?**

Beginning in 2021, we will move to an “alphanumeric” system. Link light rail will use line numbers, Tacoma Link and Sounder will use letters, and Stride BRT will use both letters and numbers. All lines will continue to use end-of-line indicators. For example, train headsigns may say **1 Federal Way**.



Final voter-approved 2041 simplified system map with alphanumeric line naming.

# Transit line naming

April 2020



Conceptual illustration of 2024 ridership experience at a Link station showing alphanumeric line naming.

## Q: *Why is Sound Transit choosing numbers for Link light rail lines?*

There are several advantages to using numbered lines.

Compared to colors or themed names, numbers and letters are more culturally neutral and can scale more easily as the system grows.

Numbers provide an intuitive, easy to remember system for all riders. Arabic numerals are the only identifier instantly understood in languages using Latin, Cyrillic, Chinese, Japanese and Korean characters, etc. Even for languages that do not use Arabic numerals, many international transportation applications (such as airport gates) still use Arabic numerals.

Low numbers also imply priority and importance to riders, and this is appropriate to Link light rail as a fast, frequent, reliable and high-capacity service.

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# Transit line naming

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Though we would prefer to use letters for Link light rail if designing the system from scratch, we recognize and honor King County Metro's pre-existing intent to continue using letters as it expands from six to 26 Rapid Ride bus lines. For this reason, we have avoided letter designations within King County except for four stations on the Sounder **S** line and one station on the Sounder **N** line.

Though a numbered system for Link can conflict with local bus routes, we see this as less problematic than either letters or colors because bus routes are already widely duplicated between agencies. For example, Metro, Pierce Transit, Everett Transit and Kitsap Transit all have a Route 4, yet with little to no resulting rider confusion.

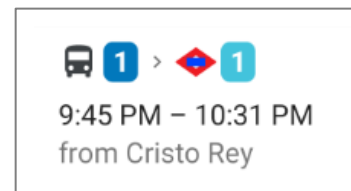
Given our commitments to our partner agencies and to system designs that are intuitive and equitable, an alphanumeric system with numbered Link lines is the best solution.

## **Q: How will Sound Transit avoid rider confusion with King County Metro routes 1, 2 and 3?**

King County Metro routes 1, 2, and 3 are short trolley routes that connect Queen Anne, Belltown, First Hill, the Central District, Leschi and Madrona. These routes would connect with the **1** **2** **3** lines at Seattle Center, Westlake, University St, or Pioneer Square stations.

However, these routes would not share stop or platform signs and would only appear together in digital products, trip-planning tools, or interagency products such as system maps. We will work closely with Metro to ensure that our wayfinding and trip planning tools clearly differentiate between services.

Madrid is an example of a city that uses single-digit numbers for both subway and bus lines, and they differentiate services with logos or icons in digital applications such as Google Maps or the Transit App.



Example: Google maps Madrid.

## **Q: What other transit systems use numbers for their rapid transit lines?**

Cities that use numbers as the primary identifier for rapid transit services include Toronto, Santiago, Paris and Madrid.

## **Q: Why is Sound Transit choosing letters for Tacoma Link and Sounder?**

Using **T** for Tacoma Link helps differentiate its local light rail service from the regional light rail service provided by the **1** **2** **3** lines. It also reinforces distinct and strong associations with Tacoma. **T** will replace Tacoma Link in 2022 when the Hilltop extension opens. This convention will also help reduce current confusion between Tacoma Dome Station, Tacoma Dome Link Extension, and Tacoma Link.



# Transit line naming

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Using **S** for Sounder South and **N** for Sounder North also reinforces the current convention of distinguishing Sounder lines by geographic corridor. The Sounder brand name will remain as an additional identifier.

Cities that use a mix of numbers and letters include New York and Mexico City.

## Q: *Why use both letters and numbers for Stride bus rapid transit (BRT)?*

Stride will be a unique BRT system, offering all-day, high-frequency express bus service on freeway corridors such as I-405 or state highway corridors such as SR 522. Alphanumeric names (S1, S2 and S3) differentiate Stride from King County Metro's Rapid Ride, which uses letters, and from Community Transit's *Swift*, which uses colors. Cities that use alphanumeric identifiers for bus routes include Washington, D.C. and New York.

## Q: *Will Sound Transit still use colors on maps and signs, etc.?*

We will continue to use color as an important secondary identifier. However, without using the colors themselves as the line names, we can more freely adapt the colors over time to maximize contrast and readability, especially for those with color vision deficiencies. We will use variants of green (**1**), blue (**2**), magenta (**3**), purple (**4**), orange (**T**), gold (**S1 S2 S3**), and silver (**N** and **S**).

We will also use shapes to differentiate modes, with circles for rail services and squares for Stride BRT lines.

## Q: *When will riders see changes?*

In general, we will launch each new line as it opens for service. In 2021, Link will become the **1** Line, Sounder North will become the **N** Line, and Sounder South will become the **S** Line. In 2022, Tacoma Link will become the **T** Line. We will launch the **2** Line in 2023, BRT lines **S1 S2 S3** in 2024-2025, the **3** Line in 2030, and the **4** Line in 2041.

You can view an animation of the system over time [on YouTube](#).

## Q: *What feedback did Sound Transit seek for these changes?*

Between January and April 2020, Sound Transit briefed and solicited feedback from partner agencies, stakeholders and community groups, including the Citizens Accessibility Advisory Council and the Transit Access Coalition, whose members include Transportation Choices Coalition, Disability Rights Washington, Puget Sound Sage, the Sierra Club, and Seattle Subway. As the proposed changes align with the prior Board resolution, no Board action is required.

## Additional questions or comments?

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