



# ***West Seattle and Ballard***

Link Extensions

## Scoping Information Report

**February 2019**



## **1. Introduction**

This report is intended to provide context for the West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions (WSBLE) Project environmental scoping period. Early scoping under that State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) was conducted prior to this scoping period followed by a three-level alternatives development process. The alternatives refined through this process are presented to the public for comment during the scoping period. The input received during scoping will help the Sound Transit Board identify a Preferred Alternative and other alternatives to study in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

This report describes:

- the upcoming scoping period
- a description of the potential alternatives
- the purpose and need for the project
- the history of regional light rail and process that led to the alternatives being evaluated during scoping
- the project timeline and next steps

## **2. West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions Scoping: Feb 15, 2019, to March 18, 2019**

Sound Transit and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) are conducting scoping to start the environmental process for the WSBLE Project, a light rail expansion project in the metropolitan Seattle area of King County, Washington. The WSBLE Project is part of the Sound Transit 3 Plan (ST3) that voters approved funding for in 2016. The West Seattle Link Extension would build light rail from West Seattle's Alaska Junction neighborhood to downtown Seattle. The Ballard Link Extension would build light rail from Ballard's Market Street area through downtown Seattle and include a new downtown Seattle light rail tunnel. [Exhibit 1-1](#) (System Map) shows Sound Transit's current service and future projects.

Exhibit 1-1: System Map



## 2.1 About Scoping

Sound Transit and FTA will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) to further examine how the project could affect the community and the environment. Scoping provides an opportunity for the public to learn about and comment on the WSBLE Project at the beginning of the environmental review process. Input received during scoping helps inform the Sound Transit Board's identification of a Preferred Alternative and other alternatives to study in the EIS.

To start the scoping period, FTA issued a Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS in the Federal Register on February 12, 2019, and Sound Transit issued a Determination of Significance in the SEPA Register on February 15, 2019. During scoping, Sound Transit is seeking public comments on the project Purpose and Need, the alternatives to be studied in the EIS, and potential impacts to study in the EIS. All project documents, including the SEPA Determination of Significance, are available on the project website at <https://www.soundtransit.org/system-expansion/west-seattle-ballard-link-extensions/documents>.

Following scoping, Sound Transit will review and summarize comments received. After consideration of the scoping comments, the Sound Transit Board will identify the alternatives to study in the EIS, including a preferred alternative.

## 2.2 Public and Agency Scoping Meetings

Scoping includes a public comment period that is open until March 18, 2019, with three public meetings and an online open house. The public meetings will be held at the following locations and times:

### West Seattle

Wednesday, February 27, 2019  
6:00-8:00 p.m.  
Alki Masonic Center  
4736 40th Avenue SW  
Seattle, WA 98116

### Ballard

Thursday, February 28, 2019  
6:00-8:00 p.m.  
Ballard High School  
1418 NW 65th Street  
Seattle, WA 98117

### Downtown

Thursday, March 7, 2019  
5:00-7:00 p.m.  
Union Station  
401 S Jackson Street  
Seattle, WA 98104

Online Open House: <https://wsblink.participate.online/>

A separate scoping meeting will be conducted with agencies and Native American tribes to present project information and receive comments. Invitations to the agency scoping meeting and public scoping meetings will be sent to the appropriate federal, tribal, state, and local governments.

## 2.3 Ways to Provide Comments

Written scoping comments are requested by March 18, 2019, and can be submitted by mail or email at the addresses listed below. Comments can also be submitted at a public meeting (listed above), provided via the online comment form available at <https://wsblink.participate.online/>, or left as a voicemail at the phone number below.

<b>Mailing Address:</b>	<b>WSBLE Project (c/o Lauren Swift)</b> <b>Sound Transit, 401 S. Jackson Street, Seattle, WA 98104-2826</b>
<b>Email:</b>	<b><a href="mailto:wsbscopingcomments@soundtransit.org">wsbscopingcomments@soundtransit.org</a></b>
<b>Voicemail Phone Number:</b>	<b>833-972-2666</b>

### 3. *Potential Alternatives*

The Alternatives development process included public and stakeholder input and a three-level evaluation (see description in Section 5.2). This section describes the alternatives developed as a result of that process that are presented to the public for comment during the scoping period. Additional documents describing the evaluation results are available on the project website here: <https://www.soundtransit.org/system-expansion/west-seattle-ballard-link-extensions>.

**Alternative 1, ST3 Representative Project.** This alternative includes the following (also see [Exhibit 3-1](#)):

- **West Seattle Extension:** This extension would be an entirely elevated alignment with a new high-level, rail-only bridge across the Duwamish Waterway on the south side of the existing West Seattle Bridge. It would serve three elevated stations at the Alaska Junction, Avalon, and Delridge areas in West Seattle before heading east and turning north into the E3 busway in SODO (a transit-only roadway currently used for both buses and light rail), where it would serve one elevated SODO Station and one at-grade Stadium Station. The extension's western terminus would be at SW Alaska Street and California Avenue SW in an east/west orientation.
- **Ballard Extension:** This extension includes a new rail-only tunnel north from the Chinatown/International District to South Lake Union and Seattle Center/Uptown, running under Fifth Avenue in Chinatown/International District, Fifth and Sixth Avenue in the commercial core, Westlake Avenue in South Lake Union, and Republican Street in Uptown. The north tunnel portal would be at the west end of Republican Street and the light rail would continue north on an elevated guideway along Elliott Avenue W and 15th Avenue W, crossing Salmon Bay on a new rail-only movable bridge. The extension would include six tunnel stations at International District/Chinatown, Midtown, Westlake, Denny, South Lake Union, and Seattle Center and three elevated stations at Smith Cove, Interbay, and Ballard. The extension's northern terminus would be near 15th Avenue NW and NW Market Street in a north/south orientation.

**Alternative 2, West Seattle Elevated/Chinatown-International District 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue/Downtown 6th Avenue/Ballard Elevated.** This alternative includes the following (also see [Exhibit 3-2](#)):

- **West Seattle Extension:** This extension would be a mix of elevated and at-grade guideway with a new high-level, rail-only bridge across the Duwamish Waterway on the south side of the existing West Seattle Bridge. It would serve three elevated stations at the Alaska Junction, Avalon, and Delridge areas in West Seattle before heading east and turning north into the E3 busway in SODO (a transit-only roadway currently used for both buses and light rail), where it would serve a new at-grade SODO Station and the existing at-grade Stadium Station. The extension's west terminus would be along 41<sup>st</sup> Avenue SW and SW Hudson Street in a north/south orientation.
- **Ballard Extension:** This extension would operate in a new rail-only tunnel north from the Chinatown/International District to South Lake Union and Seattle Center/Uptown, running under Fifth Avenue in the Chinatown/International District, Sixth Avenue in the commercial core, Terry Avenue in South Lake Union, and Mercer Street in Uptown. The north tunnel portal would be

on the west side of Elliott Avenue W. It would continue north in a combination of at-grade and elevated guideway through central Interbay and then cross Salmon Bay on a new rail-only, fixed bridge aligned with 14th Avenue NW. The extension includes six tunnel stations at International District/Chinatown, Midtown, Westlake, Denny, South Lake Union, and Seattle Center; an at-grade station at Smith Cove; and two elevated stations at Interbay and Ballard. The extension's northern terminus would be near 14th Avenue NW and NW Market Street in a north/south orientation.

Alternative 2 would have the following design option:

- International District/Chinatown Station: Cut-and-cover or mined station construction on Fifth Avenue South.

**Alternative 3, West Seattle Tunnel/Chinatown-International District 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue/Downtown 5th Avenue/Ballard Tunnel.** This alternative includes the following (also see [Exhibit 3-3](#)):

- West Seattle Extension: This extension would be a mix of tunnel, elevated and at-grade guideway with a new high-level, rail-only bridge across the Duwamish Waterway on the north side of the existing West Seattle Bridge. It would serve tunnel stations at Alaska Junction and Avalon, and an elevated station at Delridge in West Seattle before heading east and turning north into the E3 busway in SODO (a transit-only roadway currently used for both buses and light rail), where it would serve new at-grade SODO and Stadium stations.
- Ballard Extension: This extension would operate in a new rail-only tunnel north from the Chinatown/International District to South Lake Union and Seattle Center/Uptown, running under Fourth Avenue in the Chinatown/International District, Fifth Avenue in the commercial core, Westlake Avenue and Harrison Street in South Lake Union, and Republican Street in Uptown. The north tunnel portal would be on the east side of Elliott Avenue W, north of Kinnear Park. The guideway would then continue north across 15th Avenue W to central Interbay on a combination of elevated and at-grade guideway, and then cross under Salmon Bay in a tunnel aligned with 14th Avenue NW. The extension includes six tunnel stations at International District/Chinatown, Midtown, Westlake, Denny, South Lake Union, and Seattle Center; two at-grade stations at Smith Cove and Interbay; and a tunnel station at Ballard.

Alternative 3 would have the following design options:

- Alaska Junction: Tunnel station at 41st Avenue SW, 42nd Avenue SW or 44th Avenue SW; all with north-south orientation
- International District/Chinatown Station: Cut-and-cover or mined station construction on Fourth Avenue S
- Ballard Station: Tunnel station at 14th Ave NW or 15th Avenue NW; both with north-south orientation

Additional information on development of these alternatives is provided in Section 5.



Exhibit 3-1: Alternative 1





Exhibit 3-2: Alternative 2





### Exhibit 3-3: Alternative 3





## 4. **Draft Purpose and Need for the WSBLE Project**

The Purpose and Need statement establishes the basis for developing and evaluating a range of reasonable alternatives for environmental review and assists with the identification of a Preferred Alternative. The purpose of the WSBLE project is to expand the Link light rail system from downtown Seattle to West Seattle and Ballard, to make appropriate community investments to improve mobility, and to increase capacity and connectivity for regional connections in order to:

- Provide high quality rapid, reliable, and efficient light rail transit service to communities in the project corridor as defined through the local planning process and reflected in the ST3 Plan (Sound Transit, 2016).
- Improve regional mobility by increasing connectivity and capacity through downtown Seattle to meet projected transit demand.
- Connect regional centers as described in adopted regional and local land use, transportation, and economic development plans and Sound Transit's Regional Transit Long-Range Plan Update (Sound Transit, 2014).
- Implement a system that is technically and financially feasible to build, operate, and maintain.
- Expand mobility for the corridor and region's residents, which include transit-dependent, low-income, and minority populations.
- Encourage equitable and sustainable urban growth in station areas through support of transit-oriented development and multimodal integration in a manner that is consistent with local land use plans and policies, including Sound Transit's Transit Oriented Development and Sustainability policies.
- Encourage convenient and safe non-motorized access to stations such as bicycle and pedestrian connections consistent with Sound Transit's System Access Policy.
- Preserve and promote a healthy environment and economy by minimizing adverse impacts on the natural, built, and social environments through sustainable practices.

The project is needed because:

- When measured using national standards, existing transit routes between downtown Seattle, West Seattle and Ballard currently operate with poor reliability. Roadway congestion in the project corridor will continue to degrade transit performance and reliability as the city is expected to add 70,000 residential units and 115,000 jobs by 2035, without any major expansions in roadways.
- Increased ridership from regional population and employment growth will increase operational frequency in the existing downtown Seattle transit tunnel requiring additional tunnel capacity.
- Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC), the regional metropolitan planning organization, and local plans call for High Capacity Transit (HCT) in the corridor consistent with VISION 2040



(PSRC, 2009) and Sound Transit’s Regional Transit Long-Range Plan Update (Sound Transit, 2014).

- The region’s citizens and communities, including transit dependent residents and low-income and minority population, need long-term regional mobility and multimodal connectivity as called for in the Washington State Growth Management Act.
- Regional and local plans call for increased residential and/or employment density at and around HCT stations, and increased options for multimodal access.
- Environmental and sustainability goals of the state and region, as established in Washington state law and embodied in PSRC’s VISION 2040 and 2018 Regional Transportation Plan, include reducing greenhouse gas emissions by decreasing vehicle miles traveled.

## 5. *Potential topics to study in the EIS*

Sound Transit will be analyzing the potential environmental impacts from the WSBLE project in the Draft EIS and is seeking input on what should be studied in the EIS. The environmental resource categories typically considered in an EIS are listed in [Exhibit 5-1](#).

**Exhibit 5-1:** Environmental Resource Categories

### *Environmental Resource Categories*



Acquisitions, Displacements, and Relocations

Land Use

Economics

Social Impacts, Community Facilities, and Neighborhoods

Visual and Aesthetics

Air Quality

Noise and Vibration

Water Resources Ecosystems

Energy

Geology and Soils

Hazardous Materials

Electromagnetic Fields

Public Services, Safety, and Security

Utilities

Historic and Archaeological Resources

Parks and Recreational Resources

Section 4(f) and Section 6(f) Resources

Environmental Justice

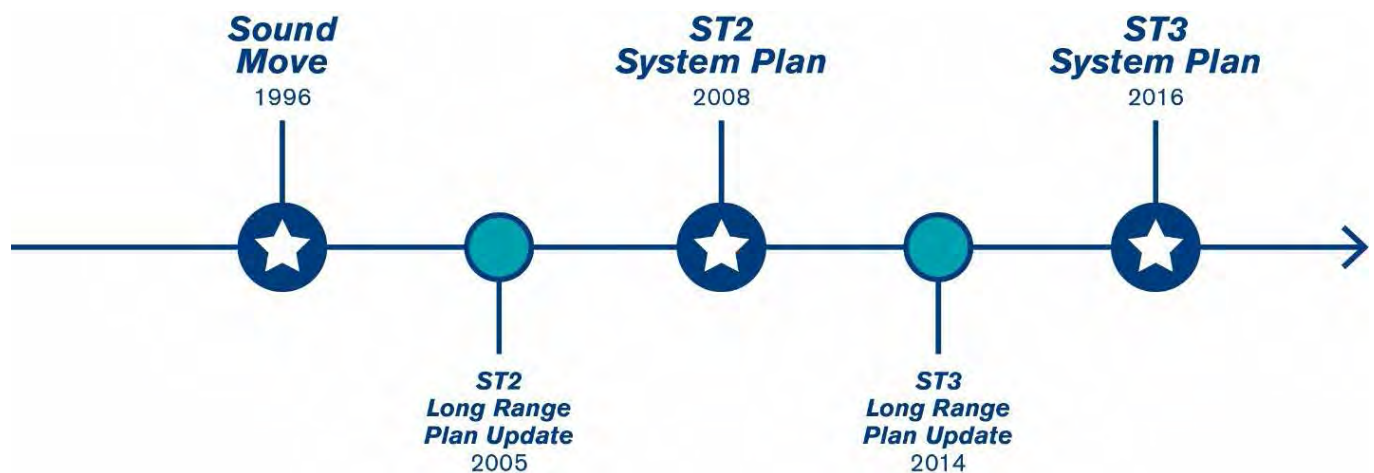
Transportation

## 6. History of Regional Light Rail and West Seattle and Ballard Extension Alternatives

### 6.1 Sound Transit and the Region's Mass Transit System

Sound Transit was created in 1996 with voter approval of Sound Move. Sound Transit has continued to implement the regional mass transit system following the passage of the Sound Transit 2 Plan (ST2) in 2008 and ST3 in 2016. [Exhibit 6-1](#) (Regional High-Capacity Transit Planning over the Years) shows the regional transit planning milestones that have occurred over the last 22 years.

**Exhibit 6-1:** Regional High-Capacity Transit Planning over the Years



In 2013, Sound Transit began planning for the investments to follow ST2. This work included updating Sound Transit's Long-Range Plan and associated environmental review. The WSBLE Project is an element of the 2014 Regional Transit Long-Range Plan and the region's Metropolitan Transportation Plan (Puget Sound Regional Council's Transportation 2040). Following system planning work to evaluate and prioritize the next round of regional transit expansion, in 2016 voters authorized funding to extend the regional light rail system to West Seattle and Ballard as part of ST3. ST3 will also extend light rail east to Issaquah and south Kirkland, north to Everett, and south to the Tacoma Dome.

### 6.2 Alternatives Development Process

Alternatives were developed from public input received during the early scoping period held in February 2018. The alternatives were then screened through three levels of evaluation. Increasingly detailed and comprehensive evaluation measures were applied for alternatives that were carried forward from one level to the next.

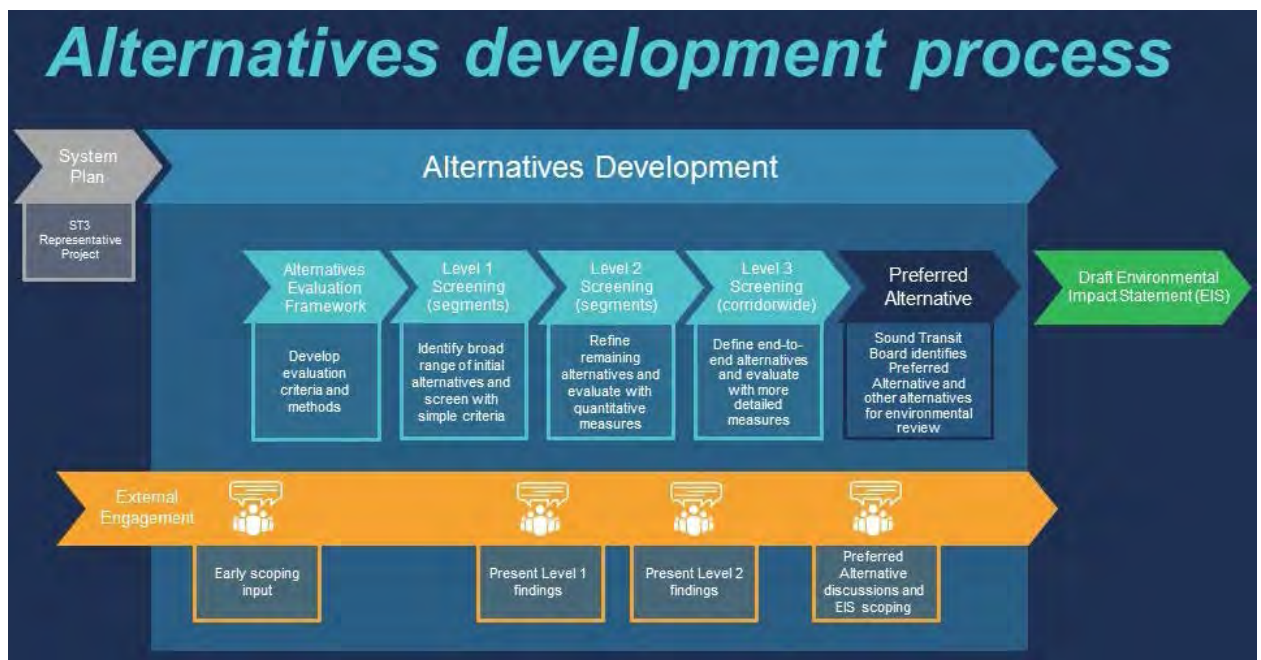
Agency and external engagement to seek input and involvement from key stakeholders during the alternatives development process was accomplished through the following groups and forums:

- **Elected Leadership Group (ELG):** Elected officials who represent the project corridor and/or Sound Transit Board

- **Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG):** Transit riders, residents, businesses, major institutional organizations, key stakeholders, and members of the public
- **Interagency Group:** Senior staff from Sound Transit, City of Seattle and other partner agencies such as Port of Seattle, King County, Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA)
- **Neighborhood Forums:** Community members interested in delving more deeply into issues specific to their neighborhood
- **Public Events:** Online open house and survey, fair and festivals, and email newsletters for people who live, work and commute in, through and around the Puget Sound region

The three levels of evaluation and the corresponding external engagement process for the WSBLE Project are depicted on [Exhibit 6-2](#) (Alternatives Development Process). Additional detail on the evaluation process and how alternatives advanced between levels of evaluation is provided below.

**Exhibit 6-2: Alternatives Development Process**



### 6.2.1 Early Scoping Input

The alternatives development process began with external engagement in early scoping. Sound Transit conducted early scoping from February 2 through March 5, 2018. The ST3 Representative Project served as the starting point for identifying alternatives, and the public, agencies, and tribes were invited to offer input on the Draft Project Purpose and Need statement, other possible alternatives to study, and potential community benefits and impacts. Sound Transit used the input received during early scoping to develop and evaluate alternatives in Level 1 of the alternatives development process described below.



Opportunities for early scoping comments included an agency meeting, three public open houses, and an online open house. Comments could be submitted at the early scoping meetings, as well as by email and mail. The Early Scoping Summary Report (<https://www.soundtransit.org/sites/default/files/project-documents/west-seattle-and-ballard-link-extensions-early-scoping-summary-report-3-3.pdf>) lists all comments received during early scoping.

Over 700 people attended the three public open houses, and 7 agencies attended the agency early scoping meeting. Sound Transit received over 2,800 individual comments in various formats. Most public comments focused on elevated routes in West Seattle and Interbay/Ballard, with many suggesting a variety of alternatives to these elevated routes, including tunnels. Many comments were also received regarding station locations and station access. In addition to comments from the general public, seven community organizations and seven businesses or business groups submitted comments. These comments generally repeated themes heard from the public, primarily in the West Seattle and Interbay-Ballard areas. Agency comments focused on alternatives, local and regional mobility, freight mobility and infrastructure, transit integration, transit-oriented development and urban design, and potential environmental impacts.

Feedback from the early scoping process was used to update the Draft Purpose and Need, develop Level 1 alternatives, and identify criteria for evaluating the alternatives. Some early scoping suggestions were not carried forward for further review in Level 1 because they were inconsistent with the ST3 Plan, technically infeasible, and/or deemed not practical.

## **6.2.2 Alternatives Screening Process**

A three-level screening was conducted for the WSBLE Project as shown in [Exhibit 6-2](#) (Alternatives Development Process). Due to the unique characteristics of the study area, the project was subdivided into four geographically based study segments for evaluation purposes in the Level 1 and the Level 2 screenings. These study segments allowed for more detailed evaluation and analysis. Following are the four study segments:

- West Seattle/Duwamish
- SODO and Chinatown/ID
- Downtown
- Interbay/Ballard

The alternatives screening process relied on a set of evaluation criteria and measures that provided a consistent means of analysis among the alternatives. [Exhibit 6-3](#) (Evaluation Criteria, Methods and Measures) illustrates the relationship between the Draft Purpose and Need statement and the evaluation criteria, measures, and methods.

The Level 1 screening evaluated alternatives using 25 different measures. These measures were mostly qualitative and identified alternatives that did not meet the project purpose and/or were lower performing compared to other alternatives. The Level 2 screening evaluated alternatives using almost 50 different measures derived from the Draft Project Purpose and Need and included more quantitative measures. After each screening analysis was complete, the results were presented to the SAG for discussion and recommendations to the ELG of what to carry forward to the next level of screening. The ELG then made recommendations on which alternatives to forward for further study in the next screening level.

After the ELG made recommendations on which alternatives to carry forward, the alternatives within each segment

were pieced together to form end-to-end alternatives from West Seattle to Downtown and Downtown to Ballard for the Level 3 Screening.

Opportunities for public input between each screening level allowed community members to learn more about the alternatives and provide input to the SAG and ELG. An online open house collected over 225 comments and over 500 survey responses. Eight station design charrettes and nine neighborhood forums were conducted to understand community character and values and inform project planning.

In addition, Sound Transit attended 18 community-hosted fair, festival and tabling events to share information and encourage public participation and briefed and interviewed nearly 150 community groups, businesses, neighborhood organizations, and social service providers to increase project awareness, gain new perspectives and gather feedback.

Between January 2018 and February 2019, there were a total of 12 SAG meetings and 5 ELG meetings.

**Exhibit 6-3: Evaluation Criteria, Measures, and Methods**



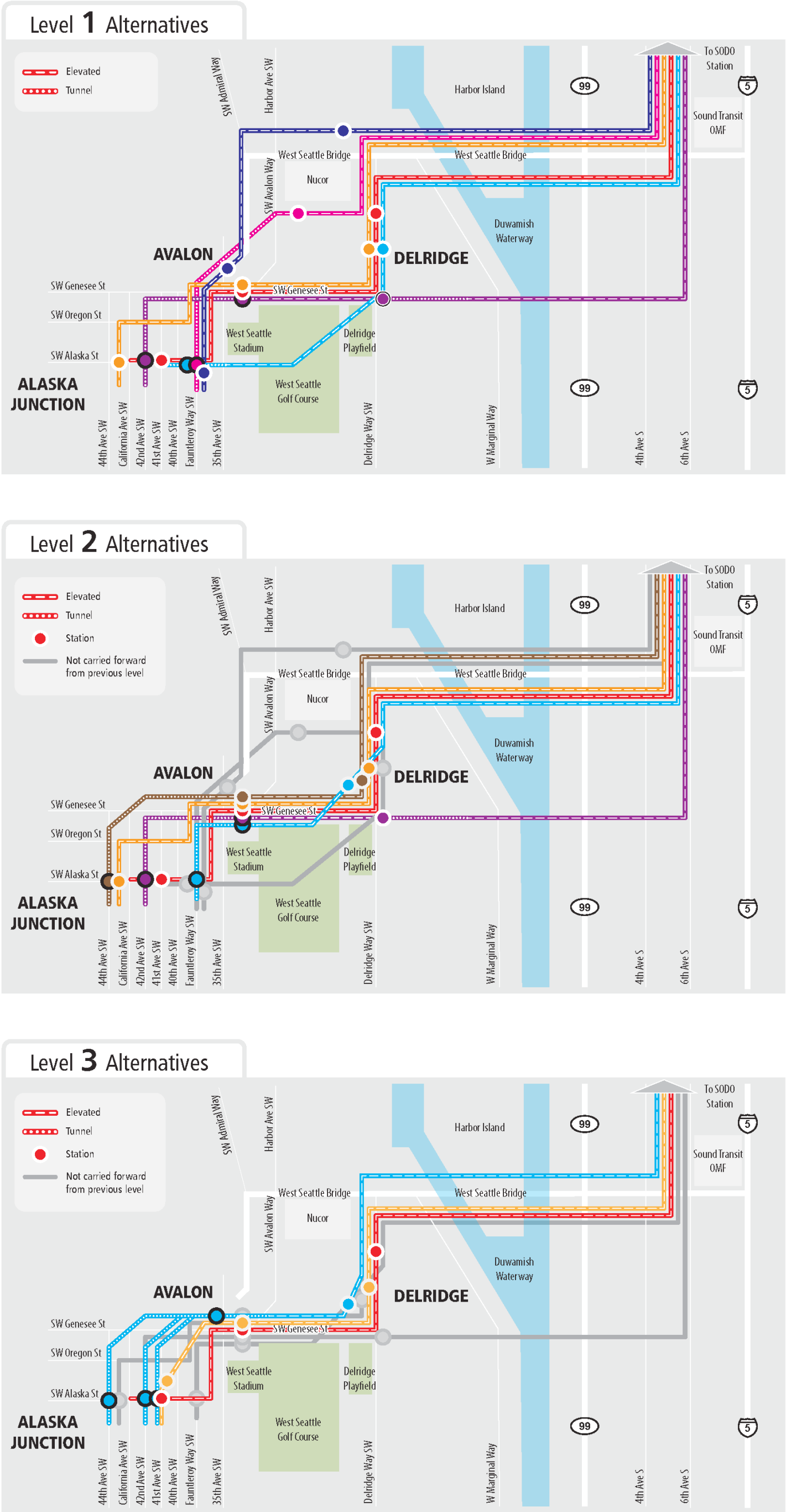
**Exhibit 6-4** (Alternatives Screening Process) illustrates the narrowing of alternatives during the screening process, which was designed to identify a Preferred Alternative and other alternatives that would be advanced to the environmental review phase.

**Exhibits 6-5 to 6-8** illustrates the progression of alternatives from Level 1 to Level 3 within each geographic segment.

**Exhibit 6-4: Alternatives Screening Process**



Exhibit 6-5: West Seattle

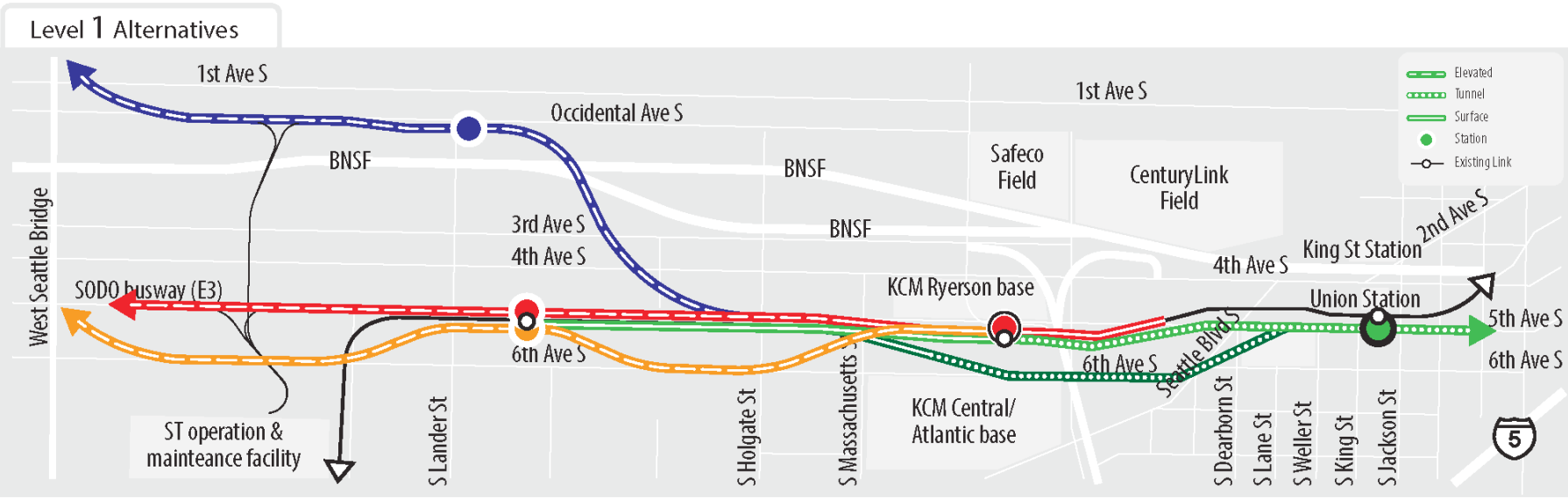


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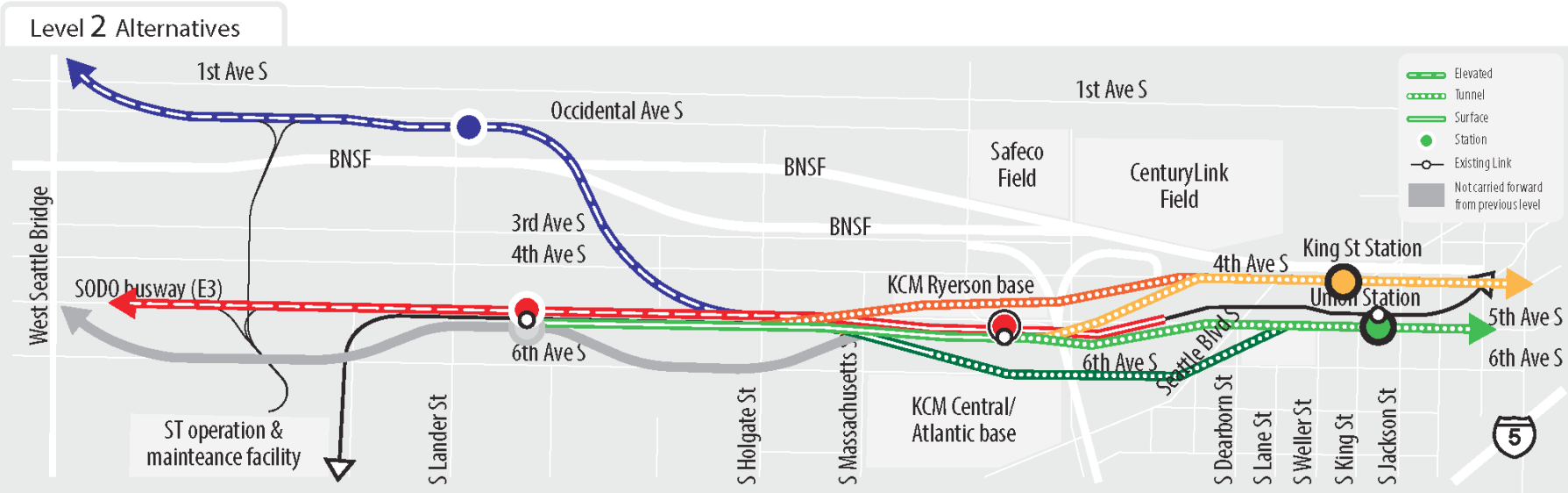




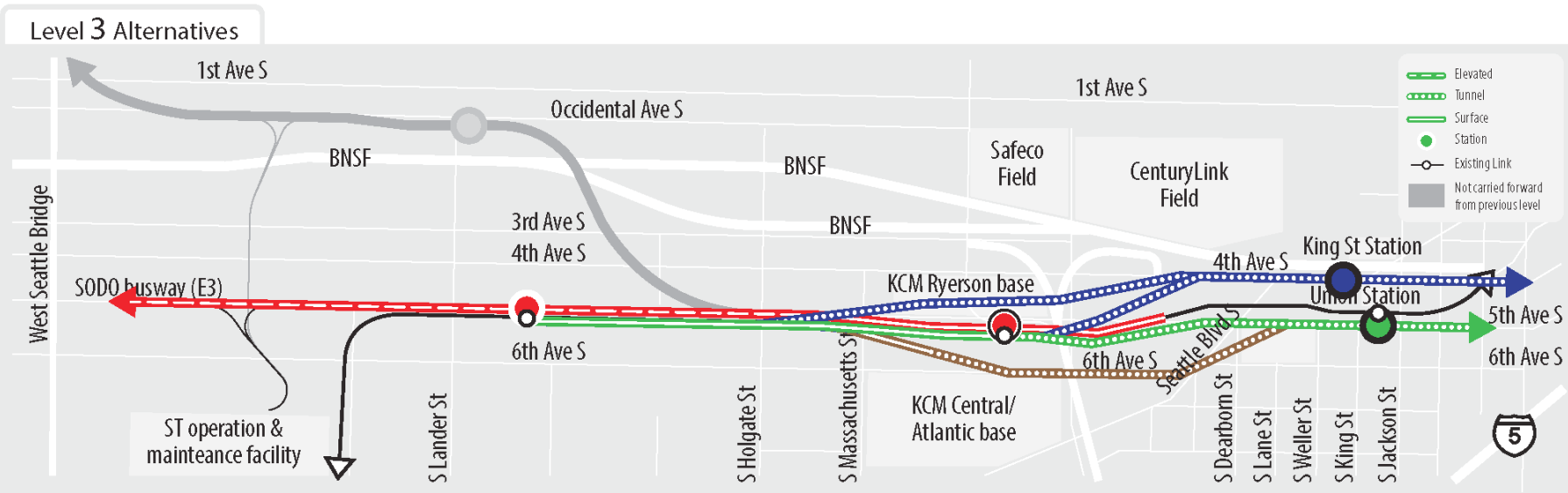
Exhibit 6-6: Sodo/C-ID



Alternative colors match with Level 1 Alternative.



Alternative colors match with Level 2 Alternative.

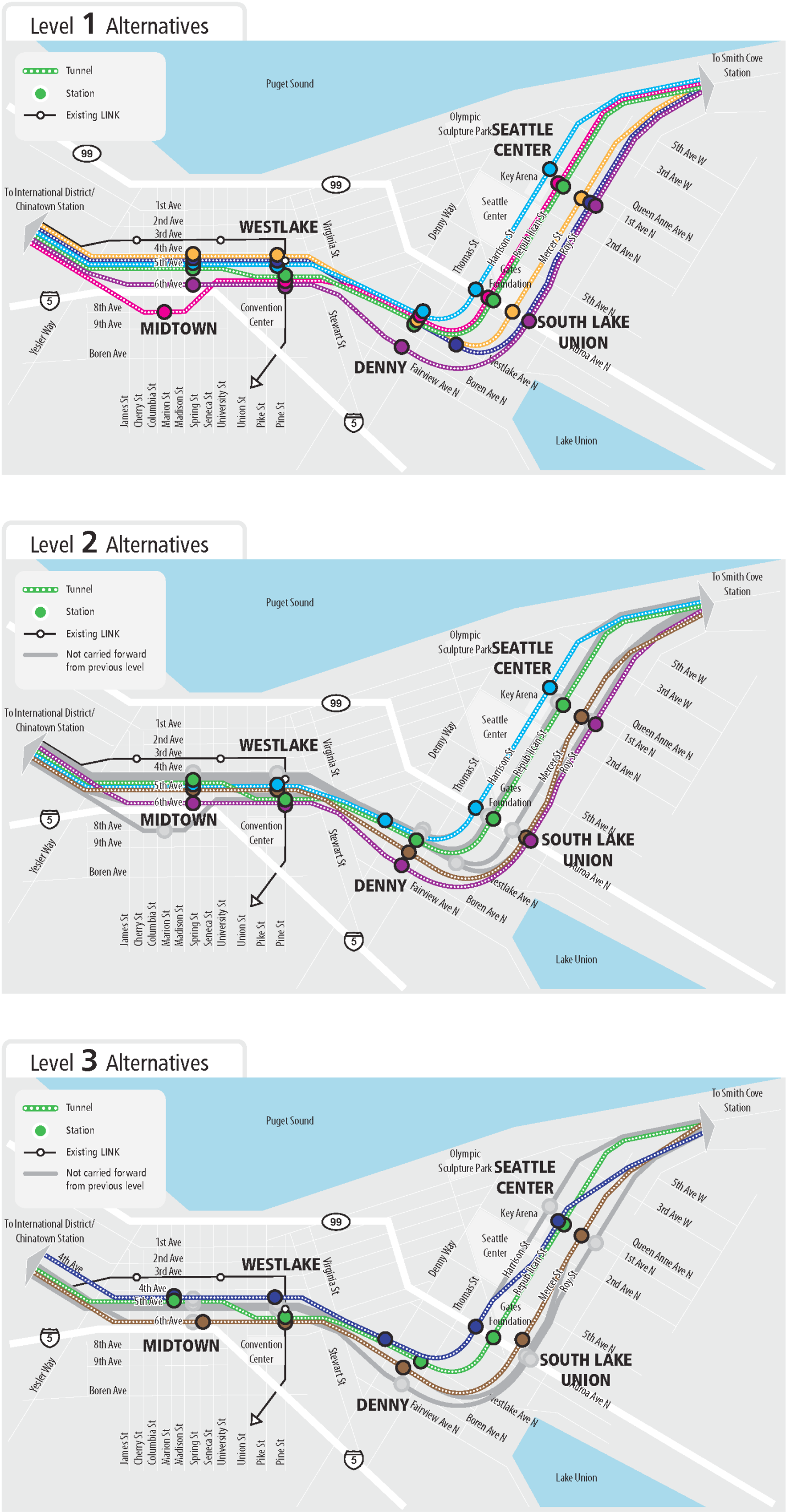


Alternative colors match with Level 3 Alternative.

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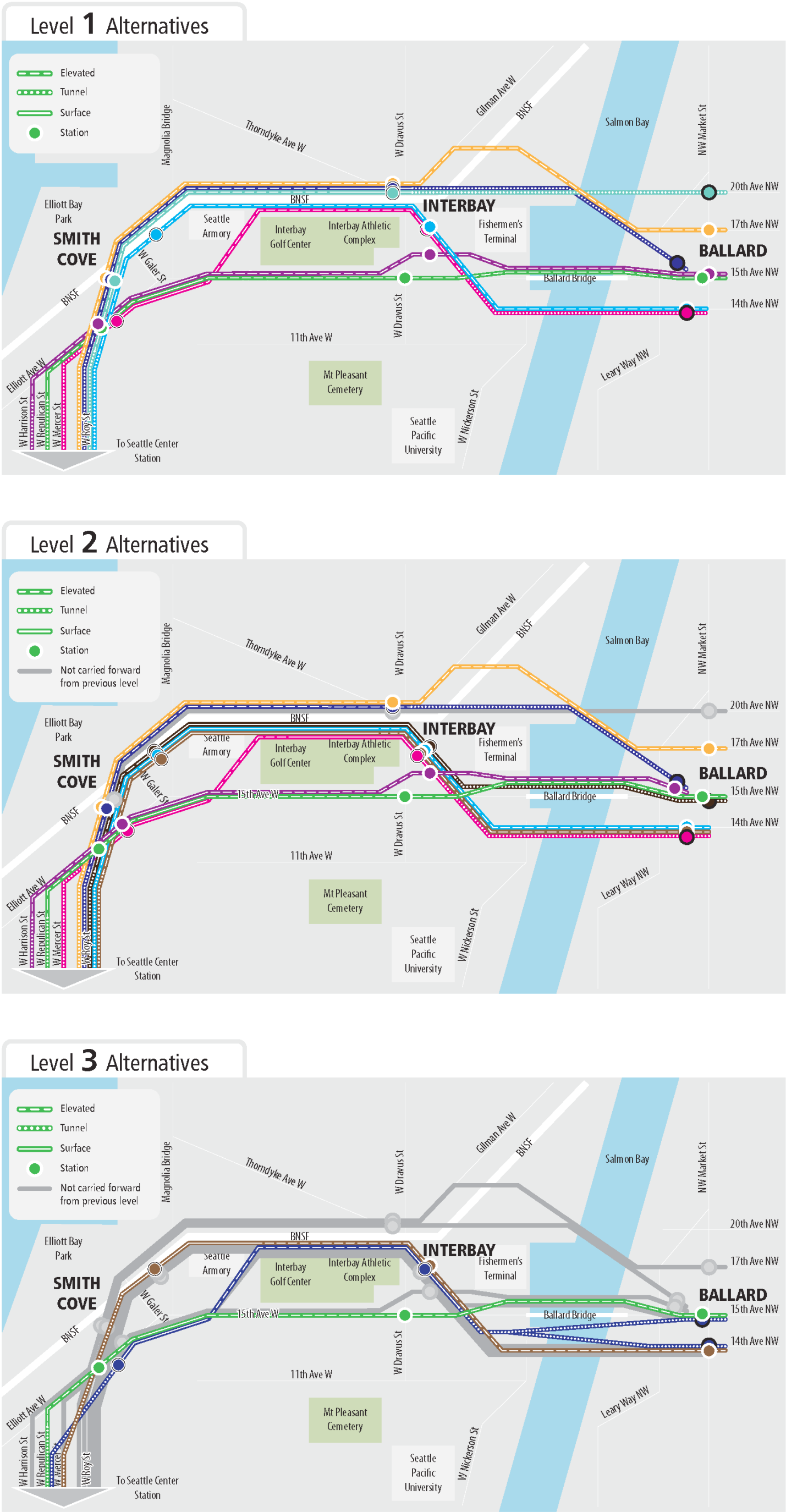
Exhibit 6-7: Downtown



Diagrams are for illustration purposes only and are not to scale.



Exhibit 6 -8: Interbay/Ballard



Diagrams are for illustration purposes only and are not to scale.



## 7. Project Timeline and Next Steps

Following scoping, the Sound Transit Board (Board) will identify a Preferred Alternative after considering the evaluation results, public and agency scoping comments, tribal comments, and input from the Stakeholder Advisory Group and Elected Leadership Group. The Board will also identify other alternatives to study in the EIS. Sound Transit will conduct further engineering, environmental impact analysis, and public involvement work on the project, and FTA and Sound Transit will publish a Draft EIS and provide an opportunity for formal public and agency comment. After consideration of the Draft EIS and comments, the Sound Transit Board will confirm or modify the previously identified Preferred Alternative. FTA and Sound Transit will then publish a Final EIS that includes responses to the comments received on the Draft EIS. After publication of the Final EIS, the Sound Transit Board is expected to select the project to build. FTA would then issue a Record of Decision for the project concluding the environmental process. [Exhibit 7-1](#) (WSBLE Project Schedule) shows the project's general timeline.

**Exhibit 7-1: WSBLE Project Schedule**





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Sound Transit plans, builds, and operates regional transit systems and services to improve mobility for Central Puget Sound.  
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