



Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

Phase: Planning — Alternatives development



What is the representative project for the West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions?

The West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions will provide fast, reliable light rail connections to dense residential and job centers throughout the region and add a new downtown Seattle light rail tunnel to provide efficient operating capacity for the entire regional system.

The extension to West Seattle will operate on a 4.7-mile elevated guideway from downtown Seattle to West Seattle's Alaska Junction neighborhood and include a new rail-only fixed span across the Duwamish River.

The Ballard extension will operate 7.1 miles from downtown Seattle to Ballard's Market Street area and includes a new 3.3-mile rail-only tunnel from the International District/Chinatown to South Lake Union and Seattle Center/Uptown. The representative project includes an elevated guideway along 15th Avenue West and Elliott Avenue West and a rail-only movable bridge over Salmon Bay.

A map of both extensions is available at: soundtransit.org/wsblink-map.



How many stations will each extension serve?

The West Seattle extension will serve one at-grade station in the Stadium area and four elevated stations in the SODO, Delridge, Avalon and Alaska Junction areas.

The Ballard extension will serve three elevated stations in Ballard, Interbay and near Smith Cove and six tunnel stations at Seattle Center, South Lake Union, Denny, Westlake, Midtown and International District/Chinatown areas.



What is the expected weekday ridership for each extension (by 2040)?

- The West Seattle extension will serve an estimated 32,000 – 37,000 riders.
- The Ballard extension will serve an estimated 47,000 – 57,000 riders.
- The new downtown Seattle light rail tunnel will serve an estimated 110,000 – 136,000 riders.



When will the extensions open?

The West Seattle extension will begin service in 2030; the Ballard extension and new downtown Seattle light rail tunnel will begin service in 2035.

Q: What are representative projects?

A: The ST3 Plan approved by voters included representative projects that establish the transit mode, approximate route, number of stations and general station locations. These were critical in developing detailed project budgets and schedules. Representative projects for the West



Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions and the downtown Seattle light rail tunnel are the starting point for alternatives development. Building on the representative project captures work already publicly vetted and approved rather than starting anew, helping to meet overall project schedules and budgets.

Q: What happens during the alternatives development phase?

A: During alternatives development, staff will assess the representative project included in the Sound Transit 3 Plan and, based on additional public engagement and technical analysis, further refine the specific route, station locations, and other project elements. The representative project itself is the result of extensive and years-long planning and public involvement work, including high capacity transit studies, the process to update the agency's long-range plan, and the work that developed the ST3 Plan approved by voters last year. Through early 2019, staff will engage the public in an intensive public involvement process that will lead to the Sound Transit Board identifying a preferred alternative, as well as other alternatives to evaluate in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

Q: Why is it important to identify the preferred alternative early?

A: Public input during the development of ST3 (soundtransit.org/st3) emphasized a strong interest in putting new light rail extensions in service as fast as possible. Identifying the preferred alternative earlier in the project development process is a key component of Sound Transit's program to streamline project delivery. This will allow public consensus about the preferred alternative to emerge earlier in the process — at the outset rather than as a result of the EIS process. It may also result in fewer alternatives studied in the EIS, both of which are critical elements to maintaining project schedule and budget.

Q: Will significant changes to the representative projects be considered in the alternatives development process?

A: Suggestions from the public engagement process that involve significant changes to the representative project will be assessed for their consistency with the intent of the ST3 Plan as well as their implications for a broad range of factors and project impacts, including transportation, environmental, land use, engineering, construction, operations, cost and schedule.

Q: Why are West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions combined during alternatives development?

A: Initially, both projects will be studied together, since there are a number of inter-related design, construction phasing and operational issues to consider. Once these issues are addressed, project segments will likely proceed independently, particularly during the final design and construction phases, given the longer timeline required for tunneling in a dense urban environment.

Q: How will public input shape the alternatives development process?

A: The representative project reflects years of public engagement, starting with high capacity transit studies for Ballard and south King County in spring 2014; the Long-Range Plan update in December 2014; and the ST3 Plan development during 2015 and 2016. Public involvement



in these efforts developed representative projects that will serve as starting points for developing more refined alternatives. For the West Seattle and Ballard Extensions, numerous opportunities will occur in the next 18 months for community members, stakeholders and elected officials to weigh in with their priorities for a preferred alternative, and to shape which other alternatives should be studied further in the EIS. Public engagement will continue through all subsequent project phases.

The best way to stay connected to project progress, development and public involvement opportunities is to sign up for project updates at: soundtransit.org/wsblink.

Q: Is there a chance these projects can open earlier?

A: During development of the ST3 Plan, after the public advocated for an earlier opening date, staff conducted additional work to reduce by three years the initial delivery date of 2038 for Ballard (soundtransit.org/st3-amended-timelines). Whether it is possible to potentially further expedite light rail to Ballard depends on work to speed up the project development phase, starting with identifying a preferred alternative in the scheduled 18 months. This will require Sound Transit, the City and other project stakeholders to work together intensively to streamline the number of alternatives studied, manage project scope, reach consensus on the preferred alternative, and build durable consensus to avoid the time-consuming process of studying alternatives introduced late in the process. It will also require early public engagement and, when the project approaches construction, the timely granting of permits by the City so construction can begin as soon as possible. Given the complexities of tunneling in an urban environment, the nine-year construction schedule (including startup testing) for the Ballard extension is already aggressive.

The West Seattle Link Extension is also on an aggressive schedule; the 2030 delivery date for this project also assumes a three-year time savings from initial projections. Given the complexity of this extension, including crossing the Duwamish River, it is too early to tell whether additional time savings can be achieved.

Q: What happens after alternatives development?

A: Following alternatives development, the project will enter environmental review and preliminary design. During this phase, Sound Transit will prepare and publish a Draft EIS in late 2020 and will then hold public hearings and take comments on the Draft EIS. After reviewing public comments on the Draft EIS, Sound Transit will prepare and publish a Final EIS in early 2022. After publication of the Final EIS, the Sound Transit Board is expected to select the project alternative to build and the Federal Transit Administration will issue a Record of Decision. In addition to completing the Draft and Final EIS, Sound Transit will conduct preliminary engineering for the preferred alternative and will evaluate project delivery options for construction.

The following timelines anticipate the project meeting all planning and design milestones:

West Seattle Link Extension: Planning, 2017 to 2022. Design, 2022 to 2025. Construction and testing, 2025 to 2030.

Ballard Link Extension and downtown Seattle light rail tunnel: Planning, 2017 to 2022. Design, 2023 to 2026. Construction and testing, 2027 to 2035.