

SOUND TRANSIT

MOTION NO. M98-43

BACKGROUND AND COMMENTS

Directing staff to begin the property acquisition process and station design process for the Tacoma-to-Seattle Commuter Rail Project

Meeting:	Date:	Type of Action:	Staff Contact:	Phone:
Board Meeting	6/11/98	Board Approval	Paul Price Val Batey	689-4760 684-1591

ACTION:

The Board is asked to identify a Kent Station location for the Tacoma-to-Seattle Commuter Rail project. Based on the station location identified, staff will begin the property acquisition process and the station design process for the Tacoma-to-Seattle Commuter Rail Project immediately upon receipt of a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) from the Federal Transit Administration. The staff recommendation is selection of the North Station location.

BACKGROUND:

Sound Transit has completed environmental review for the Seattle-Tacoma Sounder Commuter Rail project. This involved preparation of an Environmental Assessment (EA) in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The purpose of this environmental assessment is to provide environmental information to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to support a decision on grant funding and to other federal agencies to support project permitting. Sound Transit also has adopted this EA for purposes of compliance with the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) to support Board actions on the project, as well as local permitting.

In this EA, two locations were analyzed by Sound Transit for a downtown Kent commuter rail station. These locations evolved from sites studied by the City of Kent in their downtown comprehensive plan process. The sites have been refined based on operational and budgetary constraints. In addition, consideration has been given to existing and proposed land uses, comprehensive plan policies and the City of Kent's vision for the future of its downtown as a vital, livable and pedestrian-friendly economic center.

The Board reviewed the draft EA at its regular meeting on March 12, 1998, and approved the EA, including preferred station sites for all station sites on the Tacoma-to-Seattle segment with the exception of a Kent station. Also included with this agenda item are copies of Motion 98-19, as adopted by the Board.

At the same Board meeting, the Board instructed staff to allow three months for the City of Kent to identify additional funding for a potential parking structure at the south site. The draft EA was revised to address a potential parking structure at the south site. The additional funding would support selection of a site that is smaller in total area because the majority of the parking required

could be provided in a parking structure. On May 5, 1998, the Kent City Council passed a motion recommending the provision of up to \$4,000,000 of LTGO (Councilmanic) bonds to be used for a parking structure. A copy of the Kent City Council Minutes describing the adoption of that motion is attached. A copy of the motion itself is not yet available from the City of Kent.

South Downtown Kent Station

The station location known as the "South Downtown Kent Station" would extend on either side of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroad tracks from Gowe Street south to Willis Street, requiring permanent closure of Titus Street. Parking, bus platforms and other station related development would occur along the east side of First Avenue South and on both the east and west sides of Railroad Avenue.

With surface parking at the south site, approximately 800 parking stalls would be located on four lots:

- east side of First Avenue South between Willis and Titus Streets
- west side of Railroad Avenue South, between Willis and Titus Streets
- east side of Railroad Avenue South between Willis and Titus Streets
- east side of Railroad Avenue South between Titus and Gowe Streets

Bus platforms would be located adjacent to the station platform, on the west side of Railroad Avenue South between Titus and Gowe Streets.

On February 17, 1998 the Kent City Council adopted Resolution No.1507 reaffirming their preference for the South Downtown Kent Station Site and stating their intent to include the south site in the Kent Downtown Strategic Action Plan.

A structured parking option for the South Downtown Kent Station has been proposed and addressed in the EA. For this option, a four-story parking garage with approximately 500 parking stalls would be located on the east side of Railroad Avenue South, between Gowe and Titus Streets. Bus platforms would be located on the west side of Railroad Avenue South.

North Downtown Kent Station

The station location known as the "North Downtown Kent Station" would extend on either side of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroad tracks from James Street south to Smith Street. Parking, bus platforms and other station related development would occur along the east side of 1st Avenue South and on both the east and west sides of Railroad Avenue.

The EA has covered both station sites in Kent and found no significant differences between them for purposes of environmental review. The Board is asked to identify the station location for Kent, selecting from the two alternatives analyzed in the environmental documents.

At a Board workshop on March 12, 1998, additional briefing was provided to the Board on the alternative station locations for Kent. That briefing included market value, relocation cost and construction cost estimate information for the Kent station alternatives addressed in the

environmental document. Copies of the Discussion Paper on the Kent Station presented at that workshop are included with this agenda item.

A potential parking structure at the north site was not addressed in the EA. Should the Board want to include a parking structure at the north site, additional environmental review may be necessary.

The decision on the Kent Station location is a complex decision. The two alternative locations are approximately 900 feet from each other and both will serve the city of Kent adequately. There does not appear to be a clear consensus within the community itself on the best station location. However the City Council has voted the south site as the preferred site. The City Council is concerned over the potential loss of business and tax base in the downtown area if the north site is selected. Because of the existing street grid, the south site would require the acquisition of up to 36 tax parcels (involving 30 property owners) to provide the required amount of parking in surface lots. For this reason the City Council has made a commitment to provide up to \$4 million to allow the construction of a parking garage in place of surface parking lots to make the south site more feasible.

Staff has reviewed the assumptions made when the budget for commuter rail stations was originally cast four years ago. Apparently the Kent Commuter Rail station budget assumed only 150 to 250 parking spaces to be built at the station site, with the remainder of the parking demand being met by the existing KC Metro Park-and-Ride one-half mile to the west of the BNSF railroad tracks.

Upon review of all the factors as presented in the March 12, 1998 Sound Transit Board Workshop (see attached) staff is recommending that the North site be selected for the commuter rail station. Further, that staff will work with the City of Kent to design a station that will minimize the amount of property takes required at the north site by incorporating a parking structure with the City of Kent funding as described above.

RELEVANT BOARD POLICIES AND PREVIOUS ACTIONS TAKEN:

- Adoption of *Sound Move* (Resolution No. 72).
- Adoption of 1998 Budget (Resolution No. 101).
- Approval of Draft EA and preferred station sites except for Kent (Motion 98-19).
- Also see Background discussion above.

KEY FEATURES:

- Identifies Kent Station location.
- Directs Staff to begin station design process, in cooperation with local Technical Advisory Committees.

FUTURE BOARD DISCUSSIONS AND ACTIONS:

- Approval of contracts for design of stations on the Tacoma-to-Seattle commuter rail segment.
- Approval of property acquisition actions.

FUNDING:

Upon request from the City of Kent, staff has examined the preliminary site plans used in the 1993-1994 planning process to make budget assumptions for the commuter rail stations. It is apparent that while older studies showed parking needs of 450 to 850 spaces at a Kent station, the site plan

used to develop station costs indicated only 150 to 250 spaces. This site plan apparently assumed that the existing King County Metro Kent Park-and-Ride, one-half mile from the BNSF railroad tracks would provide the bulk of the parking needs for the commuter rail station. Staff believe a correction to the budget for the Kent Commuter Rail Station should be made in the range of an additional \$2 to 2.4 million. This would bring the Kent Commuter Rail Station budget closer to the budgets for other similar stations. Staff will return to the Board within the next month with a proposal to make this budget adjustment within the South King County Subarea Commuter Rail budget.

ALTERNATIVES:

Delay identification of the Kent Station location to a later time.

CONSEQUENCES OF DELAY:

Postponing this decision would result in extending the schedule for start-up of Sounder commuter rail service, or accepting the possibility of service start-up on the Tacoma-to-Seattle segment without a Kent Station.

SOUND TRANSIT

MOTION NO. M98-43

A motion of the Board of the Regional Transit Authority for the Pierce, King, and Snohomish Counties region identifying the Kent Station location, and directing staff to begin the property acquisition process and station design process for the Tacoma-to-Seattle Commuter Rail Project upon receipt of a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

BACKGROUND:

Sound Transit has completed environmental review of *Sound Move's* Tacoma-to-Seattle Commuter Rail project. A NEPA Environmental Assessment ("EA") has been prepared that identifies station location alternatives and preferred locations for all stations except Kent. On March 12, 1998 the Board adopted preferred station locations for all stations except Kent, and instructed staff to allow three months for the City of Kent to identify additional funding for a potential parking structure at the south site. The City of Kent has passed a motion recommending the use of up to \$4,000,000 of LTGO (Councilmanic) bonds to be used for a parking structure. In order to begin the property acquisition process and station design process, staff has requested direction from the RTA Board to identify the Kent Station location.

MOTION:

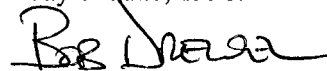
It is hereby moved by the Board of the Regional Transit Authority that staff is authorized to begin the property acquisition process and station design process for the Tacoma-to-Seattle Commuter Rail Project upon receipt of a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), with the following direction:

For the Tacoma-to-Seattle Commuter Rail project, Sound Transit identifies the following site as the station location for Kent:

- Downtown Kent (North)


The Board also directs staff to include a parking structure at the Kent (North) site, subject to any additional required environmental review of the parking structure. The parking structure will be funded by RTA project funds that otherwise would have been allocated for surface parking at the Kent station, together with \$4 million from the City of Kent.

Approved by the Board of the Regional Transit Authority for the Pierce, King, and Snohomish Counties region at a regular meeting thereof on the 11th day of June, 1998.



Bob Drewel
Board Chair

ATTEST:



Marcia Walker
Board Administrator