

MOTION NO. M2014-11

Identifying Tacoma Link Alignment for Study in Environmental Review

MEETING:	DATE:	TYPE OF ACTION:	STAFF CONTACT:	PHONE:
Capital Committee	02/13/14	Recommendation to Board	Ric Ilgenfritz, PEPD Executive Director	(206) 398-5239
Board	02/27/14	Final Action	Michael Williams, Deputy Executive, Capital Project Development Sue Comis, Light Rail Project Manager	(206) 398-5145 (206) 398-5143

PROPOSED ACTION

Identifies the Tacoma Link Expansion light rail alignment(s) to advance into environmental review.

KEY FEATURES SUMMARY

- The Tacoma Link Expansion would extend Tacoma Link light rail from the Theater District in downtown Tacoma to the Stadium and Hilltop districts. This corridor (E1) was selected by the Board in May 2013 after gathering feedback from the public and the Tacoma City Council.
- This action identifies one or more light rail alignments within the selected E1 corridor for further study in environmental review. The alignments identified for review will undergo conceptual engineering to support the environmental analyses. During conceptual engineering, alignments will be refined and station locations will be defined.
- During conceptual engineering, maintenance facility sites in the vicinity of the existing facility will be evaluated and one or more of the most promising sites will be studied in the environmental review.

The light rail alignments below are within the E1 corridor selected by the Sound Transit Board and can be considered for environmental review:

Segment A: Theater District to intersection of Division Avenue/North 1st Street

Alignment A1 (Stadium Way) would connect from the existing Theater District Station north along Stadium Way, then southwest along North 1st Street to the intersection with Division Avenue.

Alignment A2 (Broadway) would connect from the existing Theater District Station through parcels of land currently in use as surface parking and a parking garage and would continue north along Broadway to the intersection with North 1st Street. The alignment then continues southwest along North 1st Street to the intersection with Division Avenue.

- In **Design Option A2a** the connection from Commerce to Broadway would be made diagonally across a parcel of land currently in use as the Pierce Transit garage.

Alignment A3 (St. Helens) would connect from the existing Commerce Street Station across a parcel of land currently in use as the Pierce Transit garage and connect to St. Helens Avenue. The alignment continues along St. Helens Avenue until the intersection of North 1st Street, and then continues along North 1st Street to the intersection with Division Avenue.

- In **Design Option A3a** the alignment connects directly from St. Helens Avenue to Division Avenue, and would not travel along North 1st Street.
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Segment B: Intersection of Division Avenue/North 1st Street to South 19th Street

Alignment B1 (MLK) would extend from the intersection of North 1st Street and Division Avenue to the intersection of MLK Way and South 19th Street. In this option, Tacoma Link would be bi-directional along MLK Way.

Alignment B2 (MLK/J Couplet) would extend from the intersection of North 1st Street and Division Avenue to the intersection of MLK Way and South 19th Street, then turns east for one block along South 19th Street, north along South J Street until the intersection of South J Street and Division Avenue. In this alignment, Tacoma Link would run along a single track and MLK Way and South J Street would form a couplet.

BACKGROUND

The Tacoma Link Expansion would extend Tacoma Link light rail from the Theater District in downtown Tacoma to the Stadium and Hilltop districts. The project corridor is approximately 2.3 miles long. As part of the Sound Transit Plan of transit investments (ST2) approved by voters in 2008, the Plan programmed capital funds for the expansion of the Tacoma Link light rail system if other public or private entities provide matching funds. Sound Transit intends to apply for a Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Small Starts grant. The funding strategy anticipates federal funding to pay for approximately one-third of the total project cost.

Sound Transit initiated an Alternatives Analysis process in August 2012 with early scoping under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to solicit comments on the purpose and need for the project, the range of alternatives to be examined, and proposed evaluation criteria. Early scoping included two public and agency scoping meetings/open houses and a 30-day public comment period to help define the alternatives and evaluation process. The early scoping process and comments are summarized in the Early Scoping Summary Report.

At the conclusion of the early scoping comment period, 24 corridor options in eleven distinct corridors were identified. Two additional corridor options were added to the evaluation as a result of public input. The results of the initial screening and detailed evaluation are reported in the *Tacoma Link Expansion Alternatives Analysis Report and State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) Addendum, May 2013*. The AA also analyzed two transit modes, light rail transit (LRT) and bus rapid transit (BRT). Overall LRT performed better in this evaluation. In addition, LRT is the only mode consistent with Sound Transit's local planning process, including the agency's Long Range Plan and ST2.

On May 23, 2013, after gathering feedback from the public and the Tacoma City Council, the Sound Transit Board of Directors selected the E1-North Downtown Central Corridor (Hilltop via the Stadium District) as the preferred corridor and LRT as the mode for further study in the Tacoma Link light rail expansion environmental review. The Board also approved Gate 2 within Sound Transit's Phase Gate process.

In cooperation with the City of Tacoma and Pierce Transit, Sound Transit conducted the next project phase: defining and evaluating alignment options within the selected corridor. The results of the alignment evaluation were presented to the public and City Council through an extensive outreach process.

On February 4, 2014, the Tacoma City Council unanimously passed Resolution No. 38837, “recommending the removal of alignments A3 and B2 as options; and moving the A1/B1 alignment into the environmental review phase.”

Based on the alignment evaluation and public feedback, the Board is now identifying one or more alignments for environmental review. The one or more alignments identified for study will undergo conceptual engineering to support the environmental analyses. During conceptual engineering, alignments will be refined and station locations will be defined.

During conceptual engineering, maintenance facility expansion sites in the vicinity of the existing facility will also be evaluated and one or more of the most promising sites will be evaluated in the environmental review. Various alignment termini may also be analyzed during the environmental review. During the design and environmental review of the alignments and maintenance facility, Sound Transit will engage affected communities and stakeholders in the project development process and get feedback on alignment and station design issues.

Following the environmental review, the Board will select the project to be built. Sound Transit will then apply for a Small Starts Grant to provide a portion of the capital funding.

Evaluation of the light rail alignment identified by the Board will be conducted in cooperation with the FTA. Before committing federal funds to the Tacoma Link Expansion project, the FTA is required to undertake environmental review in compliance with NEPA. As the public agency proposing the project, Sound Transit is required to comply with SEPA. To satisfy both NEPA and SEPA requirements, Sound Transit and the FTA will prepare the appropriate environmental review for the project.

FISCAL INFORMATION

Not applicable to this action.

SMALL BUSINESS PARTICIPATION

Not applicable to this action.

EQUAL EMPLOYMENT WORKFORCE PROFILE

Not applicable to this action.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Sound Transit has involved stakeholders, the public and public agencies at the local, regional, state, and federal levels to solicit early and continued feedback throughout the Alternatives Analysis and alignment evaluation. Public meetings and briefings were held during the Early Scoping period and corridor selection process from August 2012 through April 2013, and during the alignment evaluation period from November 2013 through January 2014. Sound Transit also convened a Stakeholder Roundtable consisting of representatives from stakeholder groups that may be affected by project development.

During the alignment evaluation, Sound Transit convened two public open houses, convened two meetings of the Stakeholder Roundtable, conducted over 11 community briefings, provided evaluation information on the project website, and hosted an online survey to share information about possible route alignments and gather feedback. Mailings were sent to over 11,000

addresses in the corridor. Approximately 62 members of the public attended open houses. Sound Transit received 221 survey responses, eight comment responses, and six comment letters from Tacoma commissions and community groups. The outreach activities and input from the public were documented in *Alignment Evaluation Outreach Summary* and made available on the project website.

TIME CONSTRAINTS

Delaying identification of alignment(s) to be studied in environmental review would delay the start of the environmental review and conceptual engineering and subsequent publication of the environmental findings.

PRIOR BOARD/COMMITTEE ACTIONS

Motion No. M2013-31: (1) Selected E1 – North Downtown Central as the corridor and LRT as the mode for detailed study in the Tacoma Link light rail expansion environmental review, and (2) approved Gate 2 within Sound Transit's Phase Gate process.

Motion No. M2012-13: Authorized the chief executive officer to execute a contract with CH2M HILL Inc., to provide alternatives analysis services for the Tacoma Link Expansion project in the amount of \$998,663 with a 10% contingency of \$99,866 for a total authorized contract amount not to exceed \$1,098,529.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

JI 2/7/2014

LEGAL REVIEW

PW 2/7/14

MOTION NO. M2014-11

A motion of the Board of the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority identifying the Tacoma Link Expansion light rail alignment(s) to advance into environmental review.

BACKGROUND:

The Tacoma Link Expansion would extend Tacoma Link light rail from the Theater District in downtown Tacoma to the Stadium and Hilltop districts. The project corridor is approximately 2.3 miles long. As part of the Sound Transit 2 Plan of transit investments (ST2) approved by voters in 2008, the Plan programmed funds, in the form of a capital contribution, for the expansion of the Tacoma Link light rail system if other public or private entities provide matching funds. Sound Transit intends to apply for a Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Small Starts grant. The funding strategy anticipates federal funding to pay for approximately one-third of the total project cost.

Sound Transit initiated an Alternatives Analysis process in August 2012 with early scoping under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to solicit comments on the purpose and need for the project, the range of alternatives to be examined, and proposed evaluation criteria. Early scoping included two public and agency scoping meetings/open houses and a 30-day public comment period to help define the alternatives and evaluation process. The early scoping process and comments are summarized in the Early Scoping Summary Report.

At the conclusion of the early scoping comment period, 24 corridor options in eleven distinct corridors were identified. Two additional corridor options were added to the evaluation as a result of public input. The results of the initial screening and detailed evaluation are reported in the Tacoma Link Expansion Alternatives Analysis Report and State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) Addendum, May 2013. The AA also analyzed two transit modes, light rail transit (LRT) and bus rapid transit (BRT). Overall LRT performed better in this evaluation. In addition, LRT is the only mode consistent with Sound Transit's local planning process, including the agency's Long Range Plan and ST2.

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In cooperation with the City of Tacoma and Pierce Transit, Sound Transit conducted the next project phase: defining and evaluating alignment options within the selected corridor. The results of the alignment evaluation were presented to the public and City Council through an extensive outreach process.

On February 4, 2014, the Tacoma City Council unanimously passed Resolution No. 38837, "recommending the removal of alignments A3 and B2 as options; and moving the A1/B1 alignment into the environmental review phase."

Based on the alignment evaluation and public feedback, the Board is now identifying one or more alignments for environmental review. The one or more alignments identified for study will undergo conceptual engineering to support the environmental analyses. During conceptual engineering, alignments will be refined and station locations will be defined.

During conceptual engineering, maintenance facility expansion sites in the vicinity of the existing facility will also be evaluated and one or more of the most promising sites will be evaluated in the environmental review. Various alignment termini may also be analyzed during the environmental

review. During the design and environmental review of the alignments and maintenance facility, Sound Transit will engage affected communities and stakeholders in the project development process and get feedback on alignment and station design issues.

Following the environmental review, the Board will select the project to be built. Sound Transit will then apply for a Small Starts Grant to provide a portion of the project funding.

Evaluation of the light rail alignment identified by the Board will be conducted in cooperation with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). Before committing federal funds to the Tacoma Link Expansion project, the FTA is required to undertake environmental review in compliance with NEPA. As the public agency proposing the project, Sound Transit is required to comply with SEPA. To satisfy both NEPA and SEPA requirements, Sound Transit and the FTA will prepare the appropriate environmental review for the project.

MOTION:

It is hereby moved by the Board of the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority that, based on the alignments evaluated in the alternatives analysis and alignment evaluation, and the public and agency comments received, the alignments identified for environmental review for the Tacoma Link Expansion are as follows:

Segment A: Theater District to intersection of Division Avenue/North 1st Street

Alignment A1 (Stadium Way) to connect from the existing Theater District Station north along Stadium Way, then southwest along North 1st Street to the intersection with Division Avenue.

Segment B: Intersection of Division Avenue/North 1st Street to South 19th Street

Alignment B1 (MLK) to extend from the intersection of North 1st Street and Division Avenue to the intersection of MLK Way and South 19th Street. In this option, Tacoma Link would be bi-directional along MLK Way.

This motion also authorizes staff to complete environmental review and conceptual engineering, using the alignments identified above for the Tacoma Link Expansion. This motion also authorizes staff to screen maintenance facility sites in the vicinity of the existing facility, and study one or more of the most promising sites in the environmental review. The Board will not make a final decision on the project to be built until after completion of the environmental review, which is anticipated to be published in 2014 or 2015.

APPROVED by the Board of the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority at a regular meeting thereof held on February 27, 2014.



Dow Constantine
Board Chair

ATTEST:



Marcia Walker
Board Administrator