



Summary Minutes

West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions System Expansion Committee Workshop May 20, 2022

Call to order

The meeting was called to order at 1: p.m. by Committee Chair Balducci virtually on WebEx.

Roll call of members

Chair	Vice Chair
(P) Claudia Balducci, King County Councilmember	(P) Kim Roscoe, Fife Mayor

Board Members	
(A) Nancy Backus, Auburn Mayor	(P) Kent Keel, University Place Mayor
(P) David Baker, Kenmore Councilmember	(P) Joe McDermott, King County Council Vice President
(P) Cassie Franklin, Everett Mayor	(P) Dave Somers, Snohomish County Executive
(P) Bruce Harrell, Seattle Mayor	

Katie Flores, Board Administrator, announced that a quorum of the System Expansion Committee was present at roll call. Boardmembers Constantine, Frizzell, Juarez, and Millar were also present.

Welcome and opening remarks

Chair Balducci thanked the members of the committee and other Board members who were present for the special meeting of the committee to hold a workshop on the West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions (WSBLE). Chair Balducci explained that this workshop will help prepare the Board for action in July on whether to confirm or modify the preferred route and station locations. This is an important project milestone not just for the project but for the entire regional system as with a project of this magnitude there will be impacts to the full region, including the critical decision on a new downtown Seattle tunnel.

Brooke Belman thanked Boardmembers who toured the alignment and extended an invitation to the remaining Board members.

Project overview

Don Billen, Executive Director of Planning, Environment, and Project Development, began the presentation. He reviewed the existing system, and system as it would exist following build-out of the voter approved ST3 system plan. He explained that the plan would complete the regional spine between Tacoma and Everett. The spine would be split in two, what staff called "spine segmentation" in order to shorten each segment and improve reliability. This segmentation would include and utilize a second tunnel through Downtown Seattle.

Mr. Billen reviewed the program realignment process and action taken in 2021 and its impacts on the West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions, which is one of the projects now identified as having a funding gap. The target schedule for the Smith Cove to Ballard segment was 2037; with the affordable schedule being in 2039. The full WSBLE share of the regional affordability gap was \$1.8 billion in 2019 dollars, based on the 2021 cost estimates and financial projections.

Cathal Ridge, Executive Corridor Director for the Central Corridor, provided an overview of the West Seattle and Link Extensions project. The project was currently in the planning phase, which began in 2017. The Board identified preferred alternatives and other alternatives for environmental study in 2019. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) was completed and released in late January 2022 and the comment period ended on April 28, 2022.

Mr. Ridge reviewed the external engagement efforts which included 5,000 DEIS comments, over 19,500 people involved in public open houses, 1,200 posters delivered along the corridor, and numerous other outreach efforts targeted at businesses, homeowners, and community groups. There were also 12 meetings of the Community Advisory Group throughout the process providing project feedback.

Staff worked in collaboration with the City of Seattle to issue a Racial Equity Toolkit (RET) report, which was released as a draft and will be updated following further project work. The full report has been made available online and was transmitted to the Board.

Station planning was being conducted in tandem with the environmental analysis to insure well integrated stations in the urban areas. Staff was focusing on the one to three block radiuses around the station which it called the station context. A report on this work was released alongside the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

Passenger experience workshops were also conducted internally, using passenger personas to imagine travelling through the stations in order to better inform station design practices. More than 24 personas were created to attempt to capture as many experiences as possible.

Segment alternatives, benefits, and key differentiators

Interbay / Ballard segment

Mr. Ridge reviewed the three station areas along this alternative, highlighting access, transit integration, and transit oriented development potential.

Key differentiators for each alternative, including the travel time from Smith Cove to Ballard without Link which would be 38 minutes as opposed to 11 minutes with Link. Mr. Ridge continued to show illustrations of all station locations and the guideways, including station entrances and access options. The potential for Transit Oriented Development (TOD) was also shown, predicting which properties could be used for residential or commercial development.

Boardmember Franklin asked how tunnel alternatives would have similar costs to elevated guideway alternatives. Mr. Ridge advised that project costs had construction and real estate cost components. Real estate costs had increased along the alignment as a whole, however elevated or surface level guideways would require a much greater investment in real estate, driving the alternatives costs closer together. Boardmember Franklin highlighted the volatility in real estate markets. Mr. Billen advised that staff was expecting to bring preemptive real estate actions following the identification of the preferred alternative to address these real estate concerns.

Boardmember Roscoe asked about the metric of zero impact given for the tunnel alternatives, and how it was a lesser impact than the elevated guideway. Mr. Ridge responded that due to the necessary columns and column foundations for an elevated guideway in the waterway, an enclosed tunnel was actually a lesser environmental impact.

Chair Balducci noted the US Coast Guard's requirement that a bridge to Ballard be high enough to allow for large watercraft. She was concerned with that requirement in tandem to the increased costs. Mr. Ridge advised that the project team was working closely with not just the Coast Guard but tribal representatives, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), all which preferred tunnels as they would have lesser impacts on all their respective interests.

Boardmember Balducci asked what staff looked at when identifying transit oriented development opportunities around station areas. Mr. Ridge explained that the opportunities discussed in the presentation were looking only at agency owned property which could be transformed into transit oriented development, looking at current zoning and potential future zoning. Boardmember Balducci advised that she would like the agency to have conversations with jurisdictions as the system was built out through the region regarding potential zoning changes to foster more vibrant areas around stations.

Boardmember Keel asked whether costs for tunnels increased in addition to at grade or elevated alternatives. Mr. Ridge advised that costs for both were increasing, but the tunnel options were increasing at a lower rate than the elevated alternatives. Some tunnels were more expensive than others due to the real estate investments needed for their construction.

Boardmember Millar asked whether the 14th Avenue elevated alternative was still preferred considering the new information. Mr. Ridge explained that the alternative was identified as the preferred alternative by the Board in 2019. Later this year, the Board would determine whether that was still the preferred alternative.

Boardmember Harrell advised that in his capacity as Mayor of Seattle, he was receiving overwhelming feedback asking for a 15th street alternative. Chair Balducci agreed that perceived public comments were being heard by multiple Board members, and asked Interim CEO Belman to speak on this.

Boardmember McDermott agreed and asked when public comments would be available for review. Interim CEO Belman advised that the comments would be available to the Board in June.

Boardmember Roscoe asked for clarification about the subarea funding for the second downtown Seattle tunnel. Mr. Billen advised that it would be funded by all five subareas proportionate to ridership.

Downtown segment

Mr. Ridge provided an overview of this segment, which included the stations from Midtown through Mercer Street in the Lower Queen Anne/South Lake Union area. Both tunnel alternatives provide estimated daily ridership of 11,300 approximately in the Seattle Center station areas, and the daily ridership estimates for the Westlake station options were in the 74,000-77,000 range for both station alternatives.

Transit integration with various bus routes was then presented for each station alternative, outlining connections and area of access from the downtown stations, and further opportunities for TOD.

Boardmember Millar asked that TOD potential in broader station areas be addressed in future presentations.

Mr. Billen commented that the station planning report, which was referenced at the top of the agenda, covers a broader station area but is important information and was created in collaboration with the jurisdictions.

Chair Keel asked for more information about the Midtown Station locations with respect to transit oriented development. Mr. Ridge replied that the midtown area is already extremely built out and urbanized and therefore in the station radius there was no opportunity for additional TOD.

Chair Balducci called out the challenges with the Seattle Center station. She asked if the Board would need to choose one alignment or the other, or if they could be combined or reimaged. Mr. Ridge explained that while there was Board support for the station location of the Seattle Center preferred alternative, there were concerns about the impact of construction. Out of that came many comments asking for refinements combining the preferred alternative at the South Lake Union station and moving on to the Mercer Street alternative at the Seattle Center.

Boardmember Harrell advised that he was receiving support for that refinement.

Chinatown / International District (CID) / SODO segment

Mr. Ridge overviewed the current preferred alternative and alignment, which includes the stations from the International District to the stadium district. Daily ridership predications are very similar between the stations as they are close together. Transit integration opportunities were also similar, with some station locations allowing closer access to the Sounder lines. Mr. Ridge continued to outline the TOD potential at these station areas, and discussed the impacts to local businesses between the various station alternatives.

Boardmember Balducci highlighted her concern about the deep stations through downtown Seattle.

Boardmember Constantine was concerned about the deep station alternatives in this segment as well, citing that the limited access should only be considered if there are no other alternatives.

Boardmember Keel shared both concerns about deep stations. Given the concerns about the Chinatown International District's stations, he already had difficulty making a decision, and this would make it worse. He also did not want to see the post office displaced in Sodo.

Boardmember McDermott added his voice in concern about deep stations with elevator access only. He also asked for more engagement with the community around the CID. Boardmember Balducci agreed.

Boardmember Harrell advised that the two deep stations in the Chinatown/International District were not options in his mind, and he suggested taking them off the table all together in order to assist with cost constraints.

West Seattle / Duwamish segment

Mr. Ridge provided an overview of this segment which includes the guideway crossing the Duwamish waterway, and the Delridge, Avalon, and Alaska Junction stations. The daily estimated ridership was reported for each station, and the opportunities for Transit Integration which are similar across the various alternatives.

TOD potential was then outlined, with the highest potential station locations being highlighted.

Duwamish crossing alternatives were then presented in more detail, outlining the cost, constructability, and maritime impacts.

Boardmember Roscoe asked what the "social services" note on one of the Delridge station alternatives was. Mr. Ridge advised that a DSHS building's parking would be affected, which staff was assuming would affect the entire building.

Cost savings and refinement ideas

Mr. Ridge explained that the refinement ideas had not been deeply studied and were not part of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and more work would need to be completed. To address affordability concerns, staff developed five concepts. The first was to shift the elevated Fauntleroy station. A second option was to eliminate the Avalon Station. In conjunction with shifting the Fauntleroy station, this could save a combined \$525 million. The third option would be to consolidate the Denny and South Lake Union stations. The fourth was to refine Downtown Seattle station entrances. The final was to shift the 14th Avenue station in Ballard.

Other refinement concepts addressed risks or other concerns. Six concepts were developed. The first was to provide access to both sides of the Andover Street station. The second was to refine the Midtown Station entrance to improve schedule compliance. Third was the Seattle Center station location refinement which was addressed earlier. One option was to shift the Republican station further to the west, the other option was to connect the preferred alternative South Lake Union station to the Mercer Way station alternative. The fourth concept was to shift the tunnel portal in Smith Cove to the South. The fifth was to combine the Smith Cove and Interbay stations.

Boardmember Somers asked if there were cost estimates for these refinements. Mr. Ridge advised that there were not any cost savings identified with these refinements yet, however there were a number of cost risks that these refinements would potentially solve.

Boardmember Roscoe asked what shifting entrances into the public right-of-way meant in the affordability refinements. Mr. Ridge advised that many of the stations would currently need to be built into existing private buildings. If an entrance could instead be built into the sidewalks, it could reduce costs.

Boardmember Balducci asked that when the Board was making station versus station considerations, or combining stations, it would be important to know who was being served or affected, not just the ridership numbers without context.

Next Steps

An overview of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement comments would be provided to the June System Expansion Committee meeting. In July the System Expansion Committee would be asked to identify a preferred alternative for study in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, which would advance to the July Board meeting. The Final Environmental Impact Statement would be complete in 2023, when the Board would be asked to make a decision on the project to be built.

Mr. Billen asked for any other information the Board would like before it is asked to make a decision in July. Boardmember Keel asked if staff had worked on ways to decrease the project delivery time. Mr. Billen advised that staff was working on environmental work on the target schedule timeline. The refinement opportunities provided earlier in the meeting offered possibilities to reduce the project's impacts on the larger program affordability, which would then allow the program to meet the target schedule.

Boardmember Keel explained that these projects were all conjoined in one way or another, and it was important to think about accelerating to the target schedule well in advance.

Boardmember Millar asked if the two consultants could have any input in these decisions. Chair Balducci advised that this was somewhat out of the scope of the Board's independent consultant. Interim CEO Belman explained that the Board's independent consultant, David Peters, would be at the May Board meeting and Boardmembers could ask him questions at that time.

Boardmember Keel explained that the consultant was brought on to do higher program level work, but that would have impacts to the agency that would trickle down to the various projects.

Boardmember Harrell advised that the city of Seattle was working on a resolution with its City Council to make clear the city's position well ahead of the design work.

Boardmember Roscoe advised that she was having difficulty understanding the impacts on station areas. Mr. Ridge suggested that the Station Planning Report was developed in coordination with Seattle and Metro, and addressed this question on a station by station basis.

Chair Balducci noted that while no decisions would be made at the workshop, a general idea of the alignment was coming together. She asked that staff bring suggestions for refinements that the Board could consider which were still within the affordable schedule to the June System Expansion Committee.

Next meeting

Thursday, June 9, 2022
1:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Ruth Fisher Board Room
& Virtually via WebEx

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 3:09 p.m.

ATTEST:

Claudia Balducci
System Expansion Committee Chair

Kathryn Flores
Board Administrator

APPROVED on _____, PIA.