

Motion No. M2023-109

Directing staff to assess the feasibility of an additional alternative in the South Lake Union area for potential inclusion in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Ballard Link Extension project

Meeting:	Date:	Type of action:	Staff contact:
System Expansion Committee	12/14/2023	Recommend to Board	Brooke Belman, Deputy CEO, Chief Expansion Delivery Officer
Board of Directors	12/15/2023	Final Action	Don Billen, PEPD Executive Director Cathal Ridge, Executive Corridor Director

Proposed action

Directing staff to assess the feasibility of an additional alternative in the South Lake Union area for potential inclusion in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Ballard Link Extension project.

Key features summary

- This action directs staff to assess the feasibility of an additional alternative in the South Lake Union area for potential inclusion in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Ballard Link Extension project.
- Board Motion Nos. M2023-18 and M2023-57 identified the preferred alternative light rail route and station locations for the Ballard Link Extension for additional environmental review, including preparation of a Final EIS, and to advance Preliminary Engineering for the project.
- Board Motion Nos. M2022-57, M2022-73, and M2023-69 authorized scope to prepare Final EIS documents and conduct Preliminary Engineering for both the West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions projects, and to prepare a new NEPA Draft EIS/SEPA Supplemental Draft EIS for the Ballard Link Extension.
- The additional alternative would combine the Denny Westlake Shifted West station location with a potential South Lake Union station at approximately 5th Avenue and Harrison Street.
- The scope of work for the feasibility assessment includes continued planning, conceptual design, legal review, and external engagement on the additional alternative in the South Lake Union area to support a potential subsequent Board action to include the alternative in the Ballard Link Extension Draft EIS and to potentially designate it as a preferred alternative.
- If approved, staff would expedite a feasibility study to allow the Board to consider the results in May 2024. After reviewing the feasibility study, a Board decision to include the alternative in the Draft EIS as an additional alternative or preferred alternative would delay the final completion date for the Ballard Link Extension.
- This action requires a revision to the Proposed 2024 Budget's authorized allocation for the Ballard Link Extension project in the preliminary engineering phase by the amount of \$851,048 to be committed to the Project Development Services contract with HNTB Corporation.

Background

The West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions projects (WSLE and BLE, respectively) were approved for funding by voters under the ST3 Plan. The projects 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. It consists of two separate Link light rail extensions: one to West Seattle and the other to Ballard. The extension to West Seattle will operate from downtown Seattle to West Seattle's Alaska Junction neighborhood with four stations and will eventually connect to the Everett Link Extension. The Ballard extension will operate from downtown Seattle to Ballard's Market Street area with nine stations and will include a new rail-only tunnel from the Chinatown/International District to South Lake Union and Seattle Center/Uptown. It will eventually connect with the Tacoma Dome Link Extension.

The project development process has three phases. Phase 1 included alternatives development, environmental scoping and identification of a preferred alternative(s) and other alternatives. Phase 2 included the preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and conceptual engineering of a preferred alternative(s) and other alternatives as identified through alternatives development. Both projects were evaluated together in a Draft EIS issued in 2022. Phase 3 includes the preparation of a Final EIS, including responses to public and agency comments on the Draft EIS, and Preliminary Engineering of the Preferred Alternative. In this phase, the West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions will each be evaluated in separate Final EISs. A new NEPA Draft EIS/SEPA Supplemental Draft EIS will be prepared for Ballard Link Extension.

The Board adopted Motion No. M2022-57 in July 2022 to confirm or modify a preferred alternative(s) for the separate Final EIS for the West Seattle Link Extension. The Board adopted Motion No. M2023-18 in March 2023 to confirm or modify a preferred alternative(s) for the separate EIS for the Ballard Link Extension. The Board subsequently adopted Motion No. M2023-57 in July 2023 to modify the preferred station location for the Denny Station for the Ballard Link Extension EIS.

Ongoing community feedback has prompted interest by some in studying an additional alternative in the South Lake Union area of the Ballard Link Extension. The additional alternative would incorporate the Denny Westlake Shifted West station location, which is already included as a Draft EIS alternative, but would be coupled with a potential South Lake Union station at approximately 5th Avenue and Harrison Street several blocks west of the current preferred station location.

The suggested additional alternative was discussed at a meeting of the System Expansion Committee in November 2023, which then requested that staff prepare an action for the Committee in December 2023 to assess the feasibility of the additional alternative in the South Lake Union area for potential inclusion in the Draft EIS for the Ballard Link Extension project, as well as any associated budget and contract amendments for project development work, so the committee could consider forwarding said actions to the Board.

Should the motion to conduct a feasibility study be approved, staff would continue public engagement and analysis to address the interests and concerns regarding this additional alternative, including ridership impacts in South Lake Union, as conveyed in comments received by the public and in information shared with the System Expansion Committee at the November 2023 meeting including but not limited to: Climate Pledge Arena foundations, mobility impacts during construction for all users, station depth, track curves and train speeds, transit integration, and utility conflicts. Further, to advance Board discussion, the results of the feasibility analysis would be compared to prior analysis of the current Preferred Alternatives at Denny (Shifted North) and South Lake Union (7th and Harrison). Staff would also engage with the Board's independent consultant, Dave Peters, as the technical work progresses.

Project status

Project Identification	Alternatives Identification	Conceptual Engineering/ Draft EIS	Preliminary Engineering/ Final EIS	Final Design	Construction
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Projected completion date for Preliminary Engineering/Final EIS for Ballard Link Extension: 2026

Project scope, schedule and budget summary are located on page 16 of the October 2023 Agency Progress Report.

Fiscal information

As this project is pre-baselined, both the authorized project budget for project development work and a forecasted cost estimate for the remaining project delivery and construction work are reasonably assumed in the existing Long Range Financial Plan. The current cost estimate for the Ballard Link Extension project in the 2023 Fall Financial Plan is \$11.2 billion in 2023\$ (\$8.9 billion in 2019\$). This represents the cost estimate updated at the time of Realignment and does not represent the preferred alternative (Motion Nos. M2023-18 and M2023-57.) The assumed in-service date is 2039 for Ballard Link.

As noted in the July 2023 Board Motion (Motion No. M2023-57), based on current cost estimates and revenue projections, the preferred alternatives for the West Seattle and Ballard Link extensions are anticipated to exceed the assumptions in the financial plan (by \$510 million in 2019\$). Modifying the preferred alternative has the potential to change or increase the variance to the cost estimate in the financial plan.

Sound Transit, City of Seattle, and King County acknowledged there may be shared responsibility to address the additional cost of the delta between the final project to be built and the realigned financial plan through either additional funding or cost savings opportunities. Together, they have identified up to \$400 million in additional potential funding for the West Seattle and Ballard Link extensions through various sources including publicly-owned property, value capture from increased development, and in-kind contributions. The City of Seattle and King County provided letters on March 23, 2023, indicating their intent to work with Sound Transit to further analyze costs and funding sources over the next year and develop a funding agreement in advance of the Board actions to select projects to be built for the West Seattle and Ballard Link extensions. Sound Transit will need to perform a detailed analysis of the \$400 million in potential funding sources in relation to the cost estimates in order to assess the efficacy of the proposal on the Financial Plan as well as partner with the City and County to identify additional funding sources.

The alternative alignment’s impact to agency affordability, including debt capacity and net debt service coverage, is unknown at this point and will vary based on the findings of the feasibility study. The Financial Plan cost estimate will be updated based on new data from the preliminary comparative cost estimate and any Board decisions related to this milestone.

Disadvantaged and small business participation

Not applicable to this action.

Public involvement

In an effort to meet interests to expedite a feasibility study and meet a timeline that includes Board consideration of results in May 2024, staff have assumed a very aggressive schedule. It is assumed that

January through March would be focused on exploring and resolving any design/constructability issues associated with this new idea and evaluating ridership, transit integration, environmental concerns, costs, etc. This technical information would then be shared publicly in April. Similar to the spring/summer 2023 engagement effort for further studies focused on the Denny Station, Sound Transit will involve the public through webinars, an updated online open house, community briefings in the neighborhood and briefings to transit riders in communities along the corridors connecting to the station. Public feedback would be documented and made available for board consideration in May 2024.

Time constraints

The Board previously identified the preferred alternative for the Ballard Link Extension in March 2023 and modified the preferred station location for the Denny Station in July 2023. Staff has since been proceeding with environmental review and design development.

Direction to assess the feasibility of an additional alternative in the South Lake Union area for potential inclusion in the Draft EIS would not result in any delay to the overall project schedule. However, upon consideration of the results of the feasibility study, anticipated in May 2024, if the Board were to include the additional alternative in the Draft EIS it would be projected to cause a 10-month delay to the overall project schedule (revenue service date would become 2040). If the Board were to modify the preferred alternative, it would be projected to cause between 10 months and 2 years of delay to the overall project schedule depending on when the preferred alternative were modified (revenue service date would be 2040 to 2041).

Prior Board/Committee actions

Motion No. M2023-57: Confirmed or modified the preferred station location for the Denny Station for the Ballard Link Extension Environmental Impact Statement.

Motion No. M2023-18: Confirmed or modified the preferred light rail route and station locations for the Ballard Link Extension Final Environmental Impact Statement.

Motion No. M2022-57: Modified the preferred light rail route and station locations for the West Seattle Link Extension for the Final Environmental Impact Statement and requested further studies in some areas.

Motion No. M2019-104: Recommended additional alternatives for study in the West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

Motion No. M2019-51: Identified the preferred alternative(s) and other alternatives for study in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions project.

Motion No. M2017-161: Authorized the chief executive officer to execute a Partnering Agreement with the City of Seattle for the West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions Project.

Resolution No. R2017-32: Amended the Adopted 2017 Budget to create the West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions Project by (a) establishing the Project Allocation to Date through the completion of the Preliminary Engineering Phase in the amount of \$285,896,000 and (b) establishing the 2017 Annual Budget in the amount of \$4,150,000; (2) authorized the project to advance through Gate 1 within Sound Transit's Phase Gate Process; and (3) established the name of the project as the West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions Project.

Environmental review – KH 11/27/23

Legal review – DB 12/8/23

Motion No. M2023-109

A motion of the Board of the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority directing staff to assess the feasibility of an additional alternative in the South Lake Union area for potential inclusion in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Ballard Link Extension project.

Background

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information shared with the System Expansion Committee at the November 2023 meeting including but not limited to: Climate Pledge Arena foundations, mobility impacts during construction for all users, station depth, track curves and train speeds, transit integration, and utility conflicts. Further, to advance Board discussion, the results of the feasibility analysis would be compared to prior analysis of the current Preferred Alternatives at Denny (Shifted North) and South Lake Union (7th and Harrison). Staff would also engage with the Board's independent consultant, Dave Peters, as the technical work progresses.

Motion

It is hereby moved by the Board of the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority that staff is directed to assess the feasibility of an additional alternative in the South Lake Union area for potential inclusion in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Ballard Link Extension project.

APPROVED by the Board of the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority at a regular meeting thereof held on December 15, 2023.



Dow Constantine
Board Chair

Attest:



Kathryn Flores
Board Administrator