

Stride: SR 522 BRT (S3)

Issue Paper: Lake Forest Park - 1/5/2023

Issue:

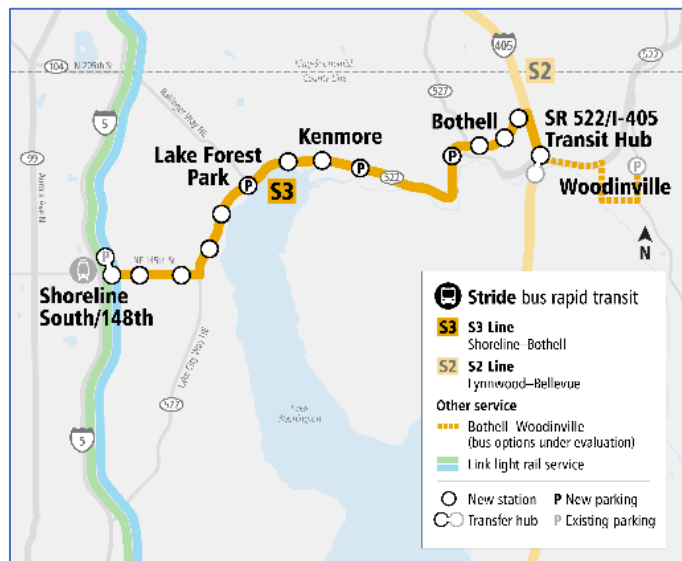
After receiving comments from impacted property owners along SR 522, the Lake Forest Park City Council passed a motion on 12/8 that requests a 90 day pause on all work on the SR 522/145th Ave NE BRT project (S3) within the City:

“A motion to direct the Lake Forest Park City Administration to request that the Sound Transit Board and Executive put into effect a 90-day pause on the Lake Forest Park segment of the project, in order to hear our citizens' concerns and work directly with the City and our community to develop new design refinements, including: 1) significant reductions in the amount of tree canopy destruction and property acquisitions; 2) to better address and improve mitigation plans for noise, tree removal, and environmental impacts; and 3) to rethink and reimagine the retaining wall design, safety, and landscaping.”

Board direction is needed in order to respond to this request from Lake Forest Park. The final property package needed for right of way acquisition for the SR 522 BRT project will be considered in January. By not taking action and pausing, for 90 days, final design and property acquisition activities would impact the critical path schedule and delay project delivery by at least 6-8 months and potentially 2 or more years. Staff recommends moving forward with the January property acquisition package as planned and committing to continue working on the issues raised by the Lake Forest Park community to find resolution in areas where appropriate.

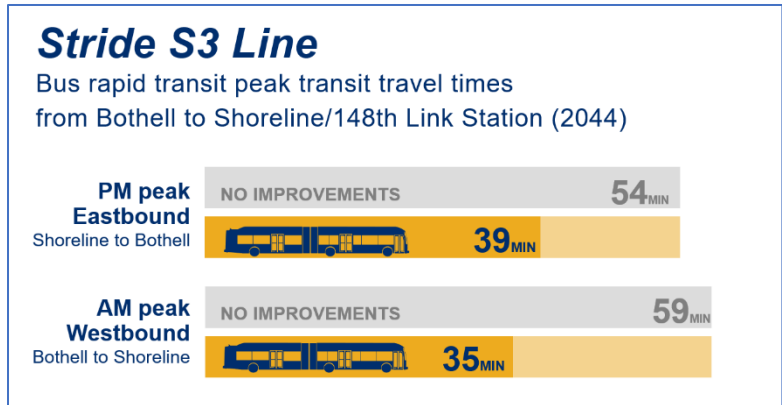
Background:

Stride S3 was included in the ST3 package at the request and advocacy of SR 522 cities and communities. Known as “522 Transit Now” the Cities along SR 522 collectively advocated for BRT service. These cities have continued to support the project, especially during the Board’s Realignment process, and as a result, moved the project from a Tier 2 priority to a Tier 1 designation. Immediately after Realignment, the Board selected the Project to be Built in September 2021 after extensive community engagement, unanimous support from SR 522 cities, and completion of environmental review (SEPA, with no appeals or controversy), and 30% design. Since then, final design has progressed past 60% (including review and minimal comments from cities), agreements have been executed (WSDOT, cities, utilities), and the Board has authorized four out of the five SR 522 BRT right of way packages, equating to 146 of 198 affected properties along the entire corridor. The project will also need to clear an estimated 30-50 encroachments on existing public right of way in Lake Forest Park. Community feedback started when property acquisition letters were mailed to these impacted property owners



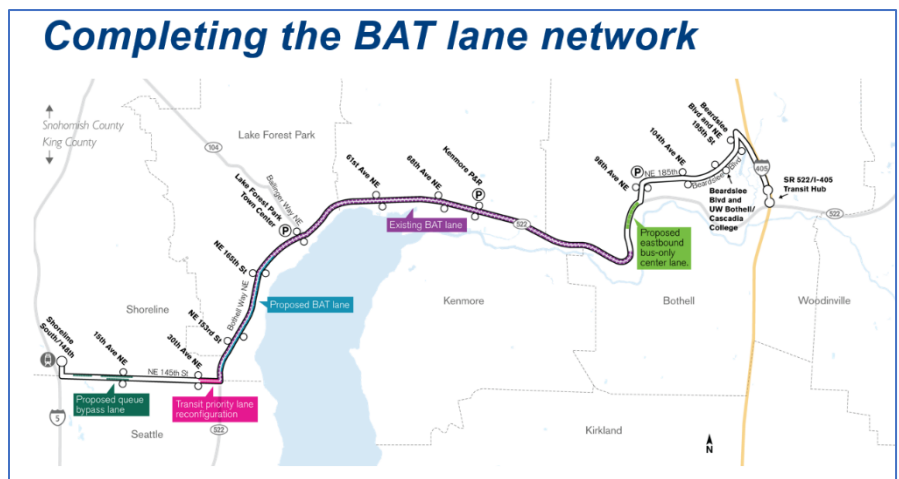
Context:

S3 will build and operate regional high-capacity transit along SR 522 between UW Bothell/I-405 BRT and the Shoreline South/148th Link station, with stations in Bothell, Kenmore, Lake Forest Park, Seattle, and Shoreline. The 9-mile line will provide a similar level of quality in service, facilities, vehicles, and rider amenities as Link light rail, and will connect to other regional and local transit services. When fully built out, the S3 line will save riders significant time, as much as 24 minutes in the PM peak than that of a no-build scenario. The S3 line will also use Battery Electric Buses (BEBs) for the entire fleet serving this BRT corridor. This will be Sound Transit’s first use of BEBs. Safety, access, speed, and travel time reliability are critical goals of Sound Transit’s improvements in this corridor. S3 is part of the Stride Program that includes I-405 BRT (S1 and S2) and a new operations and maintenance base, located in Bothell. The Board targeted 2026 for the initiation of service as a complete line, although the S3 line has been trending towards a 2027 opening, as relayed to the Board since the summer of 2021.



S3 improvements include completion of the Business Access and Transit (BAT lanes) facilities across the corridor, strategic improvements to allow transit to by-pass congested intersections, and stations that will accommodate Stride and high frequency King County Metro Transit service.

In Lake Forest Park, a northbound BAT lane spanning approximately 1.2 miles will be added along SR 522. This is a particularly challenging section of SR 522 to widen because both sides of SR 522 in this area include established community businesses and residences, steep topography, and complicated driveway access. This new northbound BAT lane will complement the existing BAT lane southbound in this section of the corridor. The improvements in Lake Forest Park are critical to reduce bus travel times



by an average of 2.3 minutes during a typical afternoon, although the travel time savings could be more than 10 minutes on the most congested days. During project development and environmental review, Sound Transit worked extensively with the City, community, and individual property owners to listen

to, understand, and address concerns - the design was refined to reduce project impacts and improve access to the HCT system. These refinements included:

- Shifting the roadway expansion to the west in order to avoid approximately 9 full property acquisitions on the east side of SR 522, and to better utilize existing public right of way.
- Reducing the width of improvements while still including pedestrian access to stations by incorporating a sidewalk and City-required landscape buffer on one side of SR 522.
- Reducing the impacts by optimizing the use of existing public right of way. An existing center turn lane will be converted to a narrow median, accompanied by U-turns at signalized intersections.
- Including a station at 165th to improve system access and avoid a “three seat ride” for nearby residents.

Shifting the improvements to the west will require more extensive construction and a new retaining wall on the west side, resulting in a higher cost project. However, shifting to the west reduces the number of full acquisitions and individual displacements for the project. The following illustrates a section of the corridor in Lake Forest Park.



Figure A-02. VP 02 – Existing condition and proposed visual simulation
SR 522 (Bothell Way NE) looking northeast near NE 155th Place in Lake Forest Park

The subsequent SEPA environmental analysis resulted in a Determination of Nonsignificance (DNS) that found the following:

- Noise: The change in noise level will range from –1dBA to +1 dBA and therefore no operational noise mitigation is proposed.
- Water resources: No improvements will occur in surface waters, wetlands or floodplains; however work will occur within surface water and wetland regulatory buffers. Impacts to these buffer areas will be relatively minimal and will be mitigated as required by local and federal permits. Stormwater management will be designed and implemented consistent with the adopted stormwater management code and the manual of the appropriate jurisdiction as well as WSDOT and Ecology stormwater regulations.
- Trees and vegetation: Deciduous trees, conifers, shrubs and landscape plants will be removed or altered. Approximately 550 shrubs, 236 deciduous trees, and 203 conifers were identified in Lake Forest Park for removal based on conceptual engineering plans and an early tree inventory. The project design will minimize vegetation and tree removal to the extent feasible and vegetation will be removed only where necessary. Trees removed or altered within local jurisdictions will be replaced in compliance with WSDOT standards and local municipal codes.
- Visual and Aesthetic: Views in Lake Forest Park will be altered for residential neighbors and travelers. Measures to reduce aesthetic effects will include preserving mature trees to the extent practicable and providing large stature tree replacement, providing architectural finishes on the vertical faces of retaining walls and/or landscaping strip or other vegetation screening pending approval from authorities with jurisdiction.
- Property impacts: The project will require full or partial parcel acquisition, permanent easements or temporary easements for construction. Property acquisitions and relocation assistance will be provided in compliance with Sound Transit’s Real Property Acquisitions and Relocation Policy, Procedures and Guidelines and Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 8.26 Relocation Assistance – Real Property Acquisition Policy. Additionally, upwards of 50 properties in the Lake Forest Park area along SR 522 are encroaching into public right of way.

Current status:

Final design and property acquisition continues and is the critical path item for S3. The City reviewed the 60% design in late summer/early fall 2022 and provided comments. Community open houses and meetings are planned for February and March 2023. 90% design will be complete in late April as another milestone towards advertising for construction in Q1 2024.

S3 Property Acquisition by the numbers:

- 220 properties within the entire SR 522 project area. The Board has already approved 168 of the 220 properties for acquisition.
- Within Lake Forest Park there are a total of 107 properties for acquisition
- 69 properties in Lake Forest Park have already been authorized in the prior 4 packages. Offers and appraisals on these 69 are already in process.
- The 5th and final acquisition package contains 52 properties – 38 are in Lake Forest Park, 8 in Bothell, 6 in Kenmore.
- There are no full acquisitions or relocations within package 5.

- There are 3 public properties owned by King County, within Kenmore, in package 5
- Within LFP there are large number of encroachments within the existing public right of way. Approximately 40-50 where folks have fences, landscaping, parking within the existing ROW.

Community concerns and design refinements:

Community engagement has been extensive, continuous, and continues to be a priority. Since the initiation of the project, over 2,100 comments and questions from Lake Forest Park have shaped the design. The current primary concerns include:

- Trees and community “fit”: Sound Transit is meeting with individual property owners to better understand the nuances of each property and adjust the final design to avoid negative impacts (such as removal of trees) to the extent practicable and mitigate those that remain. These adjustments will ultimately require City approval, so City staff are being consulted for any changes. Safety will not be compromised.
- Aesthetics: Sound Transit continues to coordinate closely with the City and WSDOT to refine the design of retaining walls. Special or otherwise non-standard WSDOT aesthetic treatments will likely require the City to assume maintenance of the walls. Discussions are ongoing to determine the City’s receptivity to assuming maintenance responsibilities – if receptive, specific aesthetic treatments will be explored.

Consequences of a 90 day pause

The City requested a 90 day pause on all project activities to allow for design refinements and additional community engagement. Stride staff estimate that such a pause would result with a delay of a minimum of 6-8 months or potentially up to 2 or more years, and increased costs. The shorter duration assumes no significant changes to the project (all fitting within the environmental clearance and design), accounts for the 90 day pause, allows for subsequent discussion with the City Council and Board of directors to confirm agreement, and accounts for restarting the property acquisition process. The longer duration adds time to account for changes that would trigger a new environmental analysis, significant design updates, and different right of way impacts. S3 is already trending towards a 2027 service opening date, 10 months past the Board’s realignment target.

Issue resolution/next steps:

- Aesthetics and trees: As noted, staff are in frequent discussions with the City and WSDOT to identify a solution to retaining wall aesthetics and with individual property owners to refine the design. Sound Transit project leadership and City leadership will jointly work to develop a community-centric approach to determining appropriate wall aesthetics, which may require the City to assume additional wall maintenance responsibilities.
- Noise and environmental effects: design refinements will be reviewed to confirm anticipated environmental impacts.
- Community engagement: Broad community engagement is ongoing, with open houses and drop-in sessions planned for February and March. Discussions with individual property owners will continue.

- Schedule: As shared with the Board throughout 2021 and 2022, the project is trending towards 2027 completion (now late 2027), with final design and right of way acquisition on the critical path. Any pause would delay project Baselineing and completion.

Recommended response to the City's request for 90 day pause:

Direct staff to:

- Continue all project activities.
- Engage the City Administrator and WSDOT to resolve wall aesthetic treatments and maintenance responsibilities.
- Conduct a joint Sound Transit-City sponsored community meeting to solicit feedback on aesthetic treatments and other potential design refinements to reflect community values, provided that safety is in no way compromised and key features of the project are retained (bi-directional BAT lanes, continuous sidewalk on the east side of SR 522, and the NE 165th Street Station).
- Convene an elected leaders forum, which would bring together the cities along SR 522 to increase transparency and community input for challenges along the alignment.