

## Perspectives of Neighborhoods

As Sound Transit moves forward with plans for construction of a regional light rail system, the City is working to understand the issues and opportunities facing Seattle neighborhoods where transit stations will be located. Toward this end, a survey of neighborhood plans was conducted to identify neighborhood perspectives on development around potential light rail station areas within the City. This neighborhood plan review is intended to help set the stage for station area planning in these areas and tailor the planning process to reflect the unique timing considerations and respond to key issues facing each affected neighborhood.

Each neighborhood has unique factors affecting station area planning. The status of the neighborhood plan, the status and nature of Sound Transit's plans for the neighborhood, the existing character of development, and neighborhood goals for the future all shape the potential for transit-oriented development. The reviews entailed examining neighborhood planning documents were reviewed to identify proposals and concerns relating to station areas. These reviews also built on information gleaned from interviews with stakeholders involved in the development of neighborhood plans, conducted by the consultant team and City staff.

In general, the *Neighborhood Plan Review* found a high level of compatibility between neighborhood planning objectives defined through the neighborhood planning process and planning considerations for transit station areas. Most neighborhoods see transit stations as an opportunity, not only for increased mobility, but also as a place to focus future development. There is recognition, however, that transit stations must be carefully integrated with the surrounding community and, to this end, many issues and potential impacts will need to be addressed.

Several citywide issues emerged from the review of neighborhood plans and survey of neighborhood perspectives. For instance, parking, business development and pedestrian environments were mentioned as issues at each station. In addition to these broad issues, each corridor segment was found to be confronting a set of issues unique to their particular urban context. For example, parking management and merging development activity are key issues in the Northgate and University District areas where residential and commercial markets are relatively strong. In the Rainier Valley, barriers to redevelopment and the need for public "jump start" investments are of particular interest to the community.

## **PURPOSE OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN REVIEW**

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Together with a market analysis, which was prepared concurrently, the *Neighborhood Plan Review* helps the City define the parameters and set the stage for station area planning. Through this review, the work that each affected neighborhood has done toward establishing a vision for itself and a plan for future development will become part of the foundation upon which station area plans are built.

The individual neighborhood reviews provided in the *Neighborhood Plan Review* report identify the status of neighborhood planning in each affected neighborhood, key neighborhood proposals related to development within the station areas, and the extent to which station planning issues have been considered. Also included is an assessment of the overall compatibility between neighborhood plan objectives and Sound Transit plans, key issues to be addressed, and special challenges to be tackled in planning for each station area. The intent of the report is to help the City:

- Design an overall process for station area planning that respects the status of neighborhood planning in each community and works to engage new stakeholders; and
- Develop a scope of work for detailed station area plans which build on the neighborhood plans and address key issues and opportunities presented by the light rail system.

When the report was completed the neighborhood plans were in various stages of completion; all plans were to be submitted to the City Council by the end of 1998 for review and adoption. The plans vary greatly in their level of specificity with respect to station area planning, largely depending on how much certainty they have regarding station location. Station area planning will build upon the framework set by the neighborhood plans and will provide a more detailed response to the specific opportunities and issues associated with location of a light rail station in each neighborhood.

## **METHODOLOGY FOR NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN REVIEW**

Information for the neighborhood plan review was collected through a collaborative approach involving both consultant and City staff. The City's neighborhood planning staff provided planning documents and other relevant information about the neighborhood planning process from each community which may be affected by light rail. While few neighborhood plans have been completed and, in many cases, a draft plan is not yet available, most neighborhoods have generated at least a vision statement and background analyses which indicate the directions their plans will take.

In addition to reviewing nearly 200 planning documents, the consultants and City staff conducted stakeholder interviews to verify planning objectives, identify alternative neighborhood perspectives, and document other neighborhood proposals relevant to the future of light rail in the area. Interviews were conducted with representatives of neighborhood planning groups as well as with other individuals who have not participated in neighborhood planning.

A list of the individuals interviewed and the questionnaire used for the interviews are included in Appendix B to this Report.

In addition, all nine City Councilmembers were interviewed to explore their overall goals for station area planning throughout the city and to identify concerns relating to individual station areas.

## **LIMITATIONS**

The neighborhood plan review is subject to several limitations:

- Final light rail alignments and station locations have not yet been determined. Sound Transit is currently examining alternatives through its conceptual design and environmental review process, and the alternatives continue to be revised and refined. Therefore, many neighborhoods do not yet know the exact location of their stations. Where there are alternative alignments, neighborhoods are uncertain about whether they will even have a station. This review is based on the latest information on alternatives provided by Sound Transit. In many areas, station area planning must await a decision by Sound Transit on the preferred alternative.
- Neighborhood planning is also a “work in progress.” With one exception (Northgate), none of the plans within station areas have been completed through to adoption. At the time of report production, only nine of the affected neighborhoods had completed draft plans for city and public review. Therefore, this review can provide only a “snapshot” view of neighborhood plan proposals and perspectives. Many are in a very early stage of development, so that planning directions are still very general and detailed conclusions cannot be drawn.
- Stakeholder interviews were necessarily limited by the constraints of time and budget. A total of 50 stakeholder interviews (including a total of 59 individuals) were conducted. Every effort was made to survey multiple interests in each neighborhood, but overall the stakeholder review should not be considered comprehensive. Broader outreach will be conducted once the station area planning process begins its next phase.
- This report does not attempt to provide in-depth coverage of stakeholder perspectives on alternative alignments and possible station locations. Comments on alignment and station location alternatives are included only to the extent that they were identified in the context of documents reviewed or stakeholder interviews about station area planning.

## **KEY FINDINGS AND ISSUES**

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Neighborhood planning groups have accepted the City’s charge of planning for growth, and are working to determine the best ways to accommodate additional housing and employment based on forecasts contained in the City’s Comprehensive Plan. Many neighborhoods look to

light rail station areas as the appropriate place to focus future development, with some specifically calling for upzones to accommodate greater density in these areas.

While few specific conflicts with light rail planning were identified, a number of Citywide themes or concerns emerged from the review of neighborhood plans and perspectives. As light rail station locations become more certain, the City will need to engage the affected neighborhoods in more detailed planning to address these issues and concerns. The issues highlighted below are ones that will need to be addressed in planning for most if not all of the station areas throughout the city.

## **PARKING**

Parking concerns are paramount in nearly every neighborhood surveyed. While the specific nature of the concern varies by neighborhood, and there are a wide range of opinions among stakeholders on appropriate solutions, there is universal concern about the number of people who may drive to light rail stations and how much parking they will require. The City must develop affirmative strategies to discourage driving to transit stations and encourage alternative modes of transportation.

In dense, urban neighborhoods such as Capitol Hill and First Hill, merchants already face parking shortages and worry about additional commuter traffic. In other areas, including the most northern and southern stops inside city limits (Northgate and Henderson Street/Rainier Beach) the issue is how to handle new commuter demand. Special parking strategies will be needed for each station area.

## **LOCAL TRANSIT CONNECTIONS**

A key to reducing the parking problems and traffic congestion related to light rail use is to ensure that there are convenient and safe connections between local transit and the light rail system. Most neighborhoods are uncertain as to how and when those connections will be established. The issue of local rail connections affects not only neighborhoods where transit stations are planned, but also neighboring communities such as Green Lake, which is concerned about traffic passing through it to get to the Roosevelt station.

Because current bus routes are not designed to connect to the future light rail system, and METRO/King County is just beginning a six-year planning process which will start to address these issues, there are no immediate answers. This uncertainty fosters heightened concern. A number of stakeholders commented that the City needs to take an active role with METRO/King County to see that local transit connections are carefully designed and are identified in a timely manner.

Another key question for neighborhoods north of the downtown core area is how the Monorail system may eventually be linked to light rail. The Seattle Transit Initiative is seeking to ensure coordination among this and other planning efforts directed at improving local transit circulation in the city.

## **NEIGHBORHOOD BUSINESS IMPACTS AND DISPLACEMENT**

Small businesses across the city express concern about their future during and after construction of the light rail system. The impacts of construction coupled with expectations of worsened parking conditions for the long term are the most frequently expressed concerns. Since many business people do not own the buildings which house their businesses, they also wonder how changing market conditions will affect them and whether they will be forced out to make way for national franchises and other higher rent uses. Business interests have not generally been active participants in neighborhood planning. Special outreach will be needed in neighborhood business districts within transit station areas, and the City must work with Sound Transit to ensure that effective business support strategies are implemented.

## **PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIONS AND STREETScape IMPROVEMENTS**

One of the most frequently cited opportunities associated with light rail station areas is the chance to foster attractive, pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods which will encourage people to walk to the transit station. Integrating the transit station into the community and using it to create a “sense of place” are frequently cited objectives. Many neighborhoods are hoping to receive significant street improvements and other neighborhood investments to help make station areas attractive and in some areas - most notably southeast Seattle - to stimulate housing and economic development. Some question the City and Sound Transit’s ability to deliver on such improvements.

## **SIGNAGE AND VISIBILITY OF STATION ENTRANCES**

Making sure people can easily find the entrances to light rail stations, and making them attractive, welcoming and safe, is a consideration that applies to all transit stations in the city. Some stakeholders noted that the entrances to the existing downtown bus tunnel do not provide a good model for future stations: the entrances are not well marked and are sometimes “hidden” in nearby buildings (such as the Westlake Station entrances). On First Hill where there is significant institutional use, particular concern was expressed that station entrances shouldn’t be tucked into institution’s buildings unless the entrances can be clearly marked and designed to welcome the public.

## **PUBLIC SAFETY**

Public safety in and around the light rail transit stations is a frequently cited concern, particularly in neighborhoods where crime is already a critical problem. Safety considerations will need to be built into design guidelines for both public and private spaces and development near transit stations.

## **CORRIDOR SEGMENT CONCERNS**

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While each neighborhood presents its own set of issues, characteristics and concerns, there are some themes which tie together various segments of the light rail system. This section highlights issues pertaining to specific segments of the proposed rail corridor, and identifies a few key issues for each affected neighborhood.

### **NORTHGATE TO UNIVERSITY**

In this northernmost segment of the light rail system, an overriding concern is uncertainty about available funding to complete the light rail system north of the University District. This concern is so great that many people feel the light rail system shouldn't be built if the northern terminus must be in the University District.

Overall, development activity is strong all along the north end line, but does not appear to be driven by the plan for light rail. Instead of needing to stimulate development in the north end, the City's challenge may be to shape development which is already happening to reflect TOD goals. Key concerns for neighborhoods along the segment are discussed below:

- *Northgate*: siting the station so it provides good access to the mall as well as to areas west of the freeway, designing and funding a pedestrian underpass or overpass to serve North Seattle Community College, creating other pedestrian connections to surrounding neighborhoods, strengthening local transit connections, working with the Northgate Mall expansion project to promote housing and make the Mall more pedestrian friendly, exploring shared parking options and other parking strategies, and regaining the community's trust with respect to implementation of the already adopted Northgate Plan.
- *Roosevelt*: siting the station at 12<sup>th</sup> Ave. or Roosevelt Ave. rather than next to the freeway so it can support the existing business district and promote development of a "town center" for the neighborhood, designing effective parking strategies, and implementing needed street improvements and pedestrian connections.
- *Green Lake*: creating strong pedestrian and transit connections to the Roosevelt station, locating Roosevelt station next to the freeway so it can better serve Green Lake, mitigating the impacts of through traffic, and revitalizing the business district through more dense housing development just across I-5 from their preferred station location.
- *University District*: having already given considerable attention to planning for light rail in the neighborhood planning process, the main concerns here involve carrying forward their plan to adoption and then working on refinements and implementation. The northern terminus issue is paramount to the neighborhood. Other key issues are maximizing pedestrian, bike and other alternative forms of access to the light rail stations, and managing parking. There is a need and opportunity to integrate station entrances with University of Washington facilities and off campus developments. Providing local bus circulation and ensuring convenient transfers with light rail are key neighborhood concerns.

## **UNIVERSITY TO DOWNTOWN: CAPITOL HILL/FIRST HILL**

First Hill and Capitol Hill are thriving, dense urban neighborhoods, and they eagerly await light rail. Opportunities for redevelopment will focus around infill development and reuse of individual vacant or underused properties. Neighborhood businesses in these areas already suffer from parking shortages and look to station area planning to provide for effective parking management.

- *Capitol Hill:* resolving the controversy regarding the potential station at Broadway and Roy Street and possibly planning for joint public/private development of the site, mitigating parking problems, providing drop-off capacity, addressing public safety, and determining the appropriate zoning for the Capitol Hill station area.
- *First Hill:* enhancing the new station's ability to serve the Madison Street business district and the numerous major institutions in the neighborhood, ensuring the accessibility and visibility of entrances to the First Hill station, and addressing parking and congestion problems along Madison Street. First Hill's station will also provide a potential jumping-off point for shuttle service along 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue and into the nearby Central Area.

## **UNIVERSITY TO DOWNTOWN: ALTERNATIVE ALIGNMENT**

The alternative route from University to Downtown being studied by Sound Transit would pass through Eastlake, South Lake Union and the Seattle Center, near lower Queen Anne. The match between neighborhood objectives and light rail through these neighborhoods is tentative at best. Eastlake is most concerned about protecting its existing character and is generally opposed to a station there. In South Lake Union, light rail could help to stimulate significant housing and new commercial development, but the neighborhood plan might not support large-scale redevelopment. The Queen Anne Urban Center would be well served by a transit station, but the station being studied by Sound Transit is not well located to serve the lower Queen Anne community; since it is located east of the Seattle Center. Since this light rail alignment is not Sound Transit's preferred route, station area planning is probably premature at this time.

## **DOWNTOWN**

Downtown Seattle is already experiencing a great deal of development, driven by regional market forces rather than light rail. Because the downtown stations already exist, land use patterns are not anticipated to change greatly because of light rail. A key issue here will be developing better signage and station entrance/exit locations to make them more accessible to the public. The location and development of green streets may warrant review in light of the station locations. There may be significant land use and transportation implications for downtown if light rail forces buses out of the tunnel and onto downtown streets.

- *Denny Triangle:* refining the neighborhood plan based on the final Convention Place station location and design, and addressing the neighborhood's significant needs for open

space and other neighborhood amenities commensurate with the rapid rate of growth the area is experiencing.

- *Pioneer Square*: addressing transportation concerns, specifically access to and through the area, particularly as two stadiums and a number of other new developments are constructed around the neighborhood.
- *International District*: transportation, parking, and access to the neighborhood's commercial district will all be key issues, as will preserving the viability and uniqueness of this neighborhood in the face of significant construction in the area.

## **SOUTH OF DOWNTOWN: BUSWAY/STADIUM AREA ALIGNMENT**

The question of alignment is still open south of downtown, with four different alignment options under review. Until the alignment question is resolved with the choice of a preferred alternative early in 1999, all the neighborhoods along the alternative alignments face uncertainty about how much attention to give to station area planning at this time.

- *North Duwamish/SODO*: preserving industrial use of the area with the development of two stadiums and a potential light rail station, coordinating and facilitating the large number of current transportation and development projects in the area, and addressing pedestrian access and significant freight mobility needs in the area.
- *North Beacon Hill*: integrating the station with the local business district, getting a new library in the neighborhood, coordinating light rail and local transit connections, and addressing through traffic concerns associated with cross-town automobile trips.

Note: Beacon Hill was only recently identified by Sound Transit as a station location under serious consideration. Therefore, only limited review is included in this report, and stakeholder interviews have not yet been conducted. City staff intend to complete Beacon Hill stakeholder interviews in the near future.

## **CENTRAL AND SOUTHEAST**

The light rail alignment through southeast Seattle is still undergoing considerable analysis and debate. As a result, much of the discussion in affected neighborhoods to date has focused on alignment issues and station alternatives, including where the line should be elevated, at grade or in a tunnel, as opposed to focusing on specific station planning issues. Most stakeholders interviewed would prefer that light rail be below grade, in a tunnel, and expressed concern about the impacts of an elevated or at grade line. The fact that the alignment is still being debated and that many alternative station locations are being considered in some neighborhoods means that their plans cannot be specific at this point about station area issues. Detailed station area plans for these areas will need to wait until the preferred alternative is identified.

Job creation and economic development are key goals of most neighborhoods along the SE alignment. Existing development in these areas is not nearly as dense as in other neighborhoods along the rail line in central and north Seattle; thus, there are opportunities for substantial new development representing much more significant change than what is likely to be seen in other neighborhoods. However, the development market is considerably “cooler” than in the neighborhoods further north, partially due to the area’s reputation (earned or un-earned) for crime, poverty and poor maintenance of existing properties.

Many of the neighborhood plans for these communities propose strategies to promote revitalization so that southeast Seattle can take maximum advantage of the development opportunities which may accompany light rail. They call for addition of new services and attractions such as movie theaters and stores. Neighborhood planners are also aware that with economic revitalization, gentrification and the need to protect existing neighborhood businesses will become greater concerns.

One key issue for the Rainier Valley overall is where to focus redevelopment efforts, given that the development market is probably not strong enough to support major redevelopment at all the south end stations all at once. After the market analysis is completed, the City will need to work with neighborhoods in southeast Seattle to identify priorities for early redevelopment efforts.

Achieving full stakeholder participation in neighborhood planning was cited as a challenge throughout the southeast Seattle neighborhoods surveyed. Business and development interests have not to date engaged as full participants in these plans. Broad representation is hampered by language barriers and the difficulty of engaging disadvantaged populations in time-consuming planning activities. Extra efforts in station area planning will need to be taken in southeast Seattle to overcome these barriers to full community participation.

- *Central Area*: establishing access to transit stations located in adjacent neighborhoods, creating pedestrian connections and transit linkages, capitalizing on the Hiawatha Place project to help build a link between Central Area and the Poplar Place station, and exploring opportunities for more neighborhood commercial zoning in the area.
- *North Rainier*: transforming the auto-oriented stretch of Rainier at McClellan into a more pedestrian-oriented area and possible "town center," providing a safe and comfortable way for pedestrians to cross Rainier Avenue, and using the station(s) to promote economic development and improved neighborhood image.
- *Columbia City*: resolving the final location of the station among the five options under consideration, establishing strong and safe pedestrian connections to the station and other forms of access (bike and transit) to the station, preserving the unique historic character of Columbia City while taking advantage of revitalization opportunities, increasing jobs, improving neighborhood image, and addressing noise, view and circulation impacts if the station is located at or above grade.
- *MLK @ Holly*: promoting economic development and improved public safety, providing access to the station (including handicapped access), and exploring the opportunity to

create a "town center" around the light rail station in conjunction with the Seattle Housing Authority's 100-acre redevelopment project at Holly Park.

- *Rainier Beach*: creating a strong connection between MLK Way (the station location) and Rainier Avenue (the community's center) along Henderson Street through pedestrian improvements and local transit, moving from auto-oriented commercial uses and zoning within the station area to more pedestrian-friendly, mixed use development and zoning, and exploring opportunities for development of a new community center and public plaza to help create the Henderson connection and spark redevelopment.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR STATION AREA PLANNING**

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The City is striving to create a smooth transition from neighborhood planning to station area planning, taking into consideration the key issues and neighborhood objectives identified in this report. Following are recommended next steps on how to best accomplish this transition:

- Neighborhood planning groups need feedback from the City as soon as possible on station area planning considerations affecting their neighborhood plans. As part of the ongoing process of City review and comment on draft plan recommendations (by the City's "Review and Response Team"), City staff should provide specific feedback on issues and opportunities which may require further consideration through station area planning.
- City staff should work with the City's elected officials to clarify citywide policy objectives for station area planning. A clear statement of objectives will help provide guidance to neighborhood planning groups.
- The adoption package for neighborhood plans should explicitly identify future station area planning needs, including key issues and opportunities warranting further review. Neighborhood plan adoption should not be delayed because of light rail considerations, but certain policy recommendations or plan elements may need to be held or revisited after station locations become final.
- City staff and the consultant team should work together to outline a schedule and process for station area planning. In most areas, any formal process for station area planning must await Sound Transit's selection of a preferred alternative in early 1999, since many station locations will be uncertain until then. In a few neighborhoods where the general location of the station is already known, station area planning could begin in advance of Sound Transit action on the preferred alternative.
- Once the preferred alternative is selected, the City should initiate a collaborative process for station area planning in each affected neighborhood. Local advisory committees should be formed to assist in planning for each station area and provide ongoing input to Sound Transit on station design. Representation should include participants from the local neighborhood planning group as well as business representatives, property owners, and other stakeholders from the station area. Meetings should be held to a minimum, recognizing the investment of time that neighborhood planning has already required.

Wherever possible, broader public outreach should “piggyback” on public meetings scheduled by Sound Transit and other community organizations. A variety of ways for citizens to express their views on station area planning should be offered, outside the regular public meeting format.

