

Potential Development Strategies for Seattle’s Light Rail Station Areas

This chapter provides an overview of potential strategies that may be used to encourage transit-oriented development within station areas. These categories were identified after reviewing the case studies, other literature, perspectives of the development community and stakeholders interviewed, and relevant neighborhood plan recommendations. Details on specific policies that could be targeted to individual station areas are described in more detail in Chapter 10 of this report, published separately, and in the Station Area Atlas. The potential development strategies include:

1. Land use tools;
2. Pedestrian-supportive measures ;
3. Parking management programs;
4. Economic and financial assistance;
5. Modifications to regulatory processes;
6. Local transit service improvements
7. Development partnerships; and
8. Pilot projects.

The potential development strategies listed for each potential station area are necessarily general at this point in the planning process and should be viewed as preliminary. The matrix on the next page shows potential strategies for each of the proposed station areas. Relative priorities reflect initial review by City staff. Once Sound Transit determines its preferred alignment in 1999, the City will work with neighborhoods, businesses, residents, and other stakeholders to explore and develop detailed recommendations.

Summary of Proposed Station Area Development Strategies

	Land Use Tools	Pedestrian Network	Parking Management	Economics/Financial Assistance	Regulatory Process	Local Transit Service	Development Partnerships	Pilot Projects
Northgate (1)	●	✓/?	○	○	?	●	✓	●
Roosevelt (2-4)	●	○	●	?	?	●	?	?
NE 45th (5)	●	●	●	?	?	●	?	?
Campus Pkwy (6)	●	●	●	?	?	●	?	?
Pacific (7)	●	●	●	?	?	●	?	?
Broadway at Roy (8)+A9	●	○	●	?	?	●	?	?
Capitol Hill (9)	●	✓/?	●	?	?	●	●	○
First Hill (10)	●	✓/?	✓/?	?	?	●	○	?
Eastlake (11)	●	●	●	?	?	○	?	?
South Lake Union (12)	●	●	○	?	○	○	●	?
Seattle Center (13)	●	✓	●	?	?	✓/○	?	?
Downtown (14-17)	●	✓	?	?	○	✓	?	
International District (18)		○	●	●	?	?	?	●
E3/Royal Brougham (19)	○	✓	✓	?	?	?		?
Lander Street (33)	●	○	?	○	?	○	○	?
Poplar (20)	○	○	○	✓	?	●	?	✓
I-90 (21, 28)	○	●	●	○	?	○	?	?
McClellan (22-23)	●	●	●	●	✓/?	●	?	○
Beacon Hill (34)	●	●	●	?	?	○	?	?
Rainier Valley Square (24)	●	●	○	●	✓/?	?	✓	?
Genesee (25)	●	●	○	✓	✓/?	○	✓	?
Columbia City (30)	●	●	○	✓	✓/?	○	●	?
Alaska (29)	●	●	○	✓	✓	○	●	?
Edmunds (26)	●	●	○	✓	✓	○	●	?
Graham (27)	○	●	○	●	✓/?	○	?	?
Othello (31)	●	●	●	●	✓/?	○	●	●
Henderson (32)	●	●	○	●	?	●	●	●

- ✓ = Supportive Policy/Program in Place
- = High Priority Action
- = Recommended Action
- ? = Further Study Required

LAND USE TOOLS

Potential land use tools include changes in zoning or the creation of overlay zones to:

- Allow increased density and/or increased height;
- Encourage mixed use developments rather than single-purpose development;
- Establish requirements for pedestrian-supportive facilities and building orientation to reinforce a pedestrian streetscape;
- Restrict some auto-oriented uses; and
- Modify parking requirements to support transit use and neighborhood commercial areas and/or allow flexibility in providing parking off-site or in shared facilities.

Some land use tools, such as pedestrian overlays and changes in parking requirements, are closely related to other potential strategies that are discussed later in this Report.

Criteria for Use

In station areas with strong market demand, adequate zoning or other changes that allow higher densities in the immediate vicinity of a selected light rail station can help attract transit-oriented development. Accordingly, these tools are proposed as high priority actions in areas of high demand that are already constrained by existing zoned capacity. Such changes may be opposed by some neighborhoods and will require both an open public process and leadership before final decisions are made. In station areas where adjustments in the Land Use Code would help encourage uses and designs favorable to pedestrians, a review of current zoning is proposed as a high priority.

Recommendations

All station areas would benefit from an evaluation of current zoning to assess whether modifications should be made to encourage transit-oriented development. Evaluation of this includes multi-family zones where transit-oriented development opportunities appear to be restricted. In the strong markets north of Downtown, zoning changes that would increase flexibility in the Neighborhood Commercial zones and allow some increased density could attract development. In southeast station areas, there is sufficient zoned capacity, but limitations on auto-oriented uses would promote better pedestrian-oriented environments around stations. The station areas in the Duwamish market segment could benefit from greater protections of industrial uses and the creation of tightly-drawn commercial areas to serve the increase in pedestrian traffic going to and from the station.

PEDESTRIAN NETWORKS

All station areas require good pedestrian networks if they are to succeed in linking nearby residences and places of business to transit stations. Well-designed pedestrian networks require careful planning and investment in street and sidewalk improvements, street lighting,

street furniture, transit shelters, information kiosks, public art, and landscaping. These improvements make the station areas more attractive for other development. By creating a comfortable environment for pedestrians, such pedestrian facilities attract people and improve security around stations.

Criteria for Use

Efforts to promote pedestrian networks are proposed as high priority actions in station areas that currently do not have pedestrian-supportive streetscapes. They are also especially important for those stations that have high levels of projected boardings, such as the University District stations. These tools are recommended (but not as high priority actions) in areas that already have pedestrian-oriented streetscapes but still require enhancements to optimize transit usage. Although some neighborhoods (e.g., Northgate, Downtown) already have programs in place to improve pedestrian connections, these should be reviewed for adequacy and for missing links (e.g., Northgate to North Seattle Community College) if a light rail station is located there.

Recommendations

The City should place its highest priority in station areas that lack good pedestrian networks now, but serve residents, employees, and retail customers who would make use of these connections. The station areas for which pedestrian networks are not proposed as a high priority either already have strong networks of sidewalks and pedestrian connections or have plans in place to enhance those networks.

PARKING MANAGEMENT

Parking management strategies within station areas could include at least seven potential strategies:

- Reducing the amount of parking required for buildings located close to transit stations;
- Allowing additional flexibility for off-site parking to count toward meeting residential parking requirements;
- Changing provisions for shared parking to optimize use of parking spaces over the course of a day;
- Building parking garages to provide shared parking for residents with short- and mid-term parking for neighboring businesses;
- Creating parking zones to limit transit patron parking on station area streets;
- Limiting or metering parking in commercial areas; and
- Replicating parking limitations for new development in other station areas, similar to those currently in effect Downtown and in Northgate.

The exact mix of policies must reflect the particular circumstances of each station area.

Criteria for Use

Parking policies should be a high priority in areas that are already more densely developed and have strong housing and retail markets. These are the areas where it is expensive to provide parking, where parking impacts of new development are expected to be the greatest, and where there is already concern about the loss of parking. Parking policies are also a high priority near station areas that will serve as major transfer points for the transit system. Parking policies are recommended, but at a lower priority, in station areas where existing demand for housing and commercial uses is not as strong. Areas, such as Downtown, that already have reduced parking requirements and areas that have existing plans to address the parking impacts associated with use of the sports stadiums should be lower priorities. Parking policies may also impact housing affordability and, as such, should be considered as a potential tool to increase the supply of affordable housing in station areas.

Recommendations

The City could consider reducing parking requirements for new development in the station areas that are already densely developed with strong housing or retail markets (e.g., Roosevelt, Capitol Hill, First Hill, McClellan, and Beacon Hill). In these areas, reducing the amount of required parking lowers development costs and will make these station areas more attractive for new development. In some of these areas, however, parking is already limited, and some residents and businesses are likely to oppose new development with reduced parking. Data on the transit ridership characteristics of the people likely to live and work in these new developments can help build support for reducing parking requirements in these areas. Parking management should also be a high priority at the Othello station, where changes in parking requirements could enable the planned redevelopment of public housing to be more transit-oriented.

Shared parking is an option that could be expanded beyond the large mixed used developments currently contemplated for the station areas north of Downtown. Parking zones would be appropriate in station areas where parking is limited and there is potential for light rail patrons to park on neighborhood streets and then ride the light rail to their final destinations. Without additional programs in place, this practice (termed “hide & ride”) limits the parking available for residents and business customers who wish to frequent neighborhood businesses.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Economic and financial assistance includes public support that federal, state, and local governments can legally provide within the state of Washington. They include:

- Capital and operating subsidies for affordable housing;
- Federal and state urban renewal and community revitalization programs;
- Property tax exemption for development in targeted areas; and
- Partnerships with financial institutions to develop pools of capital to invest in TOD-related projects.

Criteria for Use

Economic and financial assistance tools should be of the highest priority in station areas where market demand is somewhat weak. In areas where demand for housing and retail uses is strong, public assistance should be limited to providing some affordable housing within new market-rate housing development. Financial strategies aimed at educating lenders and expanding the pool of capital for transit-oriented development make sense in all station areas because conventional lending practices and underwriting criteria sometimes fail to qualify innovative mixed used projects for financing.

Recommendations

Most of the station areas in the strong markets north of Downtown do not require public economic and financial assistance to spur new development because it is already happening in these locations. In these markets, the role of public assistance should be limited to helping provide for some affordable housing within market-rate housing developments. As the City moves through the real estate cycle over the next ten years, some opportunities for public assistance may occur within these markets.

Public economic and financial assistance should be focused in the International District and Rainier Valley station areas. The redevelopment of existing public housing projects and targeted economic development policies could help spur those markets that are strengthening, but cannot yet support extensive private investment. Economic and financial assistance can leverage private investment if targeted to areas that are on the cusp of developing stronger market demand.

REGULATORY PROCESS

The City could facilitate the regulatory process by subsidizing the desired development of new transit-oriented development within station areas by:

- Expediting the processing of permits for development in station areas; and
- Preparing sub-area plans with accompanying Programmatic EISs or Planned Actions under the state's Growth Management Act and State Environmental Protection Act that reduce or satisfy requirements for environmental review of any conforming project.

These regulatory measures could increase the amount of development in station areas by increasing certainty, shortening the permitting phase, and lowering costs.

Criteria for Use

Efforts to expedite the regulatory process must balance the City's interests in encouraging new development with influencing the design elements of new development and allowing for public review. The City could streamline the regulatory process in station areas in which it wants to encourage new development.

Recommendations

The City should continue to explore streamlining the regulatory process to encourage transit-oriented development in station areas in a way that balances competing public interests. Expedited permitting could be applied uniformly across all station areas to facilitate the development process. Since the costs of preparing sub-area plans or Planned Actions under SEPA/GMA can be substantial, the City and Sound Transit may want to consider targeting these efforts in station areas that are high priorities for redevelopment and/or in locations where they may be most successful.

LOCAL TRANSIT SERVICE

Local transit service changes may include improved bus connections (including both local and express service lines) and “timed-transfer” arrangements to improve access to local businesses and employment centers and to support the regional rail transit system. Local bus service should be coordinated, not replaced, with light rail service. Because the City does not control the regional bus system, it will work with King County Metro and Sound Transit to ensure that rail and bus connections work for each station area.

Criteria for Use

Changes in local transit service will be required in all station areas. This strategy is of the highest priority around stations that would serve as major new transfer hubs, such as Northgate and Henderson, and in congested areas with high transit ridership, such as stations in the University District, Capitol Hill, and McClellan.

Recommendations

The City should coordinate with Sound Transit and King County Metro on all changes to local bus connections and make these high priorities in the Northgate, Roosevelt, NE 45th Street, Capitol Hill, First Hill, McClellan, and Henderson station areas. For Downtown stations that will not experience significant changes in the local bus connections, issues related to moving buses from the tunnel to the streets must be addressed.

DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIPS

The City and other public or non-profit entities may enter into development partnerships in areas where they already control important parcels of land, where there is demand for other public facilities, or where they want to kick-start development in weak markets. The City can enter into development arrangements with three types of potential partners:

- Other public agencies (e.g., Sound Transit, King County Metro, Seattle Housing Authority);
- Community development corporations (CDCs); and
- Private developers (through co-location of facilities).

As with economic and financial assistance, the City is constrained in its ability to enter into development partnerships by federal, state, and local law. In particular, the Washington State Constitution has very strict limitations on the lending of credit. Within these constraints, however, the City does have legal authority to develop property for public purposes such as government offices, affordable housing, public facilities such as parks and libraries, and public parking. Specific opportunities for such development will be evaluated in 1999 as detailed development strategies are prepared for each station area.

Criteria for Use

As with economic and financial assistance, development partnerships should be of highest priority in station areas where market demand is somewhat weak. They also should be high priorities in station areas where public agencies own key parcels of land that could be redeveloped (e.g. the school district land near the Henderson station) or where there is some other direct public purpose (e.g., redevelopment of Holly Park).

Recommendations

Most of the station areas in the strong markets north of Downtown do not require partnerships to spur new development. Public ownership of the Park-&-Ride lots in Northgate and the strong demand for housing and retail in that area have created an opportunity on which the City and King County are already working. Similarly, the ownership of property by Seattle Central Community College and the City of Seattle near the Capitol Hill station create opportunities for partnerships in those areas. In general, development partnerships are best focused in the Rainier Valley where market forces are somewhat weak and parcels of land are already in public ownership. The redevelopment of existing public housing at Holly Park and the potential redevelopment of Rainier Vista provide opportunities to create more market-rate housing, as well as to orient new development toward the future light rail stations.

In other areas where the markets are stronger, the City should consider development partnerships on a case-by-case basis. Assembling land can remove a significant barrier to certain types of new development.

PILOT PROJECTS

Pilot projects represent near-term actions that the City can take to show how transit-oriented development can work in Seattle. They also provide the first set of local case studies to identify and resolve policy issues, institutional barriers, and challenges in organizational development. A few “showcase” examples of transit-oriented development can demonstrate to the private market that these projects are viable and can “prime the pump” for additional private investment around station areas.

The City’s involvement in transit-oriented development pilot projects can be of two distinct types, both with the goal of influencing how projects support transit use. First, the City can become involved in projects that are already underway (e.g., those in the University District, Othello, and Henderson station areas). Second, the City can identify and help facilitate im-

plementation of significant project opportunities (e.g., the likely-to-be-abandoned Convention Place Station, opportunities for expansion of Seattle Central Community College at the Capitol Hill station, and the Municipal Center project at Pioneer Square station).

Criteria for Use

Pilot projects should be focused in station areas where a combination of market forces, potential partnerships, and support through neighborhood planning has converged to create near-term opportunities for City action. Projects should include both those markets that already have strong demand and those that appear on the cusp of increased demand for office and housing. They should be limited to a few stations at first, with the potential for additional projects over time.

Recommendations

The following potential station areas are strong candidates for transit-oriented development pilot projects:

- *Northgate*: Market conditions are strong with the proposed expansion of the Northgate Mall and a pre-existing mix of housing and office uses within the station area. Given the plans of several development companies on parcels within and adjacent to the station area, there also appears to be strengthening demand for multi-family housing. The area’s strong auto-orientation creates challenges and opportunities to employ a range of supportive policies. Partnership opportunities already under discussion include King County Metro’s Park-&-Ride lot.
- *University District*: King County Metro is proposing a bus layover facility for bus routes that provide light rail access. The project could include mixed use development and replacement of lost surface parking.
- *Othello*: The redevelopment of the Holly Park housing project creates a special opportunity for creating transit-oriented, mixed use development at this station area. The need to relocate businesses for light rail right-of-way will create an opportunity to develop a transit-oriented Town Center, consistent with the vision articulated in the neighborhood plan.
- *Henderson*: The location of the light rail station near Seattle School District property and the King County Metro Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) project creates opportunities to redevelop the Henderson station area, consistent with the Rainier Beach 2014 Neighborhood Plan. Although this station area does not have a strong market for new development, the neighborhood would benefit from major public investments as part of its revitalization vision.

Other station areas should also be considered for pilot projects, as well. Once station locations have been determined, new opportunities may occur that would justify reassessing the most appropriate sites for pilot projects. The need for close coordination with Sound Transit in right-of-way design/disposition and facility design will be critical to the success of these projects.

