



TAB Members:
Keiko Budech
Marci Carpenter
Enjoleah Daye
Lynn Hubbard
Jennifer Malley-Crawford
Andrew Martin
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Carla Saulter
Lucas Simons
Erin Tighe
Barbara Wright
Michelle Zeidman

Date: March 11, 2019

To: Members of the Seattle City Council, the Elected Leadership Group, and the Sound Transit Board

Subject: West Seattle-Ballard Link Extension Scoping Letter

The Seattle Transit Advisory Board has received several briefings on the proposed system plans for the West Seattle and Ballard Link extensions. After careful consideration, we give the following suggestions to create a preferred alternative designed for optimal rider experience that sites stations close to large populations and popular destinations, minimizes travel times and system disruptions, and focuses on the possibility of future system expansion to bring high capacity transit to more neighborhoods.

In all of our suggested station placements, there are design principles that will create a better rider experience. Stations should have multiple entrances that bridge pedestrian barriers like busy roads. Stations should have sufficient, effective, and reliable vertical conveyance so that the station itself does not become a barrier to accessing transit. Sound Transit should maximize transit-oriented development potential by minimizing the street-level impact of station entrances and engineering stations that can carry the weight of large buildings immediately above them.

We have not called out every station placement in this letter; for some stations the options lack much difference, and others are dictated by the more important concerns outlined below. As an advocate for transit riders experiences we recommend that the Sound Transit board make the following alignment choices:

Ballard/Interbay Line

- **Ballard Station at or West of 15th Ave:** A 14th Ave NW station placement adds 3 minutes of extra walking to reach the Ballard commercial core and would put much of the Ballard Urban Village more than 10 minutes of walking from the station. Bus connections on 15th and Market are also much better as both north-south and east-west bus lines run on these streets. This location is also better suited to further northward expansion as an extension up 14th Ave NW to Crown Hill would run into Ballard High School while extending up 15th Ave NW would not.

*The Seattle Transit Advisory Board shall **advise** the City Council, the Mayor, and all departments and offices of the City **on matters related to transit** and the possible and actual impact of actions by the City upon all forms of public transportation.*

*The Board shall be provided the opportunity to comment and make recommendations on City policies, plans, and projects as they may relate to **transit capital improvements, transit mobility, and transit operations** throughout the City...*

*The Board shall help facilitate City policies, plans, and projects that support local and region-wide transit mobility efforts, to help **ensure a functioning and coordinated transit system** throughout the City and region.*

*The Board shall function as the **public oversight committee of revenues collected under Seattle Transportation Benefit District (STBD) Proposition 1**, as described in Resolution 12 of the STBD...*

The Board shall make an annual report to the City Council on the status of its work program and the achievement of its goals.

*City Council Resolution
31572*

- **Ship Canal Crossing should be Tunneled:** A movable bridge has service disruptions that degrade the speedy and reliable service Link should provide. So, only a tunneled crossing or a fixed bridge are real options. Tunneling is superior to a fixed-bridge as an underground station would make future expansion north and transfers to a (likely tunneled) east-west Ballard to UW line much better. A tunnel under Salmon Bay is only \$100M more than a fixed bridge but that buys a lot of rider and network benefits while minimizing neighborhood impacts.
- **Smith Cove at Galer St.:** We agree that an optimal Smith Cove Station would integrate with the existing Helix Bridge over the BNSF tracks, but this is not one of the line's important stations. The station should be sited where unstable hillsides and uncertain engineering don't increase the price of the station. Galer St is an acceptable alternative.

Downtown Line

- A **Seattle Center/Uptown Station** centered at Republican and 1st Ave N effectively serves both the activity center of Uptown and the crowds that attend major Seattle Center events.
- **State Route 99 Station** would optimize pedestrian access and transfer potential sited at Harrison.
- A **Denny Way Station** that has been shifted south along Westlake Ave to accommodate the turn to 99 and Harrison also has the advantage of better serving the population centers in Denny Triangle.
- **Westlake Station** is one of the most important stations in the system. A transfer between the two lines here is instrumental to the successful bifurcation of the current Link line; to make transfers as seamless as possible, we suggest the 5th Ave alignment.
- **Midtown Station** sited at 5th and Madison will serve both the growing commercial district in the middle of downtown and the planned RapidRide G line (to which Sound Transit is contributing money).

Chinatown/International District and SODO Line

- **Chinatown/International District** is unfortunately a station with few good options. In choosing a station site, we believe that Sound Transit should opt **against** a deep bore station to improve surface accessibility to the wealth of other transit options in the neighborhood. Beyond that we can only recommend focusing on mitigating the impacts to historically disadvantaged populations. The International District has borne the brunt of many large infrastructure projects, and we would like to see the community involved as much as possible.
- **The Tunnel Portal** should be located to minimize impacts on King County Metro bus bases and operations. The best way to benefit riders in this corridor is to allow their buses to continue efficient function during and after ST3 construction.

West Seattle Line

- **Delridge Station** should be sited as far south as possible to maximize accessibility for population centers farther south on Delridge.
- **West Seattle Junction Station** should be located as close to California Ave SW and SW Alaska St as possible; we particularly like the options for 44th Ave SW 42nd Ave SW. The options minimize walking times up steep hills to the heart of the Junction neighborhood, home to both denser housing and retail/service destinations. This station should also be oriented north/south, to prepare for possible future expansion southward toward Burien.
- **A tunnel to West Seattle does not benefit Link riders:** A West Seattle Tunnel does not seem to have any major transit service quality or station placement advantages over an elevated option but is quite expensive at \$700M. We do acknowledge though that if our preferred North-South alignment for the West Seattle Junction station is chosen, then an elevated option will require the demolition of blocks of housing and will have non-trivial neighborhood impacts, but we feel that this is far outweighed by the hefty price tag.

Sincerely,

Seattle Transit Advisory Board