

June 1, 2022

MEMORANDUM

To: Transportation and Seattle Public Utilities Committee
From: Calvin Chow, Analyst
Subject: Resolution 32055: West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions Recommendations

On Tuesday, June 7, 2022, the Transportation and Seattle Public Utilities Committee will begin consideration of [Resolution 32055](#), making recommendations to the Sound Transit Board on the preferred alternative for Sound Transit's West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions (WSBLE) project. This follows the public review and comment period for the WSBLE Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) which concluded earlier this spring. The City's comments on the DEIS were presented to the Transportation and Seattle Public Utilities Committee on April 19, 2022.

The Sound Transit Board is expected to vote on a motion to confirm or modify the preferred alternatives for the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). The motion is scheduled to be heard at Sound Transit's System Expansion Committee on July 14, 2022, with Sound Transit Board action anticipated on July 28, 2022. Mayor Bruce Harrell and Council President Debora Juarez serve on the Sound Transit Board.

This memorandum summarizes the contents of the resolution and provides additional background and contextual information for the anticipated Sound Transit Board action.

Contents of Resolution

The proposed resolution contains four sections:

- Section 1 describes the City's goals and objectives for the WSBLE project and highlights the values used to inform the City's recommendations, including:
 - Racial equity,
 - Safety and user experience,
 - Maintaining community,
 - Environmental protection, and
 - Financial stewardship.
- Section 2 lists the City's recommendations for a preferred alternative by DEIS segment. The recommendations for the West Seattle Extension and the Ballard Extension segments are described below with accompanying illustrations:

- **West Seattle Junction** – Alternative WSJ-5, medium tunnel to Alaska Junction station at 41st Street SW with retained cut Avalon station.



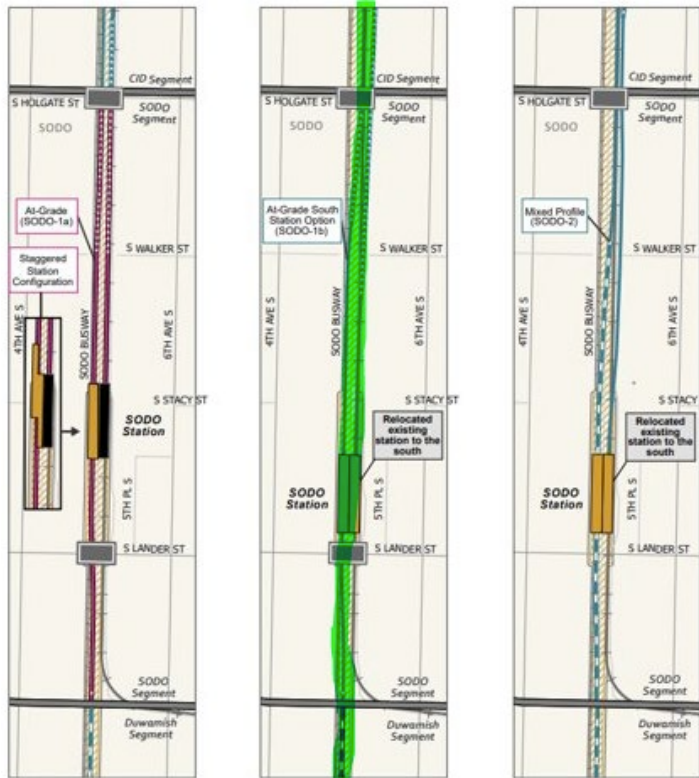
- **Delridge** – Alternative DEL-6, elevated lower height Delridge station at SW Andover Street.



- Duwamish Water Crossing – Alternative DUW-1a, south crossing.



- SODO – Alternative SODO-1b, at-grade South station option.



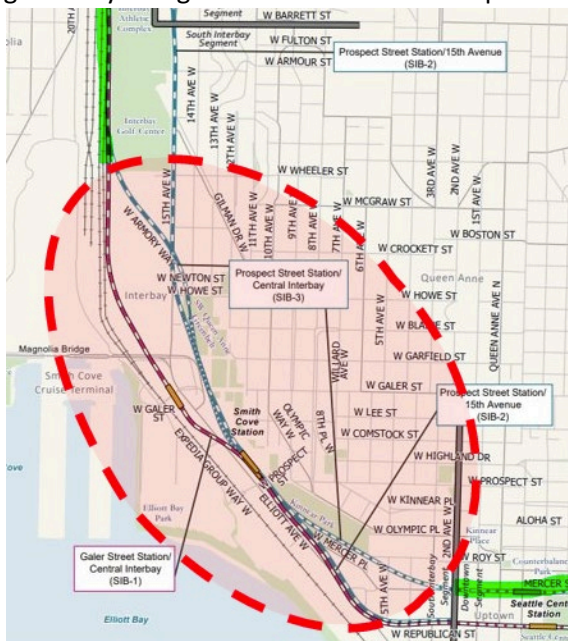
- Chinatown/International District** – No recommendation. The resolution states that the DEIS does not provide adequate information on business and residential impacts, construction and transportation impacts, and potential mitigation strategies. The resolution recommends that Sound Transit engage in a focused six- to nine-month planning process with Chinatown/International District and Pioneer Square stakeholders, the City of Seattle, and King County Metro to improve the 4th Avenue shallow and 5th Avenue shallow alternatives and mitigation plans for the Sound Transit Board’s consideration.



- Downtown** – Recommend alternative DT-1 on 5th Avenue through the Seattle commercial core. Recommend a mix of alternatives DT-1 and DT-2 through South Lake Union to Seattle Center with stations at Denny Way and Terry Street, 7th Avenue N and Harrison Street, and 1st Avenue N and Mercer Street.



- **South Interbay** – No recommendation. The resolution states that the DEIS does not provide adequate information on the impacts associated with construction and operation of an elevated guideway along Elliott Avenue W and impacts to Environmentally Critical Areas in the segment.



- **Interbay-Ballard** – Alternative IBB-2b, retained cut Interbay station at 17th Avenue W and tunnel alignment to Ballard station at 15th Avenue NW.



- Section 3 of the resolution acknowledges Sound Transit’s exploration of cost savings and design refinements as directed by the Sound Transit Board. The resolution supports the goal of controlling costs, but opposes project scope reductions that do not provide commensurate benefits and are inconsistent with the commitments made in the Sound Transit 3 ballot measure.
- Section 4 notes that while the cost difference between the preferred alternatives and the preferred alternatives with third-party funding in the DEIS has reduced significantly based on updated design and cost estimating, there may be important project elements that will require third-party funding. The resolution envisions the City as a partner in addressing funding needs and in looking for opportunities to reduce costs to the project. The resolution articulates the intent to engage in third-party funding discussions in earnest when the FEIS and the Federal Record of Decision are complete and more complete project cost estimates are available.

Background and Context for Sound Transit Board Action

In November 2016, voters approved the Sound Transit 3 transit ballot measure. The ballot measure included the extension of Link light rail service to West Seattle and Ballard as part of the regional expansion of the Sound Transit system. Following the vote, the City entered into a Partnering Agreement ([Resolution 31788](#)) and a Project Administration Agreement ([Ordinance 125563](#)) with Sound Transit to provide technical support in developing the WSBLE project.

In 2018, Sound Transit began project scoping for the WSBLE project to determine the route alternatives to be analyzed in the environmental review process. To guide the process of screening project alternatives, Sound Transit established an Elected Leadership Group (ELG) of Sound Transit and Seattle elected officials,¹ advised by a community Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG). The ELG met seven times throughout 2018 and 2019, and the meetings were held jointly with the City Council’s Sustainability and Transportation Committee.

Based on the feedback from the SAG and the ELG, the Sound Transit Board identified a preferred alternative for the DEIS as well as a preferred alternative with third-party funding (Sound Transit Motions [M2019-51](#) and [M2019-104](#)). The concept of third-party funding arose in acknowledgement that additional funding may be necessary for desired project improvements that go beyond the core voter-approved project. The Sound Transit Board’s selection of the preferred alternative and the preferred alternative with third-party funding was informed by preliminary cost estimates developed during project screening.

¹ The ELG membership representing the Sound Transit Board included Snohomish County Executive Dave Somers, Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan, King County Executive Dow Constantine, Seattle Councilmember Rob Johnson, and King County Councilmember Joe McDermott. The ELG membership representing the project corridor included Seattle Councilmember Lisa Herbold, Seattle Councilmember Bruce Harrell, Seattle Councilmember Sally Bagshaw, Seattle Councilmember Mike O’Brien, Seattle Councilmember Lorena González, and Port Commissioner Stephanie Bowman.

Following the economic uncertainty of the pandemic and facing rising cost pressures across the portfolio of Sound Transit 3 projects, the Sound Transit Board approved a capital realignment plan (Sound Transit Resolution [R2021-05](#)) in August 2021. The realigned capital [program](#) identified a \$1.8 billion (in 2019 \$'s) affordability gap for the WSBLE project. The impact of this affordability gap was described as a two-year delay in the delivery of the Smith Cove to Ballard segment of the WSBLE project. Sound Transit Resolution R2021-05 also called for additional work to pursue expanded revenues, financial capacity and cost savings options for addressing the affordability gap.

In January 2022, Sound Transit released the DEIS for public review and comment. City departments conducted an extensive review of the DEIS, and the City submitted formal [comments](#) on the project. The 90-day comment period closed on April 28, 2022, and Sound Transit received over 5,000 responses. Sound Transit also released cost savings and design refinement ideas for WSBLE in response to Sound Transit Resolution R2021-05. These cost savings and design refinement ideas were not included in the DEIS and would need additional environmental review if pursued further. The City's DEIS comments and Sound Transit's cost savings and design refinement ideas were presented at the [April 19, 2022](#) Transportation and Seattle Public Utilities Committee.

Sound Transit released updated cost estimates for the alignments with the DEIS, and in some cases the cost difference between the preferred alternative and the preferred alternative with third-party funding has narrowed significantly since the previous Sound Transit Board action. In addition, the environmental review has uncovered other factors, such as US Coast Guard guidance on navigable waterway clearance requirements for a Ballard bridge crossing, that may warrant the Sound Transit Board's reconsideration of the preferred alternative. As part of its annual program review, Sound Transit updated the projected affordability gap for the WSBLE project to \$2.2 billion (in 2022 \$'s);² which still represents a two-year delay in the delivery of the Smith Cove to Ballard segment on the \$14.1 billion (in 2022 \$'s) WSBLE project.

The Sound Transit Board is expected to vote on a motion to confirm or modify the preferred alignments for the FEIS. As part of the motion, the Sound Transit Board may also direct Sound Transit staff to conduct further work on the cost savings ideas, design refinements, or other concepts arising from the DEIS review.

Sound Transit held a Board Workshop on the WSBLE project and DEIS findings on May 20, 2022. Sound Transit's System Expansion Committee is scheduled to hear a summary of the DEIS public comments on June 9, 2022, and to take up the motion on the preferred alternative on July 14, 2022. Under this schedule, the full Sound Transit Board would take up the Motion on the preferred alignments for the FEIS on July 28, 2022.

² Sound Transit [2022 Annual Program Review Report](#), Table 21, p. 27 (April 2022).

Based on this direction from the Sound Transit Board, Sound Transit staff would begin work on the FEIS with an expected publication in late 2023. Following the release of the FEIS, the Sound Transit Board will have to take a final action to determine the WSBLE project scope in order to enter into a Record of Decision with the Federal Transit Administration and be eligible for federal grant programs.

cc: Esther Handy, Director
Brian Goodnight, Lead Analyst