

Planning for Light Rail: Land Use Code Amendments

Seattle City Council Land Use Committee
April 30, 2025

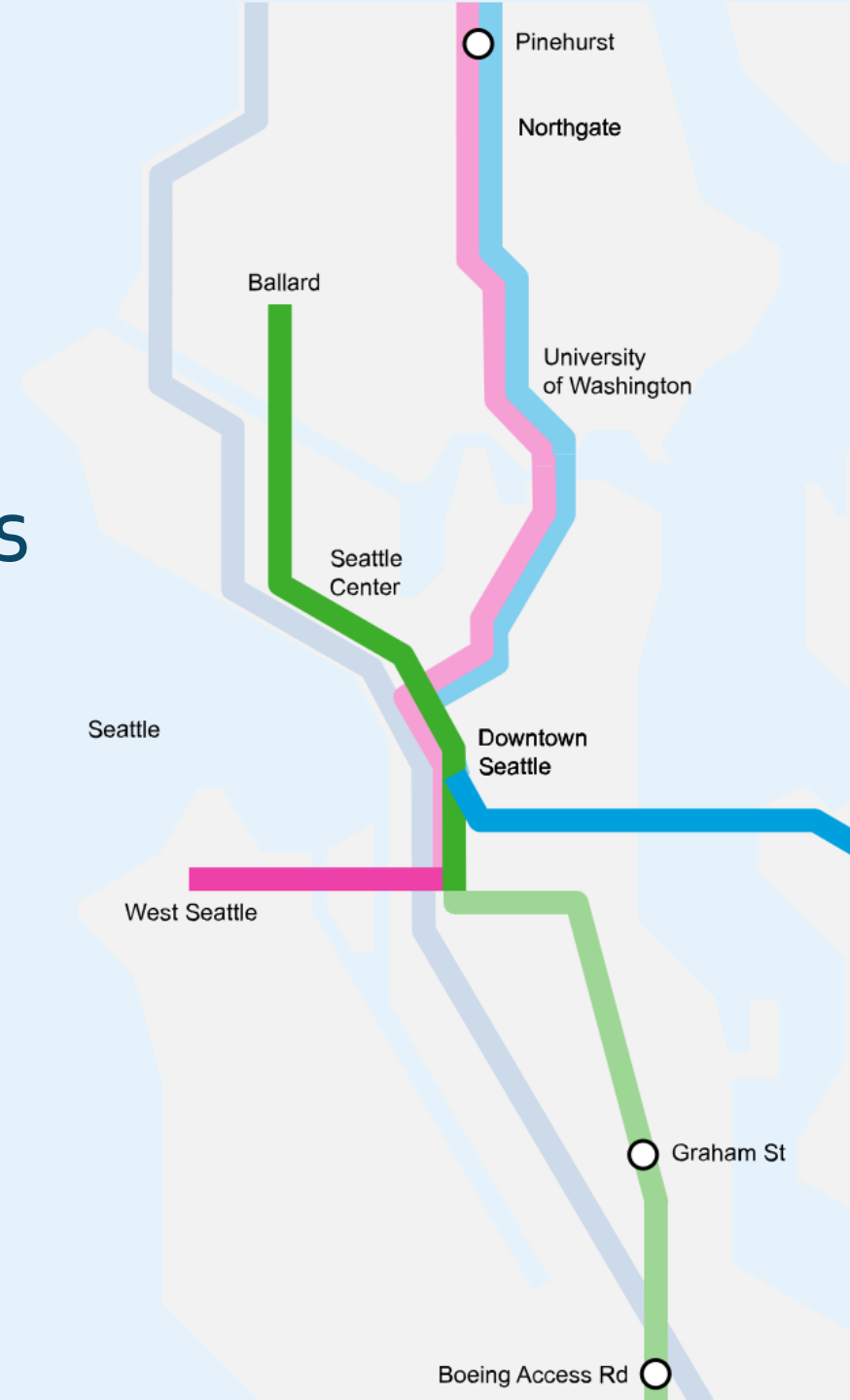
Agenda

ST3 and the ST3 City Team

Overview of light rail code amendments

- Process improvements
- Design improvements

Next Steps



Sound Transit 3 in Seattle

In 2016, over 70% of Seattle voters said yes to ST3.

ST3 is the largest infrastructure investment program in Seattle's history. These projects, including the West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions, bring tremendous opportunity to transform how people reach their homes, jobs, and destinations.

The **ST3 City Team** is an interdepartmental *One Seattle* effort that partners with Sound Transit to help deliver these investments to Seattle communities. Led by the Office of the Waterfront, Civic Projects, and Sound Transit, the ST3 City Team relies on leadership and subject matter expertise across dozens of City departments.



Why City code amendment legislation?

- **Remove code conflicts.** RCW 36.70A.200 (1) (a) states that essential public facilities includes those facilities that "are typically difficult to site" and lists examples. The statute also provides that "no local comprehensive plan or development regulation may preclude the siting of essential public facilities."
- **Streamline permit process.** The City and Seattle and Sound Transit Partnering Agreement (2018) establishes our mutual interest of collaboration in advance of permitting to streamline the permit review process.



Light Rail Land Use Code Amendments

Sound Transit and the ST3 City Team have been working for five years to identify code changes to guide light rail design, streamline permitting, and resolve code conflicts.

Summary of proposed code changes:

Process-related improvements	1. Streamline Master Use Permit process
	2. Create project-level Preliminary Construction Management Plan
	3. Create project-level Tree & Vegetation Management Plan
Design-related improvements	4. Establish light rail-specific development standards
	5. Revise bicycle parking requirements
	6. Identify Seattle Design Commission as advisory review body

1. Streamline Master Use Permit process

AT-A-GLANCE

Intent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An efficient permit process that includes public engagement opportunities
Current	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Includes public notice, comment period, and land use decision• Permits are appealable twice: once to Seattle Hearing Examiner and once to Superior Court via Land Use Petition Act (LUPA)
New	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintains public notice, comment period, and land use decision• Permits are appealable once via LUPA
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Retains the existing public process• Adds a public meetings for key permits• Makes appeals more efficient by reducing process

2. Preliminary Construction Management Plan

AT-A-GLANCE

Intent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A neighborhood-level construction strategy provided with the MUPs
Current	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Permit-by-permit review of right-of-way construction impacts
New	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Segment/contract level review of right-of-way construction impacts
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Addresses multiple construction activities occurring simultaneously• Ensures maintenance of traffic for vehicles, trucks, pedestrians, bikes and buses• Provides an opportunity for community engagement

2. Preliminary Construction Management Plan

ADDITIONAL DETAILS: The preliminary construction management plan submitted at time of MUP review will include:

- A list of required permits (utility, guideway, station);
- A strategy for how construction will be sequenced;
- Information on street closures (as identified in the EIS);
- A list of other major projects in the same area to avoid conflicts;
- Location for construction staging and truck haul routes;
- Detour plans for people driving, walking and rolling, taking the buses, riding a bike, and driving a truck; and
- A designated point of contact for construction communication

A final CMP will be required prior to commencing construction.

3. A Tree and Vegetation Management Plan (TVMP) for Each Link Extension

AT-A-GLANCE

Intent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A project-level tree and vegetation management plan(s) to describe tree impacts and tree replacement strategy
Current	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Permit-by-permit review of tree regulations (over 300 for WSLE)
New	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A TVMP allows for one document with consolidated tree management information for each link extension
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Addresses tree management before, during and after construction• Allows early engagement with stakeholders• Improves delivery of existing tree policies• Enables tree replacement while light rail is being built

3. A Tree and Vegetation Management Plan (TVMP) for Each Link Extension

ADDITIONAL DETAILS: Sound Transit **will create a plan for each Link extension** describing the project's impacts and tree replacement approaches per established City policy:

- Restore ecological function in environmentally-sensitive locations
- Replace lost tree canopy and create new tree canopy
- Replace trees lost from City property with a minimum of 3:1
- Locate trees in high-opportunity areas, such as along public streets, within parks



3. What Will Be in the TVMP?

ADDITIONAL DETAILS: The plans will focus on trees impacted within the project footprint. The plans will include:

1. Preliminary inventory and map of trees to be protected and replaced
2. Documentation of proposed protection methods for trees retained
3. Description of the proposed tree mitigation
4. Best management practices to be used during construction
5. Site restoration requirements
6. Tree and vegetation management practices post-construction
7. Strategy for tree replacement that cannot fit in the project footprint



4. Light Rail Development Standards

AT-A-GLANCE

Intent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clear, minimum standards for light rail facility design
Current	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Code specifies 19 different sets of standards for light rail (zone-by-zone)
New	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One set of standards that set design requirements for light rail
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creates an equitable and consistent set of requirements across the city• Provides transparency for the public, City staff and Sound Transit on the expectations for future light rail design• Minimizes the requests to modify standards on individual permits• Supplements Light Rail Design Guidelines that will be applied by Seattle Design Commission

4. Light Rail Development Standards

ADDITIONAL DETAILS:

Accessing the station:

- Street improvements and pedestrian lighting
- Driveways, pedestrian and bicycle pathways
- Signs/wayfinding

Station design:

- Building design- visible entrances
- Quality of station façades
- Landscaping and street trees
- Weather protection at stations, platforms, and in right-of-way



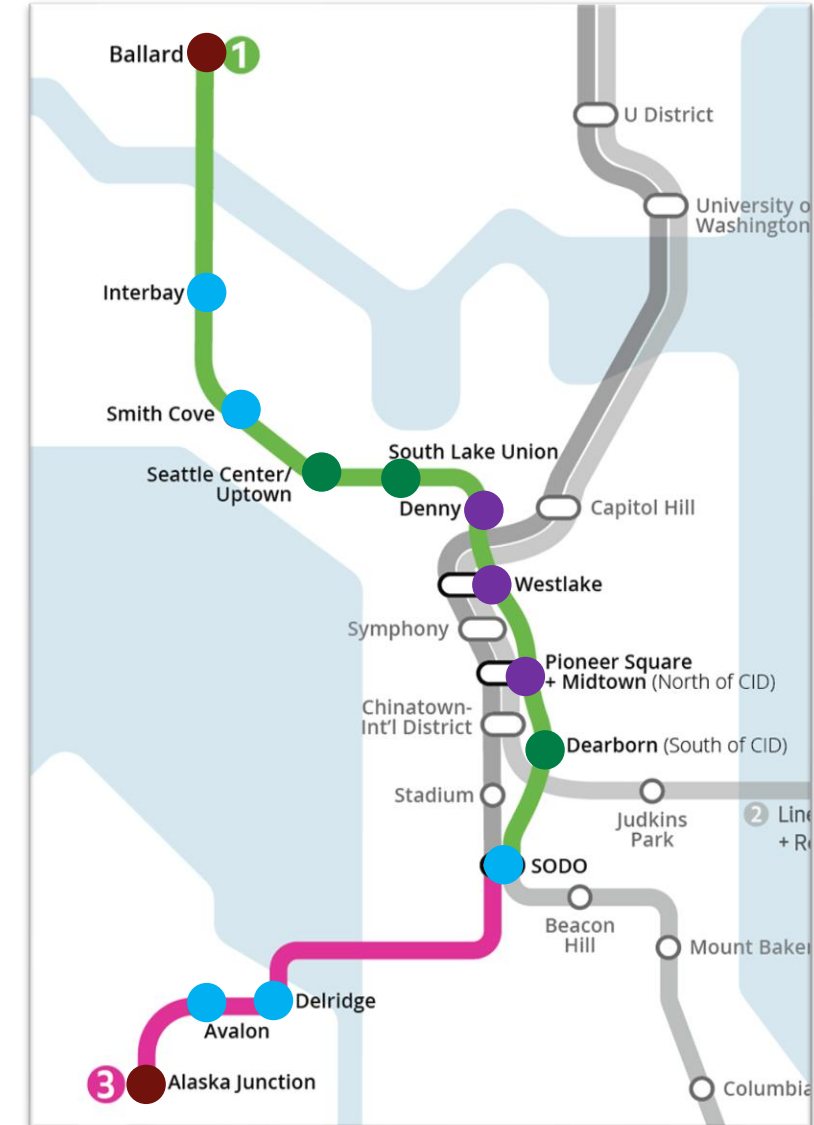
5. Planning for Bikes

AT-A-GLANCE	
Intent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide adequate, accessible, and safe bike parking at light rail stations
Current	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The current bicycle parking code lacks key definitions for light rail• Required amount would exceed expected demand
New	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Amounts tailored for station location and ridership patterns• Accommodate a variety of different bike styles• Include space for micromobility
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provides bicycle parking to meet anticipated demand, with provisions for additional bike parking to be provided if necessary

5. Station Typology Will Inform Bike Parking

Station Type	Definition	Percentage (factor)*
Terminus Stations	Stations located at end of light rail system in the City of Seattle.	5.5% Day of Opening 7% Total
Local Stations	Stations located in intermediate vicinities, not served by Central/Mid-Center/Terminus stations.	4% Day of Opening 7% Total
Mid-Center	Stations within ½ mile outside of the Downtown Urban Center	2% Day of Opening 4% Total
Central Stations	Stations located in the Downtown Urban Center	1% Day of Opening 2% Total

*Note: Each station will require a minimum of 54 bike parking spots per station.



6. Establish SDC as Advisory Review Body

AT-A-GLANCE	
Intent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify Seattle Design Commission (SDC) as the advisory review body to inform station design quality and provide community engagement opportunities
Current	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Light Rail Review Panel advised on design quality for ST2 projects
New	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Seattle Design Commission will advise on design quality for ST3 projects• The code defines the subjects of the SDC review
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enables application of adopted Light Rail Design Guidelines• Facilitates a context-specific light rail design• Allows a public meeting to assess design quality

6. Establish SDC as Advisory Review Body

ADDITIONAL DETAILS. Seattle Design Commission will review light rail transit facility projects and provide recommendations to SDCI and SDOT.

- Architectural, aesthetic, and urban design qualities of light rail facilities
- Transportation, pedestrian accessibility, and circulation sufficiency;
- Quality and type of public amenity features and spaces;
- Visibility and legibility of portals/entry points, including wayfinding signage; and
- Integration of public art into the facilities.



More materials available online...



Planning for Light Rail Tree and Vegetation Management Plans

The construction of new light rail facilities will impact trees. The City will require Sound Transit to develop Tree and Vegetation Management Plans for the West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions to ensure a clear and consistent approach for tree protection and replacement.

The requirements for the plans will align with City policies:

- Restoring ecological function in environmentally sensitive locations
- Replacing lost tree canopy and creating new tree canopy
- Replacing trees lost from City property with a minimum of 3:1
- Locating trees in high-opportunity areas, such as along publicly-owned streets and within parks

Project-level tree and vegetation management plans provide more information about affected trees and a documented strategy for project-wide tree replacement at on-site and off-site locations.

These plans will make it clear how trees would be added along streets, within parks and natural areas, and as construction sites are restored.



In coordination with the Seattle Department of Transportation, the Office of Sustainability and Environment, and Seattle Parks and Recreation, these plans will also create a more equitable tree canopy by planting trees in neighborhoods or public spaces with less existing tree canopy, consistent with the One Seattle Tree Plan.

More Information
www.seattle.gov/light-rail



Planning for Light Rail Bike Parking Code Amendments

The City of Seattle plans to update bike parking code requirements for future light rail stations. This work is being done through a partnership with Sound Transit to streamline the permit review process and define clear requirements for future light rail design.

The existing bike parking code does not consider the differences among station locations and types, or the evolving types of bikes that could be parked at stations.

An updated code will:

- Be grounded in data and peer-city review
- Right-size requirements for station day of opening while also allowing for future growth in bike parking needs over the life of the station
- Consider the differences between stations and clarify how we calculate bike parking requirements
- Create design standards that provide for a variety of bike parking needs and designs
- Create design standards that make bike parking safe and easy for riders to locate
- Develop new shared bike and scooter space requirements
- Help to streamline light rail permitting



More Information
www.seattle.gov/light-rail



Preparing for Light Rail New Standards for Station Design

The City of Seattle is setting new requirements for how light rail stations are designed. These standards cover important aspects like station size, shape, lighting, access, parking, signs, and overall appearance. The goal is to create stations that are functional, accessible, and enhance the look of our neighborhoods.

In addition to the new standards, we adopted Light Rail Design Guidelines. These guidelines, along with input from the Seattle Design Commission (SDC), help ensure each station fits seamlessly into its local context.

Why are new standards needed?

- The West Seattle and Ballard Light rail segments pass through 19 different zoning areas, each with its own rules. A single set of standards is necessary to simplify and streamline station design across the city.
- Current building standards for residential, commercial, or industrial use don't work well for light rail stations.
- The new code creates consistent baseline requirements for all light rail stations, no matter their location.

How will stations fit into their neighborhoods?

- The new guidelines help Sound Transit design stations that reflect the unique character of each neighborhood.
- The SDC will review station designs to ensure they work well in their surroundings.
- Public input is welcome! The SDC holds meetings where community members can share their thoughts.

What will the new standards cover?

The proposed standards will address key factors like:

- Bicycle and scooter parking
- Accessibility for everyone
- Weather protection
- Clear signs
- Pedestrian-friendly lighting
- Easy bus connections

What visual features will be included?
The standards will ensure stations look great and match their surroundings with:

- Thoughtful shapes, sizes, and materials
- Well-planned layouts
- Landscaping that enhances the area
- Integration with nearby streets and public spaces
- A design that reflects the neighborhood's character

We are committed to creating light rail stations that are not only practical and accessible but also enhance the communities they serve. With clear standards and guidelines in place, Seattle is taking a proactive approach to managing light rail station design.

More Information
www.seattle.gov/light-rail



Next Steps

Code amendment legislation:

- May 13: Committee meeting
- May 29: Public hearing

Q2 2025: Additional legislation to adopt West Seattle Link Extension (WSLE) project

Q3 2025: WSLE permitting begins



Additional Questions & Comments?

Office of the Waterfront, Civic Projects, and Sound Transit

Angela.Brady@seattle.gov

Sara.Maxana@seattle.gov

Chris.Gregorich@seattle.gov

Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections

Lindsay.King@seattle.gov

Gordon.Clowers@seattle.gov

A blue-tinted photograph of a city street scene. In the foreground, a group of pedestrians is walking on a sidewalk. A tram is moving along the street, featuring a colorful advertisement for the 'Jim Henson Exhibition' at the 'MUSEUM OF POP CULTURE' with the tagline 'Imagination Unlimited'. The tram's destination sign reads 'LIVE UNION'. In the background, there are modern buildings, a construction crane, and traffic lights.

From the entire ST3 City Team:
Thank you!