

Planning for Light Rail: Land Use Code Amendments

Seattle City Council Land Use Committee
May 12, 2025

Agenda

4/30 Committee Follow-Up

1. Non-Code Amendment Issues

- Safety and User Experience on Transit
- Residential and Business Displacement

2. Code Amendment Legislation Issues

- Code Amendments Recap
- Community Engagement Highlights
- Tree + Vegetation Management Plan

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.



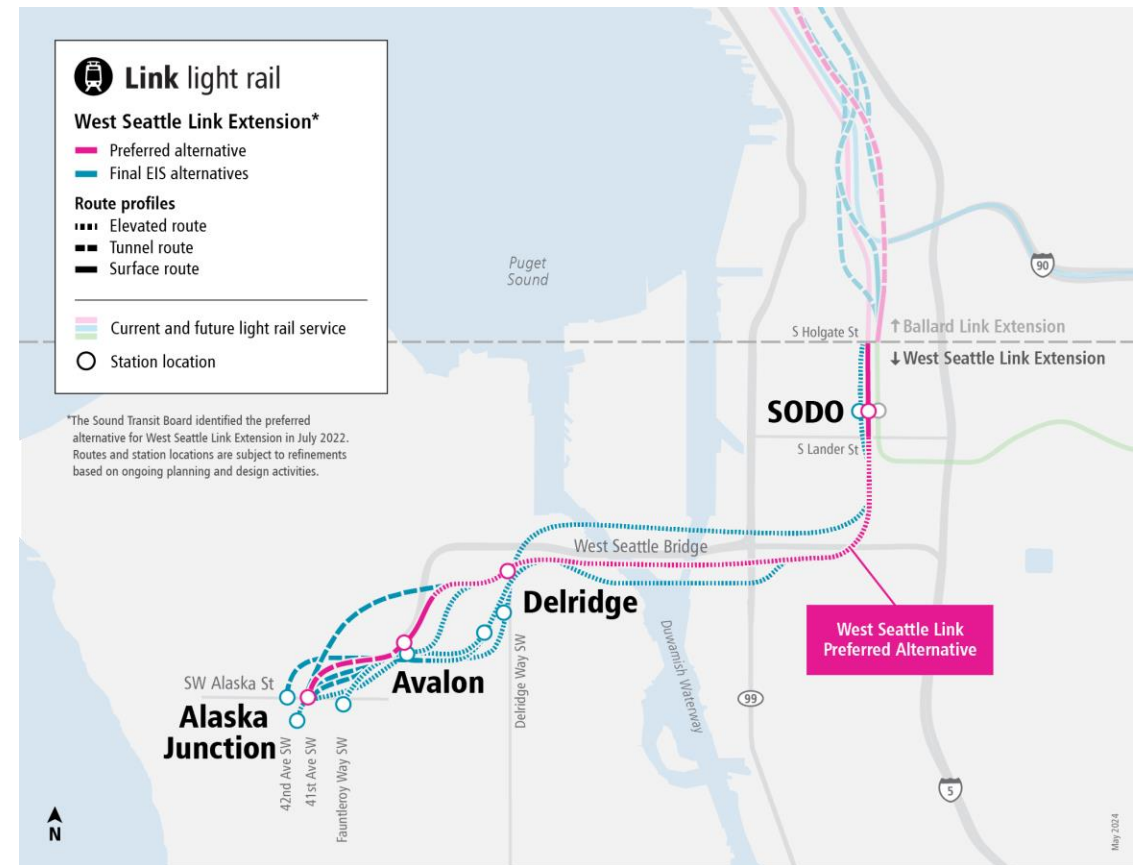
1. Non-Code Amendment Legislation Issues

Safety and User Experience on Transit
Residential and Business Displacement

Background: Selecting a Preferred Alternative

Selecting the station and guideway locations is a critical opportunity to shape project outcomes, including safety, user experience, and displacement.

Following the Draft EIS, City Council adopted Council Resolution 32055 (2022) that recommended a preferred alternative for WSLE and BLE in advance of the July 2022 Sound Transit Board action.



Background: Selecting a Preferred Alternative

Council Resolution 32055 (2022) based recommendations on five values:

- Racial equity. Promote equitable benefits and avoid disparate impacts.
- **Safety + user experience.** Locate and design stations to maximize ridership and access to the Sound Transit system, providing for safe access and circulation that minimizes pedestrian risk.
- Community. **Minimize residential and business displacement** and impacts to existing neighborhood assets; ensure compatibility with housing, employment, and industrial land uses; and maximize opportunities to further equitable TOD and other community-identified priorities.
- Environmental Protection. Minimize impacts to sensitive environmental areas.
- Financial Stewardship. Facilitate responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars by seeking highest benefit for dollars spent, helping maintain the project schedule and budget, and prioritizing future expansion opportunities in planning and design.

Safety and User Experience on Transit

Selecting a preferred alternative:

- Prioritizing safety and user experience in selection of a preferred alternative (e.g., Delridge station alternatives).

Improving safety and user experience through design and permitting:

- Advancing Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design. Final design will include interagency review on CPTED principles.
- Applying adopted Design Guidelines in permit project review process (e.g., Open Space Design & Activation; Safety & Comfort; Lighting; Intuitive Wayfinding)



NON-CODE AMENDMENT LEGISLATION ISSUES

Safety and User Experience

Additional efforts outside ST3 project planning to improve safety and user experience on transit:

- Partnering with Sound Transit, ST, King County, community organizations, labor, law enforcement through the **King County Regional Transit Safety Task Force** to achieve measurable, sustainable safety improvements for employees and transit riders.
- Improving safety and access to transit and local destinations for people walking, rolling, biking, and driving through multiple efforts, including SDOT's **MLK, Jr Way Safety Project** and Sound Transit's **At-Grade Crossing Program**.

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Residential and Business Displacement

Selecting a preferred alternative:

- For Delridge and West Seattle segments, WSLE Preferred Alternative has relatively low residential and moderate business displacement compared to other alternatives considered.

Supporting affected property owners and tenants:

- WSLE now entering design phase: Sound Transit will begin property acquisition, with comprehensive assistance to property owners and tenants affected by property acquisition or relocation.
- New: State legislation adopted this month increased cap for business displaced by Sound Transit from \$50k to \$200k and updates the amount every year 2% to adjust for inflation.



2. Code Amendment Legislation Issues

Recap

Community Engagement

Tree and Vegetation Management Plan

Recap: 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

Community Engagement Highlights

The code amendment legislation was shaped by several years of community engagement.

2023-4. Station Planning Survey, Bike Survey, Bike Parking Study (ST).

2023-4. Sound Transit & City of Seattle Open Houses held in October 2023 and March 2024. Community Liaisons provide in-language support.

2023-4. Tabling at farmer's markets and other public events.

2024-5. SDC Public Meetings. Preliminary Engineering Reviews of the WSLE stations and guideway segments; Briefings on design guidelines, code amendments.



Community Engagement Highlights continued

The code amendment legislation was shaped by several years of community engagement.

2024-5. Communication to interested parties.

2024-5. Boards and Commissions: Urban Forestry Commission, Seattle Design Commission, Seattle Bicycle Board, Seattle Transit Board.

2024-5. Stakeholders: SODO BIA, Downtown ST3 Steering Committee, Delridge Neighborhood Development Association, Port of Seattle, Tribes.

2025. SEPA process: Public notice via LUIB and information provided on both SDCI and SDOT websites.



Tree and Vegetation Management Plan (TVMP)

Key advantages of the TVMP. The TVMP will streamline the permit process and lead to better outcomes for tree protection and replacement than current policy.

Transparent process with upfront engagement.

- Provides a transparent process for consolidated tree management information in advance of permitting. Current code would deal with tree impacts permit-by-permit through administrative processes.
- Includes upfront public engagement, including engagement with Urban Forestry Commission and Tribes.

Earlier tree replacement = new canopy sooner.

- The TVMP will support early tree replacement in advance of and during light rail construction.



TVMP: Potential to transplant trees?

While it may be possible to transplant trees from construction locations, the logistics are challenging and costly.

Limitations:

- Size, genus, species, accessibility (sending and receiving sites) and health condition matter
- Larger trees are harder to transplant and have lower survival rate
- Season and time needed for transplanting may not align with property acquisitions and timing of light rail construction; could result in delay for project

Costs:

- Transplant coordinated by COS to City property; City must contract out to specialists
- Much higher costs: 10-100 times higher than tree replacement
- Would likely be considered a betterment under Sound Transit policy

Outcomes:

- City experience with transplanting trees shows low survival rate

CODE AMENDMENT LEGISLATION ISSUES

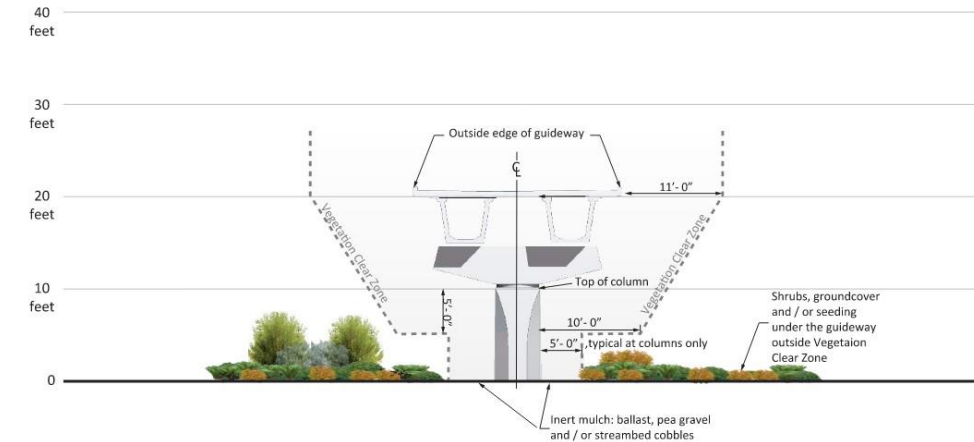
Preparing for the TVMP

As Sound Transit prepares the WSLE TVMP later this year, the City will help inform plan development AND collaborate on plan implementation.

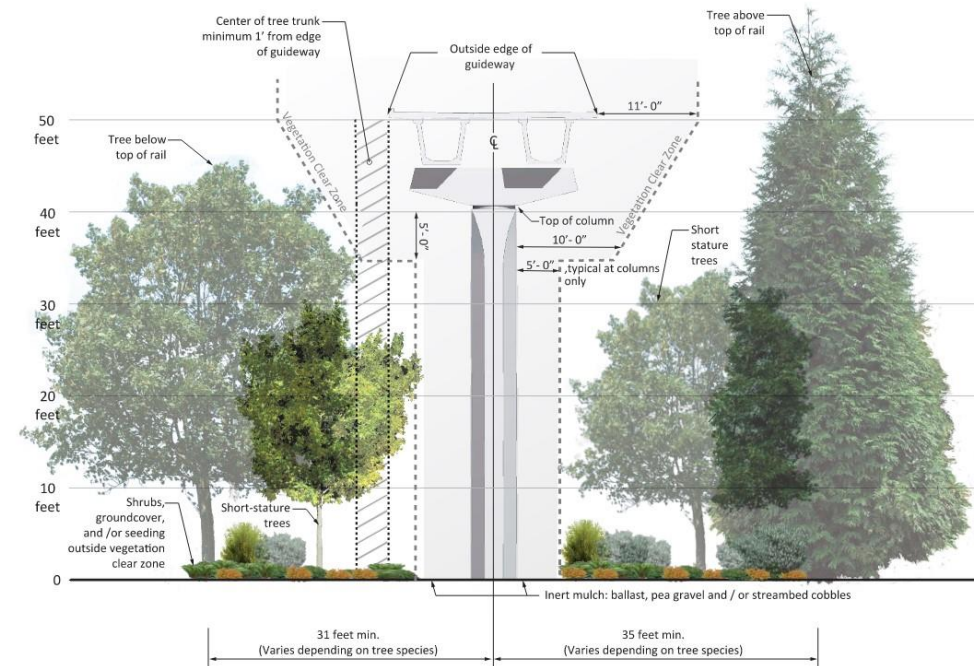
- **Engage in plan development.**
- **Encourage larger trees within the project footprint, where feasible.**
- **Develop a new Capital Improvement Program for ST3 tree replacement outside the project area.**
 - Consider strategies to encourage conifers and larger trees
 - Assess feasibility of transplanting smaller trees

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Guideway Elevated 20+ feet Above Ground
Proposed Cross-Section



Guideway Elevated 50 feet Above Ground
Proposed Cross-Section



Images: Sound Transit

Code amendments streamline permitting

The West Seattle Link Extension and Ballard Link Extension Projects will require hundreds of permits.

The light rail code amendments are essential to helping deliver these projects. The amendments:

- Create clear standards
- Streamline the permitting process
- Provide a transparent, public process
- Maintain City authority to assess and mitigate impacts for light rail construction and operation

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Preparing for Light Rail

Faster Light Rail Permits Ahead: Cutting Approval Time in Half

Building light rail from West Seattle to Ballard means the City of Seattle will need to review and approve a lot of permits. To help make the project move faster, we are updating the land use code to simplify the permit process and set clear rules for light rail station design. These changes will help connect Seattle neighborhoods and destinations with reliable transit sooner.

Updates will:

- Create clear standards for light rail construction
- Simplify permits by adjusting requirements to fit the need
- Clarify how people participate in light rail station design review
- Review and issue construction staging and station location permits quickly
- Reduce schedule delays by limiting appeals to one opportunity
- Continue to require public notice and comment periods for all permits

The permit process for alternative construction hours and work in Environmentally Critical Areas and Shoreline Districts does not change.

Why make these improvements?

- Streamlining the review process speeds up approval for over 90 permits, allowing light rail construction to begin sooner
- Clear design standards and a focus on key station design topics removes confusion for the public and Sound Transit
- Better coordination between the City and Sound Transit means faster permitting and less risk



SEATTLE'S LAND USE CODE

This code guides how private property is used. The rules are in place to protect public health, safety, and quality of life. Sound Transit works with us to get the land use permits necessary to ensure what they build meets Seattle's standards for design and construction of light rail.

The code does a few key things, such as, it keeps the public informed about key permit applications and uses zones to determine the kinds of buildings and activities allowed in each area. Doing so protects the environment and historic sites, makes sure buildings are the right size for the surroundings, and people can continue to easily walk and roll.

More Information
www.seattle.gov/light-rail

City of Seattle

Next Steps

Code amendment legislation:

- May 29: Public hearing

Q2/Q3 2025: Additional legislation to adopt West Seattle Link Extension (WSLE) project

Q3/Q4 2025: WSLE permitting begins



Additional Questions & Comments?

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From the entire ST3 City Team:
Thank you!