

Seattle Times, 11/19/15

<http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/transportation/new-sound-transit-chief-enthused-about-growth-plans/>

New Sound Transit CEO excited by big light-rail expansion plans

Originally published November 19, 2015 at 8:38 pm Updated November 20, 2015 at 11:49 am



Former Federal Transit Administration chief Peter Rogoff will succeed CEO Joni Earl at Sound Transit. (Dean Rutz/The Seattle Times)

Peter Rogoff, the new Sound Transit CEO, said the prospect of working on a ballot measure for light-rail expansion attracted him to the job.

By [Mike Lindblom](#)

Seattle Times transportation reporter

Sound Transit hired a new executive Thursday to lead the agency through the precarious job of crafting a possible \$20 billion expansion plan, for the November 2016 ballot.

Peter Rogoff is expected to start work in January, succeeding CEO Joni Earl, who is on unpaid medical leave with a brain injury. Earl will stay on as an adviser until the University of Washington Station opens early next year.

“I am not the best candidate,” Rogoff, 55, a former federal transit official, told the board. “The best candidate is a healthy Joni Earl.”

Rogoff’s pay has yet to be negotiated, said board Chairman Dow Constantine. The advertised range is \$201,000 to \$302,000, while Earl would be making \$253,000 if on full duty.

From 2009-2014, Rogoff ran the Federal Transit Administration, where he signed an \$813 million grant to help fund the almost-ready \$1.8 billion, light-rail tunnel connecting Westlake Station, Capitol Hill and the UW. He is now undersecretary for policy at the U.S. Department of Transportation.

“This is a very high-functioning agency,” he said, referring to Sound Transit’s ability to deliver projects.

That wasn’t always that case, when it badly underestimated costs in the 1990s and nearly collapsed, before a reorganization led by Earl.

Rogoff said later he looks forward “to seeing the fruits of my labor,” compared with a federal policy post.

“You can really count on one hand, with a couple of fingers left, the number of communities that have meaningfully and aggressively planned for the growth in its future, that has a vision for how transit can improve future conditions, and its quality of life.”

Los Angeles comes to mind, he said, where voters approved two tax hikes and multiple train lines, along with Dallas.

Rogoff said the Sound Transit 3 plan, headed toward a possible 2016 vote, attracted him.

Constantine said Rogoff will “help us shape that proposal to make it more beneficial and attractive to voters. His experience is going to help us navigate what are, in the best conditions, choppy waters.”

Along with proposed property, car-tab and sales-tax hikes, the expansion could include train rides as long as 50 to 60 minutes from Everett or Federal Way into Seattle. Is there a natural limit?

“Compared to what?” replied Rogoff. Recently, car or bus rides of at least 70 minutes have become routine from Everett to Seattle.

“What’s important,” he said, “is not just to look at imposing the project on conditions today, but what trip times people will be willing to accept when they’re faced with the congestion of tomorrow.”

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Seattle Times, 11/27/15 (updated 11/28/15)

<http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/education/potential-vote-on-transit-levy-would-benefit-education/>

Vote to expand light rail next year could mean \$500M for education

Originally published November 27, 2015 at 7:36 pm Updated November 28, 2015 at 12:36 pm

The next phase of light-rail expansion in Puget Sound could come with a half-billion dollars for education in the region thanks to last-minute wrangling on the new state transportation budget.

Section Sponsor

By [John Higgins](#)

Seattle Times education reporter

A likely vote next fall for expanded light rail in the Puget Sound area could generate about \$500 million to boost education for children who are homeless, from low-income families, in foster care or otherwise need extra help from preschool all the way to college.

What does half a billion dollars in education money have to do with public transportation?

Not much, but it has a lot to do with politics, the art of compromise and a late-night maneuver by Rep. Jessyn Farrell, D-Seattle, to help pass a new statewide transportation package last summer.

If the Sound Transit puts a [\\$15 billion ballot measure](#) before voters in November 2016 and it passes, fees on the projects' construction contracts could generate about \$500 million over 16 years.

Those fees would go into an education fund that would be distributed to the Pierce, King and Snohomish county governments based on their share of the population within the transit district's boundaries.

County councils will decide how it's spent.

King County expects to receive about 60 percent of the proceeds based on population, said Frank Abe, communications director for King County Executive Dow Constantine.

That would be about \$300 million on top of the ["Best Starts for Kids" countywide levy](#) that voters passed earlier this month, which will collect \$392 million over six years to improve prenatal care, early-childhood parenting skills and teen mental health.

If a transit measure is put on the ballot next year and voters approve it, Constantine and the council would convene an advisory group in early 2017 to begin hearing recommendations.

The first dollars wouldn't flow until at least September 2017, and possibly later depending on construction schedules.

Farrell said the money can't be used to satisfy the state Supreme Court's 2012 McCleary school-funding decision because that would just widen the gap between wealthy communities that approve higher local taxes and poorer ones that don't.

But the money can be used to enhance education for the kids who need it the most in the region, whether it's making preschool more affordable, keeping homeless children in their neighborhood schools or helping foster kids go on to college.

"It could truly help fill some gaps for some really vulnerable students if we do this wisely," Farrell said.

Lawmakers had struggled for three years to come up with new spending for transportation.

By early summer, they had reached a compromise [on a new \\$16 billion, 16-year transportation package](#).

Republicans wanted to end the practice of using sales taxes collected from state road-building projects to pay for schools, law enforcement and social programs rather than road construction.

Democrats wanted legislative approval for the Sound Transit district to raise up to \$15 billion in additional taxes from Puget Sound area voters, mostly to expand light rail — a key step toward placing a new measure on the November 2016 ballot.

Potential light-rail destinations include Everett, Redmond, Tacoma, Ballard and West Seattle, as well as bus rapid transit on Interstate 405.

Democrats agreed that sales taxes on new state road projects would flow into the state's Connecting Washington account, which pays for road construction and other transportation improvements. That shift will happen over four years.

Republicans agreed to allow Sound Transit to seek \$15 billion from voters, scrapping the previous \$11 billion limit set in the Senate.

But the approval came with a catch: a new 3.25 percent fee that would be applied to construction contracts for the projects funded by the measure.

That money — up to \$518 million over 16 years — would then flow into the general fund to replace the lost road-construction revenue and could be spent however lawmakers wanted.

But Farrell, who is the vice-chair of the House Transportation Committee, thought that was a bad deal for voters in the Sound Transit District, which covers the most populated areas of King, Pierce and Snohomish counties.

“If we’re raising our own taxes, we should not be sending that money back to the state to fund prisons in Walla Walla or whatever,” Farrell said.

She [tweaked the compromise](#) plan to ensure that the fees generated by a potential transit ballot measure would stay in the Puget Sound region in a fund dedicated to education.

The amended deal passed in the wee hours of the morning.

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From Seattle Times, 12/4/15

<http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/transportation/sound-transit-may-propose-another-tunnel-in-27b-package/>

Sound Transit may propose another tunnel in \$27 billion package

Originally published December 4, 2015 at 10:02 am Updated December 4, 2015 at 11:34 am



Sound Transit may propose building a second downtown light-rail tunnel, the centerpiece of a possible 25-year, \$27 billion package for the ballot. (Greg Gilbert/The Seattle Times)

Sound Transit ballot scenarios, as big as 25 years and \$27 billion in costs, feature another light-rail tunnel in downtown Seattle.

By [Mike Lindblom](#)
Seattle Times transportation reporter

Sound Transit is considering whether to build a second downtown light-rail tunnel, the centerpiece of a possible 25-year, \$27 billion package for next fall's ballot.

The new passage might run from just east of the International District/Chinatown Station to Uptown (Lower Queen Anne), by the time 1 million new residents arrive, regional ridership grows, and tracks are added to serve Ballard and West Seattle.

The agency staff Friday released 15-year, 20-year, and 25-year construction options. Each requires the same \$200 a year per adult in tax increases, for urban parts of Snohomish, King and Pierce counties, agency staff say. The longer the timeline, the more can be built.

Whether local politicians on the 18-member transit board agree to a quarter-century of projects, or balk at such an audacious Sound Transit 3 (ST3) campaign, isn't yet known. They'll begin weighing their choices in a meeting Friday.

The most expensive option would collect \$27 billion in new taxes through 2041, or \$48 billion if existing taxes plus new federal aid, bond sales and fares through 2041 are included, on a quest to deliver light rail to Everett, Tacoma, Redmond, Issaquah, Kirkland, Ballard and West Seattle.

That's about twice what the agency sought in the Legislature this year, by asking for \$15 billion in tax authority in a 15-year plan.

Early estimates indicate the full network would attract perhaps 50,000 train riders in the Lynnwood- Everett stretch, over 40,000 in West Seattle, around 50,000 in Federal Way and Tacoma, and maybe 55,000 in Ballard-Uptown.

Less pricey options may not build all the lines.

The suggested second Seattle tunnel might start under Fifth Avenue South at the International District, as a shallow cut-and-cover section. Twin tubes could be bored downtown — running east of the 1989 Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel, because the combination of the future Highway 99 tunnel and the old Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway tunnel prevent excavation to the west. A new Madison Street light-rail station would be part of the new tunnel. Northwest of Westlake Station, the tunnel could revert to cut-and-cover.

Parsons Brinckerhoff, the agency's longtime design consultant, offers a rationale.

Even though packed trains in the existing tunnel can theoretically carry 16,000 passengers per hour, per direction (200 people per railcar, in four-car trains arriving every three minutes), planners say they will need more trains after 2040, and therefore, another tunnel.

Previously in Sound Transit board workshops, no one has urged half-measures, such as shorter lines or a smaller tax increase. To hold back might dishearten the pro-transit voter base, and leave too many neighborhoods off next year's campaign-card maps.

Chairman Dow Constantine, the King County executive, [said in April that a bigger network offers better odds of winning](#) than a limited version. Since then, he's all but promised to deliver trains to his home neighborhood of West Seattle.

The latest options for ballot projects are to be posted at 10 a.m. Friday at SoundTransit3.org.

Even a quarter-century of ST3 might not cover some ideas floated by board members, such as a Link extension to Everett Community College, or a Sounder commuter-train spur to Orting, Pierce County.

Transit enthusiasts at Seattle Subway ask for [an even grander “ST Complete” package](#) that builds rail to Kenmore, Woodinville, Renton, and a crosstown Ballard-Wallingford-University corridor — the idea being to get all plausible lines approved in a single vote.

If the measure fails, work continues anyway on the 2008 voter-approved ST2 plan, to reach Lynnwood, Overlake and Highline College with light rail by 2023.

State law passed this year allows an ST3 measure to:

- Raise the agency’s sales tax, now 90 cents per \$100 purchase, by an additional 50 cents per \$100.
- Enact a new property tax of \$25 per \$100,000 of assessed value.
- Raise the agency’s car-tab tax of \$30 per \$10,000 vehicle value to \$80.

The taxes likely would extend two or three decades beyond construction, to pay off bond debts.

The payoff for all this spending would be more train connections, to give people an alternative to traffic, and shape urban development.

Crucial route choices lie ahead.

Should a north line bend west to Paine Field or take a quicker, cheaper path along I-5, directly to Everett Station?

Should a train to West Seattle serve intense, upscale growth at the Junction neighborhood, or turn south to reach working-class transit riders on Delridge Way?

Should I-405 bus-rapid transit from Lynnwood to Bellevue and Renton strive for speed, or should it serve more locations that add exits and stops?

Should a cross-Eastside train from Totem Lake to Bellevue College and Issaquah be built, or perhaps Kirkland-Bellevue bus-rapid transit that partially runs alongside bikeways, in the former freight-rail corridor?

A draft plan is due by March, followed by public outreach and a final version in June. Then comes the presidential-year election, when supporters will court younger voters, as ST2 rode on Barack Obama’s coattails in 2008.

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Tacoma News Tribune, 12/9/15

<http://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/news-columns-blogs/matt-driscoll/article48875685.html>

December 9, 2015 12:53 AM

Matt Driscoll: Not too early to think about extending light rail to Tacoma

Extending tracks south from Federal Way will likely be part of next Sound Transit ballot measure

A big question: What path will it take?

Choosing the right route could impact development and land use for years



PETER HALEY THE NEWS TRIBUNE

By Matt Driscoll, mdriscoll@thenewstribune.com

The good news is, nearly everyone agrees that next year's Sound Transit 3 ballot measure will include the chance to take a big step toward completing the region's light rail "spine" by funding light rail to Tacoma.

As Shefali Ranganathan, the deputy director of the policy and advocacy nonprofit group Transportation Choices, tells me: "I think it's pretty much a given."

Now the big question is: If voters approve the 2016 ballot measure, generating up to \$15 billion in regional transit revenue over the next 15 years, how will that light rail get here from Federal Way?

Last week, [Sound Transit officially unveiled completed drafts and comparisons](#) for all the projects on the lengthy list of ST3 possibilities. And the public (and more directly, Sound Transit's board) have a lot to choose from.

Here in the South Sound, that means everything from potential Sounder service to DuPont, or from Puyallup to Orting. It also means [possibilities I've written about before](#), such as extending light rail all the way to the Tacoma Dome or getting the Link light rail to Tacoma Community College.

By next spring, we should have a good idea which projects make the cut and will be included in the ballot measure.

But that will be far from the end of the decision-making process.

I think it's pretty much a given.

Shefali Ranganathan, deputy director of Transportation Choices, on whether getting light rail to Tacoma will be part of the Sound Transit 3 ballot measure

As we've seen up north, expect plenty of debate in the years ahead among cities, transit advocates and regional leaders on Sound Transit's board over how light rail makes its way to Tacoma from South 320th Street in Federal Way.

There are two official possibilities: Building tracks along Interstate 5, which figures to be the cheaper, faster and potentially less disruptive route, or building along state Route 99, which might offer more possibilities for what transit wonks like to call "TOD" — or transit-oriented development.

I allude to the north because that's where the battle has played out over how to get light rail from SeaTac Airport to Federal Way, a project that was started with money from Sound Transit's last ballot measure.

Many transit and design advocates pushed for a route along SR 99, for the reason stated above.

Ultimately, Sound Transit's board voted unanimously in July to give the I-5 option from SeaTac to Federal Way a "preferred alternative" status, pending an environmental review.

Many cities potentially affected by light-rail construction along SR 99 argued that it would be too disruptive to economic activity — contentions that, while perhaps warranted in the short term, perhaps failed to give enough weight to the long-range implications of what mass transit can do to spur investment and smart land use.

In other words, the decision may prove to be shortsighted.

If things go as planned, eventually we'll have a similar decision to make about how to get light rail from Federal Way to Tacoma. But already the conversation is full of nuances.

As Ranganathan acknowledges, the difference in TOD potential between an I-5 route and an SR 99 route is “marginal” once you get south of Federal Way.

She says Transportation Choices has not taken a position on a preferred route, saying that far more study and analysis is needed — and will take place in the years ahead.

In Fife, for example, SR 99 and I-5 run parallel and in close proximity, meaning smart design could likely bridge the gap.

Meanwhile, SR 99 is still something of a no-man’s land between South 356th and Fife.

Whatever the fastest route is makes the most sense for riders.

Tacoma City Councilman Ryan Mello on choosing between Interstate 5 and State Route 99 in Fife

Staunch transit advocates such as Tacoma City Councilman Ryan Mello support the need for TOD, and the kind of design that supports it and serves the most riders. But he points to differences between the SeaTac-to-Federal Way decision and the one that will confront our area.

“Whatever the fastest route is makes the most sense for riders,” Mello says, observing that “there’s not really the land-use pattern between Fife and Tacoma” that you see between SeaTac and Federal Way.

That means he favors the I-5 alternative at this point. He says fewer stops, along with more frequent and convenient service, are essential to attract riders and remove single-occupancy vehicles from our clogged roadways.

Still, it’s hard to predict the future.

Our best hope is probably to make decisions now that positively impact our children and our children’s children, taking into account the power of transit as more than simply a people mover.

“What we are trying to continue to push (Sound Transit) and local government to think about is to do the economic analysis over not just five, ten or 15 years. ... Really think this as sort of a 50- to 100-year analysis,” Ranganathan explains.

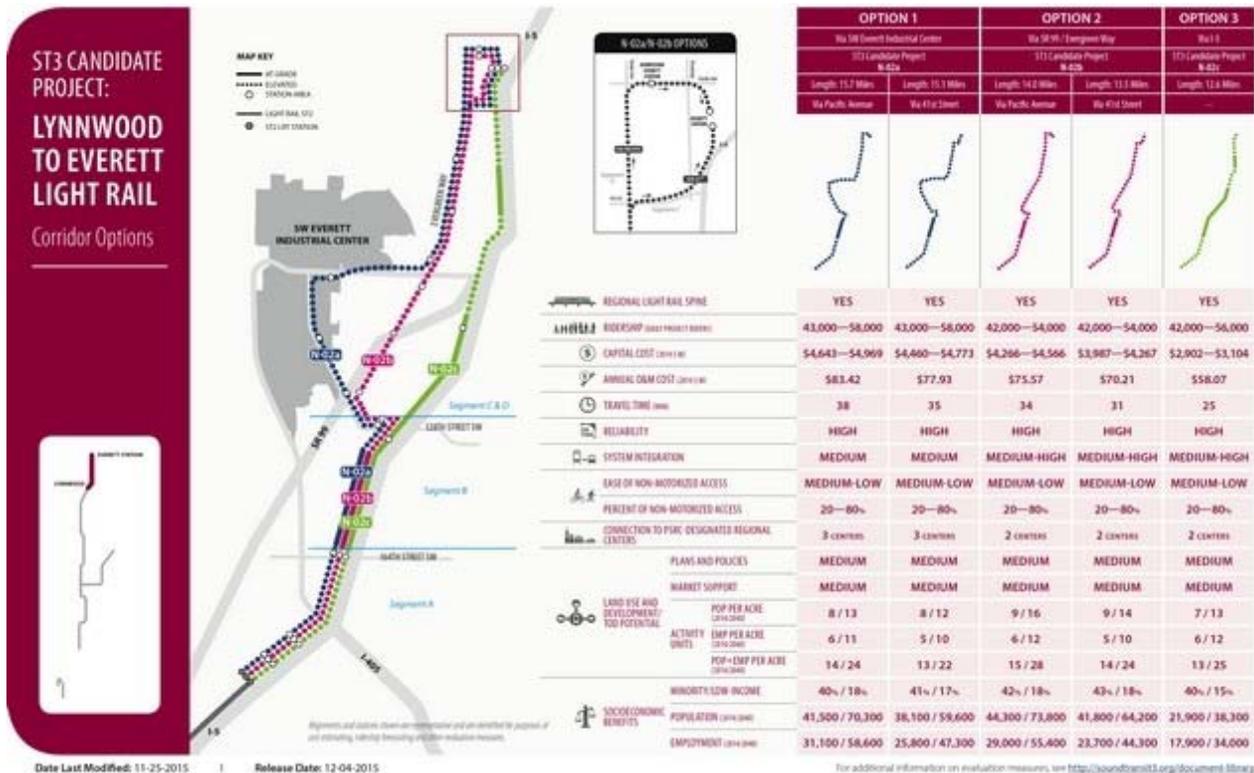
“It’s not often that we get to make these sorts of investments.”

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Light rail options for North Puget Sound far from settled



Sound Transit

Options to extend light rail to Everett, under consideration for the Sound Transit 3 ballot measure. Download the PDF below.

By [Noah Haglund](#)
Herald Writer

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EVERETT — There's a lot riding on decisions about building a light-rail system from Lynnwood to Everett. And beyond that, there's a long journey ahead.

New designs released this month show how Sound Transit's Link trains might reach the heart of Snohomish County, in 15 to 25 years.

There are trade-offs.

A route that would reach Paine Field — a must-have for Snohomish County's elected leaders — would come at significant cost and would lengthen commute times. That could complicate talks as Sound Transit board

members try to balance the northern reaches of the system with proposed additions in Pierce County, the Eastside, Ballard and West Seattle.

Proposed tunnels under downtown Seattle could eat up billions of dollars, but also might make the entire system run more smoothly. Adding costs to create a better system also might mean pushing out the timeline an extra five or 10 years.

“Obviously, we're going to have to negotiate a settlement on this because not everybody is going to get everything they want,” Everett Mayor Ray Stephanson said.

Decisions about light-rail routes will help the Sound Transit board craft [a tax measure known as ST3](#) for the November 2016 election. The board expects to release more details in March and draft the ballot measure by June.

Specific routes, property acquisitions and better cost estimates for future expansion will be years in the making, if voters approve.

The agency is currently building out Sound Transit 2, which passed in 2008. It should bring rail to Northgate by 2021, and to Lynnwood and the Eastside by 2023.

Costs, trade-offs

Concepts [presented by Sound Transit staff at a Dec. 4 workshop](#) show the dilemmas for the 18-member board.

[Reaching the southwest Everett industrial center around Paine Field and the Boeing Co. factory](#) would cost nearly \$2 billion more than going straight up I-5, planners estimate. Costs are pegged at up to \$5 billion for that option, compared to a maximum of \$3.1 billion along the I-5 corridor.

For Stephanson, it's unacceptable to build any route that bypasses the state's largest job center.

Others are on the same page. The three Sound Transit board members from Snohomish County issued a statement with Stephanson and County Executive-elect Dave Somers after the workshop.

“We think it's important to build the right system, as opposed to the cheapest system,” said Edmonds Mayor Dave Earling, who serves on the board.

A Paine Field route also would make for longer trips to downtown Everett than following I-5 — up to 13 minutes longer, if Sound Transit planners are on the mark.

A one-way Everett-to-Seattle morning commute by light rail would take an average of 53 minutes if that future route were to head straight down I-5. That would grow to 66 minutes if the route passes through the industrial area around Paine Field.

By contrast, a person driving him or herself needed an average of 51 minutes to go from Everett to Seattle on I-5 during the morning commute in 2014, [the state Department of Transportation reported](#). The trip took an average of 68 minutes by bus.

For elected leaders in Snohomish County, the added time was insignificant compared to the need of getting light rail to the Paine Field area.

Light rail is “a lot more reliable than the interstate system, so I'm not worried about adding a small amount of

time,” said Everett City Councilman Paul Roberts, the Sound Transit board's vice chairman.

Roberts also believes the I-5 route provides few options for transit-oriented development north of 128th Street.

There's a middle option. It would branch off the freeway at 128th Street, like the Paine Field route, but follow Highway 99 and Evergreen Way before cutting over to Everett Station.

It could shave about four minutes off travel time and save perhaps a half-billion dollars, compared to serving the Paine Field industrial area. To Stephanson, that route won't work because it fails to get close enough to aerospace jobs and would reach an area already served by Community Transit Swift buses. It also could cut through the lots at Evergreen Way car dealerships.

Paine Field doesn't dramatically change ridership, at least according to the best guesses of Sound Transit planners.

Up to 58,000 riders would use light-rail trains through the Paine Field industrial area, Sound Transit estimates. That compares to a high-end estimate of 56,000 daily riders for the I-5 route and 54,000 for Highway 99.

A 2.1-mile line [from Everett Station to the area around Everett Community College](#) is treated separately in new plans. It would cost up to \$764 million and carry a maximum of 4,000 riders daily.

The bigger picture

Leaders in Snohomish County realize they'll have to make compromises, given what's on the drawing board for other areas. Sound Transit's district extends through much of Snohomish, King and Pierce counties.

A successful ballot measure will have to win over Seattle voters.

“The thing that's so intriguing about this is that we in Snohomish County need King County and Pierce County voters as much as they need us,” Stephanson said.

[A Ballard line](#) might cost less than \$2 billion, or more than \$5 billion, depending on the route. The main variable in the price is pursuing a less-expensive design at street level versus spending more to punch another tunnel under downtown Seattle. The less-expensive version might carry up to 50,000 riders on an average work day; the costlier one up to 133,000.

[A West Seattle leg](#) would include elevated tracks and a tunnel into downtown at a cost of up to \$2 billion. Daily ridership estimates range from 20,000 to 50,000 for competing designs.

On the Eastside, a segment from the Overlake neighborhood to downtown Redmond would cost an estimated \$1.1 billion to carry up to 10,000 riders on an average day.

A segment [from Kirkland's Totem Lake neighborhood to Issaquah](#) could cost nearly \$3.4 billion and carry up to 15,000 people per day.

A 15-mile leg from the Kent-Des Moines area to the Tacoma Dome is estimated to attract up to 69,000 riders per day and cost a maximum of more than \$4 billion.

How to pay?

To pay for ST3, the Sound Transit Board is considering a mix of property, sales and motor-vehicle excises taxes that are estimated to cost the average area resident an extra \$200 per year, about \$17 per month.

The taxes would generate an estimated \$15 billion over 15 years, with another \$11 billion coming from grants, bonds, fares and existing taxes. If completed on schedule, that would get light rail to Everett by 2036.

It's unclear whether the measure would provide enough cash, though.

"I never thought we could really do what we could need to do with a 15-year package," said Roberts, the Everett councilman. "I think we need to go to 20."

Over 20 years, the budget would rise to \$30 billion. Over 25 years, it could reach \$48 billion.

Costs for the project are estimated 2014 dollars and are bound to rise with inflation.

Earling is an original board member from the early 1990s and is quick to point out that the original vision for light rail included Everett as a key destination, along with Seattle, Bellevue and Tacoma. The agency needs to keep that promise, he said.

"It's our duty, as a board, to stick to that commitment from many years ago," Earling said. "My commitment is to finish the spine."

An initial measure failed at the ballot in 1995. Voters approved a scaled-back plan known as Sound Move in 1996, agreeing to build out the rail and bus system in phases. Former Snohomish County Executive Bob Drewel led the Sound Transit board when it crafted the successful measure.

Giving people up north in Snohomish County a stake in the process was crucial to winning the votes to pass the original package. Shorting the community on the light rail system would run counter to why Sound Transit was formed in the first place, Drewel said.

"This was a regional effort to build a core system for the central Puget Sound area," he said.

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More information

Staff from Sound Transit have drawn up concepts for future Link light-rail routes to Everett and other destinations.

The information is being used to formulate a ballot proposal for November 2016. More details are due out in March.

Find more, including a library of documents, at www.soundtransit3.org.

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Politics & Government

December 26, 2015 7:42 AM

Inside the proposals to grow light rail with Tacoma's population

Sound Transit formulating ballot proposal for November 2016
Tacoma possibilities include streetcar along South 19th Street, inter-city rail to mall
Ballot question could set a 25-year, \$48-billion regional transit plan



1 Extension from planned route to Tacoma Community College

Martin Luther King Jr. Way to South Pearl Street

Length: 3.65 miles

Cost: \$642-687 million (in 2014 dollars)

Ridership: 6,000-8,000 (projected daily boardings in 2040)

PROJECT ELEMENTS

Project would extend the proposed Link Light Rail from downtown Tacoma to Tacoma Community College and include modifications to existing and planned Link infrastructure.

- Four center-platform and three side-platform stations
- Widen Martin Luther King Jr. Way and reconstruct South 19th Street from South Wilkeson Street to state Route 16.

2 Extension from Tacoma Dome Station to Tacoma Mall

Tacoma Dome Station to South Pine Street

Length: 3.55 miles

Cost: \$975 million-\$1.043 billion (in 2014 dollars)

Ridership: 6,000-8,000 (projected daily boardings in 2040)

PROJECT ELEMENTS

Project would extend the Link Light Rail from Tacoma Dome station to Tacoma Mall.

- Two elevated stations
- Realign and rebuild freight rail line near East 26th Street and East C Street.
- 500-stall parking garage to be built near Tacoma Mall station.

Note: Elements of these proposals will be refined during future phases of project development and are subject to change.



*Link Light Rail train moves along Pacific Avenue in downtown Tacoma on Dec. 17. Lui Kit Wong
lwong@thenewtribune.com*

By Derrick Nunnally

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When President Obama signed a \$305 billion highway bill this month, he reauthorized a grant program that is being leaned on for nearly half the \$153 million cost of the Tacoma Link expansion through the Hilltop neighborhood to South 19th Street. A subsequent budget deal meant the project's \$75 million federal grant had officially cleared Congress, bringing construction of the long-awaited streetcar segment closer.

Before that project ever breaks ground, Sound Transit is working up plans to ask the region's voters to approve another long-term plan that could include stretching the Tacoma Link line even farther: 3.7 miles straight west on South 19th Street to Tacoma Community College.

A separate project under consideration would stretch plans for city-to-city light rail, the Link train, beyond the Tacoma Dome station to the Tacoma Mall, making it possible to ride the train from the geographic center of the city to Sea-Tac Airport and Seattle.

With Tacoma [projected to gain 127,000 new residents](#) in the next 25 years — a 62 percent increase over its current population — Sound Transit’s estimates say that if built, each of the two proposed projects would carry 6,000 to 8,000 riders daily.

Their combined price tag for 7.1 miles of new urban rail would be more than \$1.5 billion, about 10 times the money being spent to bring the city’s streetcar line from 1.6 miles of downtown to a four-mile circuit serving mixed-use and residential neighborhoods.

Planning documents say those projects have the potential to help shape the growing city, from reducing car traffic to encouraging denser pedestrian-oriented development.

In the real world, they face several hurdles.

First, they — and the light-rail connection from the Tacoma Dome station to Federal Way, which would tie Tacoma into the Seattle-based Link trains network — have to make it from the 45-item list of potential Sound Transit 3 projects to the agency’s planned November 2016 ballot proposal.

The odds of that happening remain unclear, since Sound Transit hasn’t formally decided how ambitious the Sound Transit 3 tax proposal will be.

THE BUDGET DICTATES THE PLANNING

Using the high-end cost estimates for each potential project, the Sound Transit 3 possibilities include more than \$40 billion of new construction ideas through the region, from Everett light rail to a potential Sounder commuter rail extension to DuPont.

The agency’s [funding plans](#) for Sound Transit 3 call for asking voters to approve a combination of new sales, motor-vehicle and property taxes that would cost a typical adult in the district about \$17 a month and bring in \$15 billion over 15 years.

Add in another \$11 billion from other sources — mainly existing taxes, federal money, bond issues and fare collection — and the agency would have \$26 billion to spend over the 15-year life of the tax.

Two other options — to extend the life of the tax to either 20 years or 25 years — would each make more new-project money available. The biggest commitment, the 25-year-plan, would plan for \$48 billion in revenues, enabling the agency — under current calculations — to build out possibly the entire wish list, if the money projections hold true.

The other major obstacle to Tacoma’s potential light-rail future is securing voter approval, which historically isn’t a sure bet.

The first Sound Transit 2 proposal lost in 2007 before a more modest version of it won in 2008. Pierce County’s voters cast a lower percentage of votes for it each time than did voters in King and Snohomish counties, the other two served by the agency.

The changing demographics of Tacoma, though, could have implications for how the city votes. In November, a [road-repair tax issue passed by a minuscule 22-vote margin](#), a milestone for a city that had gone 47 years since its voters last approved a spending measure to maintain city streets.

Sound Transit is also building its upcoming spending proposal for the November 2016 ballot, which like the successful 2008 proposal is widely expected to be a high-turnout election.

WHAT THE PROPOSAL WOULD BUILD

The Tacoma Link expansion along South 19th Street would serve the same route that Pierce Transit bus route 2 currently runs along, a corridor from downtown and the Hilltop neighborhood to a transportation center at Tacoma Community College.

Officials from Pierce Transit and TCC say they would welcome having streetcars serve Pierce Transit's second-busiest route, with an average of 2,846 boardings each weekday.

"If Sound Transit were to build light rail here, we would provide feeder service (connectivity) to those boarding locations along the route and put the remainder of our time back into service elsewhere in our system," Pierce Transit spokeswoman Rebecca Japhet wrote in an email.

The draft plan would build seven stations along South 19th Street, with the streetcar running in the center of a widened street from Martin Luther King Jr. Way to state Route 16, and in a separate right-of-way west of state Route 16, which it would cross on a separate bridge from the road.

Total estimated cost for the work: between \$642 million and \$687 million, Sound Transit says.

TCC President Sheila Ruhland said in a statement that bringing Tacoma Link west "would be a natural fit for our school," especially for students who could use it to travel to classes at the University of Washington Tacoma, which is on the existing line.

"This light rail project would be terrific for students and would greatly benefit both colleges," Ruhland said.

Extending the Link light rail line from the Tacoma Dome station to the Tacoma Mall would run about \$1 billion and use a mix of street-level, elevated and covered-tunnel railways.

The draft plan calls for two new elevated passenger stations, at Tacoma Mall and on South Pine Street, with a new 500-car parking garage at the Tacoma Mall station.

According to agency projections, the population within half a mile of these stations is expected to more than triple, to 10,400 residents from 3,300, in the next 25 years.

Unlike the trolley-line extension, building the regional light-rail spine out to the Tacoma Mall depends on a project that isn't yet a sure thing. Bringing Link rail south from Federal Way to the

Tacoma Dome station would come first, and the projected cost of \$3.4 billion to \$4.2 billion for that segment of train service could reduce the chances of bringing the inter-city trains deeper into Tacoma.

WHAT'S NEXT

Using studies released earlier this month, Sound Transit [has built a website](#) mapping out details and costs of these and other projects on the table for the Sound Transit 3 ballot proposal.

After a board vote tentatively set for March to set a draft list of projects for the ballot measure, it'll ask for formal citizen input to finalize the plan for the November election, Sound Transit spokesman Geoff Patrick said.

“We’re encouraging people to familiarize themselves with the options,” Patrick said.

U.S. Rep. Derek Kilmer, D-Gig Harbor, said Congress’ passage of a transportation bill helps enable the necessary long-range transportation planning to accommodate projected changes in the South Sound by providing “a predictable and stable partner” for Sound Transit and other regional agencies.

He cited the \$75 million federal slated to help Link’s Hilltop extension as an example that “makes Tacoma an even more vibrant place” and said he hopes federal agencies will embrace further opportunities for long-range infrastructure planning.

He was asked how ideological divides in Congress affect this goal.

“The reality is, transportation infrastructure investment has been, and in my view should continue to be, a bipartisan priority,” Kilmer said. “Getting people from place to place is not about moving left or moving to the right. It’s about moving forward rather than moving backward. Generally, I think, there’s a real appreciation for that.”

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NEWS

Sound Transit proposals could benefit Kent



A new parking garage for Sounder train commuters in Kent is part of a Sound Transit proposal for future projects that still need to be funded. — Image Credit: Kent Reporter, File Photo



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by STEVE HUNTER, Kent Reporter Courts, Government Reporter
Dec 30, 2015 at 12:41PM

Kent could see a new downtown parking garage for Sounder train riders and the expansion of light rail to South 272nd Street under a Sound Transit proposal.

The projects are part of the candidates for the ST3 ballot measure the agency's board plans to send to voters in November in an effort expand mass transit throughout the regional system between Tacoma and Everett with an estimated population growth of one million over the next 25 years.

The Sound Transit Board will narrow the list by March with a draft proposal and figure out by June how much to ask voters to approve increased taxes and fees to fund the projects.

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“To meet the mobility challenges of our rapidly growing region it is our job to work out the right level of investment and mix of projects for the public to consider,” said Sound Transit Board Chair and King County Executive Dow Constantine said in a media release. “The decisions we make over the coming year will shape our region for generations to come.”

The board at a recent workshop discussed proposals to put before voters, including a 15-year measure that could generate up to \$15 billion through new taxes and fees the Legislature in 2015 authorized Sound Transit to seek approval from voters. Those measures are:

- Property tax of up to 25 cents for each \$1,000 of assessed valuation (\$75 annually for a \$300,000 house). A property tax was identified as a way to establish a more progressive revenue source for regional transit investments that reduces reliance on the sales tax.
- Sales tax of up to an additional 0.5 percent (50 cents on a \$100 purchase).
- Motor vehicle excise tax (MVET) of up to 0.8 percent of vehicle value (\$80 annually on a \$10,000 vehicle).

Commuter trains are the primary way some Kent residents benefit directly from Sound Transit. An average of 1,131 riders board the train each weekday at Kent Station, according to Sound Transit documents.

Sounder trains travel weekday mornings and afternoons between Lakewood and Seattle with stops in South Tacoma, Tacoma, Puyallup, Sumner, Auburn, Kent and Tukwila. Sounder also serves select major weekend events such as Mariners and Seahawks games. Adult fares are between \$2.75 and \$5.25 depending on how far you travel.

The ST3 candidate projects include building a 450-stall parking garage in downtown Kent; expansion of station platforms to handle eight or 10 train cars rather than the current seven; and possibly increase operations to all day and on weekends.

Sound Transit already has the funds to expand light rail from SeaTac to Kent by 2023, with a station planned for east of Pacific Highway South near 30th Avenue South. Construction is expected to start in 2019.

The new proposal would extend the tracks another two miles along the west side of I-5 to South 272nd Street in Kent as well as to Tacoma. The agency also would build a 1,240-stall parking garage at the Star Lake site at South 272nd Street.

The extension of light rail to Star Lake, the building of the Kent Station parking garage and the expansion of station platforms to handle more rail cars each were part of Sound Transit 15-year funding package (ST2) approved by voters in 2008. But that \$17 billion package ran out of money to cover the Kent projects.

For more information about the proposed ST3 projects, go to soundtransit3.org.

Kent proposed ST3 projects:

Light rail:

- Extend tracks from Kent to Star Lake (South 272nd Street)
- 2-mile route would go along the west side of I-5 in a mixed elevated and at-grade guideway
- Parking garage at Star Lake Station with about 1,240 stalls
- Cost \$513-\$545 million

Sounder commuter train:

- New Kent Station parking garage with 450 stalls
- Cost \$36-\$39 million
- Expand train platforms at Kent Station and other stops
- Could handle eight cars rather than current seven

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- Cost \$98-\$105 million
- Expansion to 10 cars would cost about \$133 million
- Operate beyond current weekday peak mornings and afternoons
- Potential all-day service, i.e., every 30, 60 or 120 minutes
- Add weekend service, possibly every 90 minutes from 7:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m.
- Cost to be determined after more analysis

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[NEWS01](#)

Published: Tuesday, January 5, 2016, 12:01 a.m.

Big Issues | Agenda 2016

Light rail, congestion top list of transportation challenges



Andy Bronson / The Herald

Paul Roberts, vice chairman of Sound Transit, stands at Paine Field on Thursday. Roberts wants light rail to come to Everett to support a growing workforce “for the next 100 years.”

By [Jerry Cornfield](#)

Herald Writer

Traffic congestion will fuel another year of debate on how to get people to their destinations in faster, if not more predictable, fashion.

This year's biggest scrap in Snohomish County is likely to be whether voters decide [a 20-year-old promise to bring light rail to downtown Everett](#) is worth keeping — even it means paying higher taxes and waiting

another 20 years for the first train to arrive.

Back in the mid-90s leaders of the fledgling Sound Transit pledged to construct a light rail system connecting Everett with Seattle, Bellevue, Tacoma and SeaTac Airport.

There's money to get trains to Lynnwood by 2023 and its leaders are mapping out a \$15 billion service expansion that would include reaching Everett sometime after 2030.

Its fate depends on the electorate and the three men from Snohomish County who serve on the Sound Transit Board of Directors and who could influence the outcome.

This November, voters in Snohomish, King and Pierce counties are expected to consider a ballot measure, referred to as ST3, to fund the added service through a combination of higher taxes on property, retail sales and motor vehicles.

The agency board is in the midst of deciding what to build with the money, knowing their choices can sway the minds of voters.

That's where Snohomish County Executive Dave Somers, Everett Councilman Paul Roberts and Edmonds Mayor Dave Earling come in.

As the county's delegates on the board, they've been united in wanting trains to follow a route that stops near the Boeing Co. plant at Paine Field, then proceeds to Everett. It's a must-have route but one that [could cost about \\$2 billion more](#) than sending trains directly from Lynnwood to Everett along an I-5 alignment.

That's \$2 billion some political leaders in King County are eyeing to pay for additions in Ballard and West Seattle.

The Snohomish County trio realizes that compromise may be inevitable, given what's on the drawing board for other areas. Without a Paine Field stop in the mix, it could be a hard sell to voters.

Earling, an original Sound Transit board member from the early 1990s, said the agency must keep its promise to serve Everett before branching out.

“It's our duty, as a board, to stick to that commitment from many years ago,” Earling has said. “We think it's important to build the right system, as opposed to the cheapest system.”

Light rail won't be the only battleground for transportation this year.

Those four-month-old express toll lanes on I-405 will attract much scrutiny in 2016.

The law establishing the lanes on a 17-mile stretch between Lynnwood and Bellevue gives the state Department of Transportation until 2017 to work out the kinks before lawmakers can pull the plug.

Rep. Mark Harmsworth, R-Mill Creek, isn't in the mood to wait and is giving voice to a legion of frustrated drivers congregating online at [Stop405tolls.org](#).

Harmsworth, a member of the House Transportation Committee, is [pushing a bill](#) to get rid of one of the two toll lanes in each direction south of Highway 522, and open up the lanes across the full corridor to all drivers for free on nights and weekends.

Meanwhile, drivers throughout 2016 will endure bouts of congestion in the name of progress.

Weekend closures for I-5 are on the horizon as crews continue a nearly year-long project [to replace the aging bridge expansion joints on I-5](#) over a trio of soggy sloughs. With the bridge over Union Slough completed last fall, [the Steamboat and Ebey slough bridges](#) are now in the DOT's line of sight.

[Work on Highway 532 over the Davis Slough](#) — rebuilding the only bridge that connects Camano Island with the mainland — is [expected to wrap up](#) in early 2016 after delays.

Construction is expected to start in 2016 [on a pedestrian bridge from Grand Avenue down to the Everett waterfront](#). It's also going to carry pipelines across the steep slope, railroad tracks and West Marine View Drive, replacing deteriorated underground pipelines. Work is expected to last all year and into 2017.

Meanwhile, commuters who rely on Sounder trains hope this year will bring fewer cancellations due to tracks covered in mud. The last of six federally funded [slope stabilization projects are due to wrap up this year](#).

Herald writers Noah Haglund and Melissa Slager contributed to this report. Jerry Cornfield: 360-352-8623; jcornfield@heraldnet.com.

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Seattle Times, 1/21/16

http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/eastside/council-votes-to-endorse-transit-on-cross-kirkland-corridor/?utm_source=Morning+Brief&utm_campaign=cc6bed52db-Morning+Brief+1+21+2016&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1a3928a0f1-cc6bed52db-118969913

Council votes to endorse transit on Cross Kirkland Corridor

Originally published January 20, 2016 at 8:10 pm Updated January 21, 2016 at 7:40 am

The Kirkland City Council voted to endorse transit on the Cross Kirkland Corridor, over the objections of many residents who held “Recall The Council” signs.

By [Lynn Thompson](#)
Seattle Times staff reporter

The Kirkland City Council has voted to endorse transit on the Cross Kirkland Corridor as part of a [Sound Transit 3](#) package, despite objections from residents who want the corridor to remain a more wooded, natural trail.

The council voted 5-1 Monday night to include the Kirkland project in what could be a \$20 billion regional transportation ballot measure later this year, with taxes potentially stretching out until 2050 or beyond.

In letters to the Sound Transit board, the council recommended full funding for the light rail from Totem Lake to Bellevue and Issaquah. It calls for further study to determine the best transportation mode for the [Kirkland corridor](#), with bus rapid transit as one option.

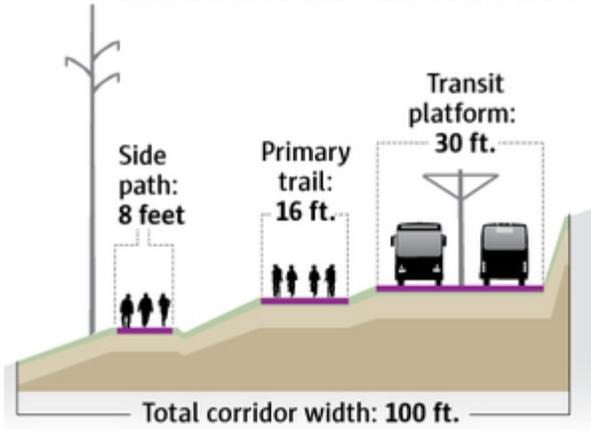
City officials said that with technology evolving and the Kirkland project likely to be far down on the project list, it wanted Sound Transit to take a flexible approach and work with the city on what might ultimately be built.

The council urged Sound Transit to ensure that any transit on the corridor have zero emissions and address concerns about noise, safety, parking and environmental impact. City officials say transit would run on only a portion of the corridor’s 100-foot-right-of-way, preserving the remainder as a bike and pedestrian trail.

That didn’t satisfy about 70 residents who held “Recall The Council” signs during the meeting and wore green to show their support for keeping the trail in a more natural state. Another 1,700 have signed an online petition opposing any transit on the corridor.

Some members of Save Our Trails acknowledged they might not have legal grounds for a recall, but said the signs were a way to show their displeasure.

Linking Totem Lake to Bellevue and beyond



Sources: King County, city of Kirkland
 MARK NOWLIN / THE SEATTLE TIMES

The Cross Kirkland Corridor currently is only a gravel trail, but the city of Kirkland voted to ask Sound Transit to add transit to a Sound Transit 3 package. Less

“There’s a strong feeling that this was railroaded through,” said Macgregor Miller, who opposes transit on the corridor. He said that the first city open house on the proposal came after the November elections, too late for residents to raise the trail as a campaign issue.

Kirkland bought its six-mile portion of the Eastside Rail Corridor and opened it to bikes and pedestrians a year ago.

The debate before the council mirrored the one that likely will engage the entire region as the immense cost of potentially extending light rail to Pierce and Snohomish counties and Redmond and Issaquah in King County is weighed against worsening traffic congestion and the lack of a coordinated, efficient transit system across the three-counties.

Kirkland Councilmember Toby Nixon cast the only no vote Monday, saying the potential ballot measure will be too expensive and benefit too few in Kirkland. He said the cost each year to Kirkland residents is estimated at \$24 million, or \$500 for every household for a tax measure that could extend for decades.

For the same money, he said, Kirkland could create a system of local shuttles that would serve every neighborhood, school, business center, transit center and park and ride, “making it far more convenient for people to leave their

cars at home.”

But Councilmember Shelley Kloba said the region is already paying a price in pollution, reduced productivity, time away from families and too few commuting choices.

“Regional cooperation is the only way we will get anything done,” she said.

Deputy Mayor Jay Arnold agreed, saying that while the sentiment of many residents seems to be to “do nothing” on the trail, the timeline of the Sound Transit 3 projects may be 40 years or more.

“Doing nothing for the next 40 years is not an option,” he said.

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MORNING FIZZ

City Calls on Sound Transit to Fund More Transit, Republicans Abandon McCleary Plan

Council sends letter to Sound Transit, Republicans send message to Democrats, and Olympia not interested in rent control.

1/26/2016 AT

BY [JOSH FEIT](#) • 9:20AM



1. The Seattle city council and mayor Ed Murray have sent [a letter to Sound Transit](#) outlining their priorities for the ST3 plan; Sound Transit is soliciting feedback from all local jurisdictions in the runup to a draft ST3 proposal due in March.

Most of Seattle's must-have list has been known for a while now. The letter, organized primarily by new city council member Rob Johnson and the mayor's office, calls for: a second downtown transit tunnel, light rail from downtown to West Seattle and

downtown to Ballard, new light rail stations on the existing voter-approved lines at Graham Street in

Southeast Seattle and 130th Street in North Seattle, and specific stations in South Lake Union and Interbay on the new lines. The letter also flags well-known Seattle priorities like bus rapid transit on Madison Street and land use planning that promotes “transit oriented development”—planning speak for dense, residential and commercial hubs wrapped around transit stations.

However, there’s a new bullet point (and the first one in the letter) that the mayor added and Johnson amended with specifics: “Early Transit Deliverables.”

“There’s no question people want light rail in the region,” Johnson says about ST3’s vision to build light rail out to Everett and Tacoma, “but there’s also no question people are feeling the pinch from missing transit on the pending light rail corridors [in Seattle].”

Johnson says Seattle is asking the ST3 plan to add rapid bus lines along the Downtown-to-West Seattle and Downtown-to-Ballard routes that light rail won’t serve for another decade (if voters pass ST3 this November.)

“In the past five years alone,” the letter says, “Seattle added 70,000 residents and 63,000 jobs. ... We face a reality that even under the best circumstances most of these light rail connections are more than a decade or two away, and there is a growing disconnect between the long-range vision of ST3 and the immediate transportation needs Seattle and our region face today. ... With this in mind, the City of Seattle requests that ST3 fund near-term transit...” Specifically, the letter goes on to call for, “Funding operation costs of bus rapid transit lines on future light rail corridors to a Link [light rail train] level of service frequency until light rail can be constructed in the corridor.”

Asked how much this would cost, Johnson referenced the current Madison Street BRT plan, one line, which is estimated to cost about \$150 million. Johnson says funding for stop-gap BRT along future light rail corridors should be funded by a combo of the city, the feds, Metro, and Sound Transit.

Johnson’s former transit advocacy group, Transportation Choices Coalition, along with a list of other transit, social justice, and green groups also sent [a letter to Sound Transit](#). The letter, signed by OneAmerica, the Cascade Bicycle Club, Puget Sound Sage, and TCC among others, calls for TOD focused on affordable housing, demands attention to multimodal access to stations (not just park and ride access for cars... “excessive spending on parking disproportionately

“

“Excessive spending on parking disproportionately benefits white people” the advocates letter states flat

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Seattle Times editorial, 1/29/16

<http://www.seattletimes.com/opinion/editorials/kirkland-city-council-on-board-for-transit-with-a-keen-eye-to-the-future/>

Kirkland City Council on board for transit, with a keen eye to the future

Originally published January 29, 2016 at 4:03 pm

Kudos to the Kirkland City Council for including transit in the future of the city's Cross Kirkland Corridor.

By [Seattle Times editorial board](#)
The Seattle Times

GIVE the Kirkland City Council credit for demonstrating a leadership quality all too rare at all levels of government: foresight.

A strong majority of the council voted to keep the city's options open for transit in the Cross Kirkland Corridor: "yes" to transit in a portion of the 100-foot-wide corridor, with the choice between bus rapid transit and light rail to be decided over time.

Asking Sound Transit to put Kirkland in the queue for planning and budgeting is huge. The city's intent is made clear to regional transit planners — and to local residents who want the corridor left solely for pedestrians and bikers.

City Council members are looking ahead for what is next for their community — its population of 86,000 is well beyond the sleepy, waterfront suburb of fond memories. Google's arrival, and its campus-expansion plans, are part of a positive civic dynamic.

Look at the change ahead with Kirkland's Parkplace redevelopment, off Central Way, near Peter Kirk Park. A blend of commercial and residential activity that is all about the future. It's another opportunity and demand for links to Kirkland's transit options.

The opening of Seattle's First Hill Streetcar makes the case for Kirkland doubters. Times change, and change takes time. The streetcar line was a decade in the making.

The Seattle metropolitan area is coming up on the half-century mark of its first ill-fated flirtation with a rail rapid-transit system. The federal money flew in other directions, traffic got ever nastier over the decades and the cost of transportation relief soared in price.

Kudos to the Kirkland City Council for looking ahead. The details remain to be settled, but the affirmation of commitment to transit in the city's corridor is a moment to be acknowledged.

Editorial board members are editorial page editor Kate Riley, Frank A. Blethen, Ryan Blethen, Brier Dudley, Mark Higgins, Jonathan Martin, Thanh Tan, William K. Blethen (emeritus) and Robert C. Blethen (emeritus).