

From Seattle Transit Blog, 5/12/15

<http://seattletransitblog.com/2015/05/12/the-eastside-needs-better-choices/>

The Eastside Needs Better Choices

May 12, 2015 at 7:30 am By [Dan Ryan](#)



ST Express 545 arriving at Evergreen Point. The busy SR 520 corridor is not on the draft priority list for high-capacity transit investments

Last Thursday, the Sound Transit Executive Board reviewed a [proposed draft project list](#) for the Sound Transit 3 ballot. On May 28, the full Board will consider and perhaps amend this list. After June 4, the public will be asked to comment on the draft project list, and the subsequent comment will guide the Board in further whittling down the list to a feasible proposal for ST3.

Sound Transit's Geoff Patrick explained yesterday that the public outreach will "ask people's views about the priority level for each project on the draft list, and to identify projects they think should be added or deleted". The public will not be specifically asked about projects that are not on the draft list. So while the door is not closed to members of the public who may point to their own priorities, the presented options will be the "starting point for the Board and public's conversation".

Predictably, the draft project list for Snohomish, Pierce and South King is focused on completing the spine. All of their projects are just alternate alignments for doing so. Snohomish' goals will

be hard to achieve without large revenue transfers from elsewhere. The draft list includes costly projects such as alignments to Everett via Paine Field and a further extension to North Everett.

North King has ten projects to consider; all are light rail and would serve West Seattle or Ballard. Mayor Ed Murray would like to add Madison BRT to the list. The quality of the eventual outcomes in North King will depend on how these goals are balanced.

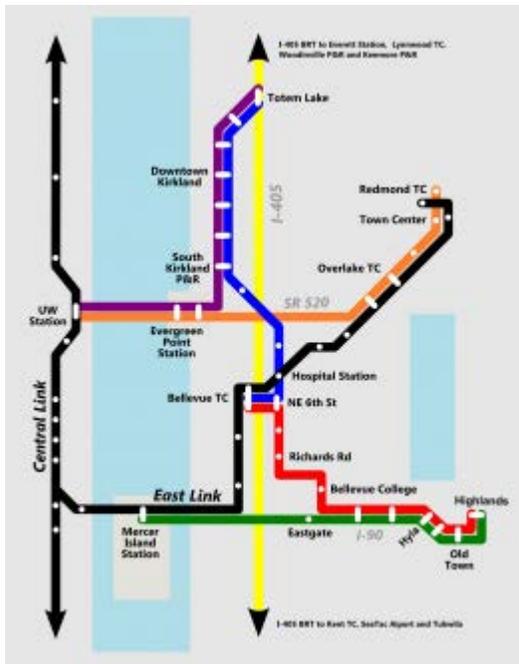
East King has just three options on the draft list. These are (i) the Eastlink extension to Redmond, (ii) I-405 BRT from Lynnwood to Seatac, and (iii) a light rail line from Totem Lake to Issaquah via the ERC and I-90.

The first two are highly likely to be in the final plan, and I endorsed their inclusion along with the [BRISK](#) BRT network last week. The last cannot, because even the maximum revenue authority sought by Sound Transit won't support all three. The high-end cost estimate for Totem Lake to Issaquah rail is \$2.67B (vs. about \$900M each for East Link and I-405 BRT). With Eastside revenues well under \$4B, Sound Transit could build to either Totem Lake OR Issaquah, but not both. Depending on the size of the final revenue authorization and competing demands from Everett, they may not build either end.

Rail lines to either Totem Lake or Issaquah are obviously over-sized solutions for travel demand. Either line, rather than a BRT network connecting much of the Eastside, would explicitly reject an 'abundant access' approach to transit planning. Sound Transit's own corridor studies showed both Totem Lake and Issaquah could be served by BRT with [no loss of ridership](#), and for much lower cost.

We do not know why the less expensive BRT options for Totem Lake/Issaquah are not on the list. Neither do we know why BRT options on SR 520 are not on the list. Much Eastside transit demand is cross-lake. While cost estimates for rail on SR 520 were quite high, BRT service that would leverage existing HOV-3 lanes is inexpensive and would improve the transit experience for many riders.

The corridor study revealed a rail line to Issaquah would be hobbled by poor connections. Responding to concerns about interference with East Link operations and environmental impacts to Mercer Slough, the [proposed LRT options](#) did not interline with East Link, but instead followed alignments to the east. This meant the only connection to East Link could be at Hospital Station. Riders to both Bellevue and Seattle would make transfers involving out-of-direction travel, ludicrously so for Seattle travel. While some have [suggested](#) better alignments may be possible, there's no indication that Sound Transit staff have figured out how to solve this challenge, and it would probably be more expensive. If unresolved, rail to Issaquah wouldn't even serve Issaquah riders well.



More transit options for more people

Rail to Kirkland is inferior to BRT in at least two ways, other than the unnecessary cost. One is the last-mile challenge in downtown. While there are necessary compromises in getting buses to serve downtown well, rail cannot do so at all except with expensive tunneling. A second challenge is that rail could only serve travel to Bellevue. The more popular Kirkland-Seattle transit market would continue to be served by buses on surface streets, or riders would be forced to transfer from rail to bus at South Kirkland. BRT on the corridor could serve both travel markets.

The Executive Board is appropriately concerned that the draft list not be filled up with more expensive options. They are, after all, trying to get to a shorter and more affordable list. But BRT is the affordable option for transit to more places on the Eastside, developing transit corridors that could be served by rail in the future when demand warrants. Last week, I wrote at length about one potential network ([here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)). The BRISK network would include five BRT lines covering the Eastside, in addition to I-405 BRT and an Eastlink extension to Redmond. The entire package, by Sound Transit’s own numbers, fits comfortably within the requested revenue authority. The Board needs to ask why a single rail line, serving much less of the Eastside with compromised station locations, is the option that deserves to advance to the next level.

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From Seattle Transit Blog, 7/24/15

<http://seattletransitblog.com/2015/07/24/sound-transit-chooses-i5-fed-way/>

Sound Transit Chooses I-5 for Federal Way Link

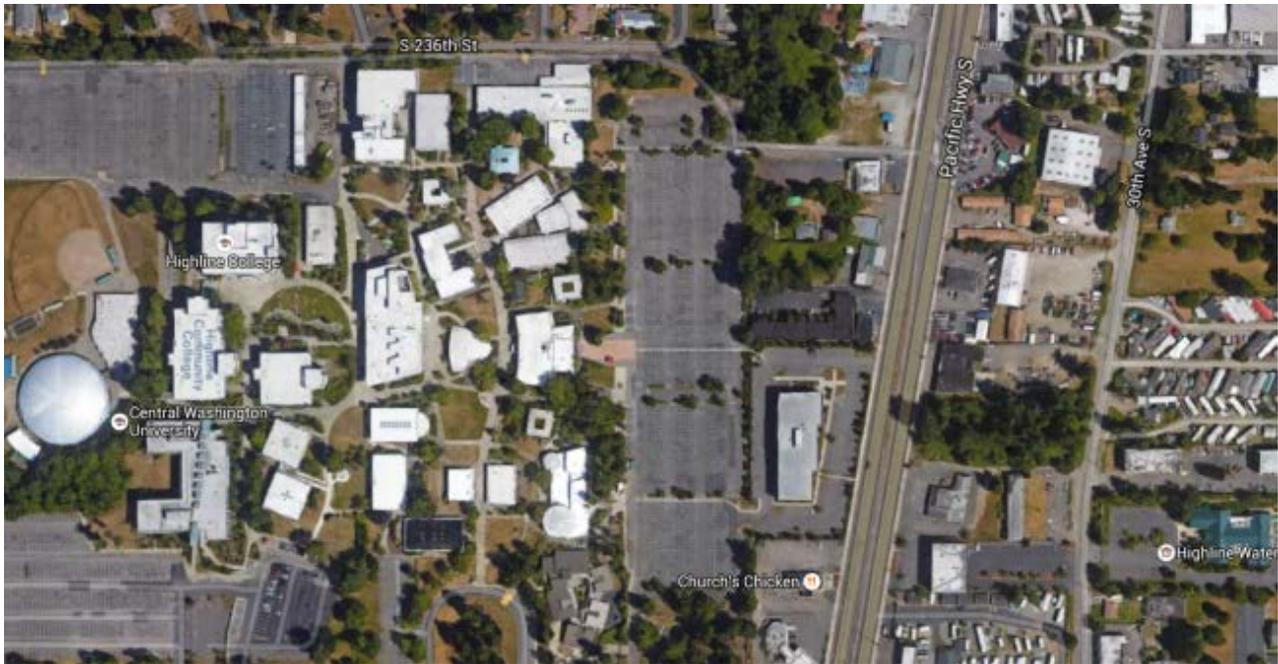
July 24, 2015 at 12:00 pm By [Zach Shaner](#)

[CORRECTION: The original post used an outdated TOD estimate to claim a 60% loss between the alternatives. With the amendments yesterday and updated totals, the true reduction in TOD potential is 29%. I regret the error.]

On Thursday afternoon, the Sound Transit Board voted unanimously to recommend I-5 as the preferred alignment for Link from Angle Lake to Federal Way Transit Center. You can watch the Board discussion beginning at 2:02:05. I-5 will now have preferred status heading into the FEIS, after which the Board will make a final decision sometime in 2016. There were 4 amendments, the first of which chose I-5 itself while the next 3 served particular needs at each of the station areas at Highline, S. 272nd, and Federal Way TC.

Critically, the cities of SeaTac, Des Moines, Kent, and Federal Way were unified both in their opposition to SR-99 and their support of I-5. Board Members McCarthy, Butler, Roberts, and Earling all talked at length about pleasing the local jurisdictions, but mentions of the actual utility of light rail service on I-5 vis-à-vis SR 99 were curiously absent. In defending her vote, McCarthy said she'd "be hard pressed to go against" those communities, and that "all the metrics" support I-5.

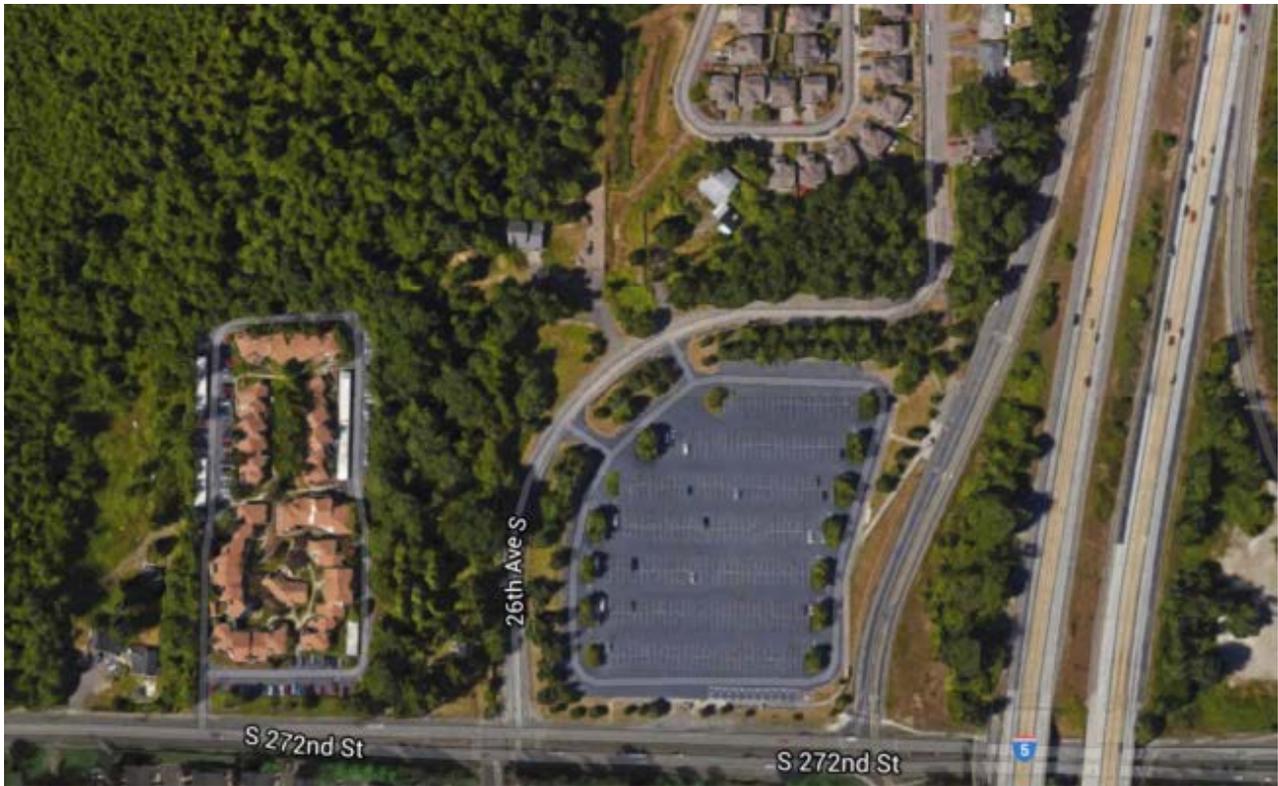
But other than political expedience and capital cost – I-5 saves approximately \$300m on the \$1.5-\$1.8B project – what metrics could possibly favor I-5? Sound Transit chose an alignment that serves fewer riders, that [contradicts its own TOD policy](#) and has ~~60%~~ 29% less TOD potential, ignores the preponderance of public comment and the pleas of Highline for direct access, has fewer stations, worsens walksheds, does little for intra-South King mobility, **and is no faster** than an SR-99 alignment. From an agency in the business of maximizing mobility, this decision is a disappointing failure to learn from [the mistakes of Denver](#), Portland, and our own Lynnwood Link when it comes to freeway rail alignments. Sadly, it also continues to treat South King County as a pass-through community, rather than a destination in its own right.



Highline Community College station area. The station will likely be east of SR 99 near 30th Ave S, roughly 1/4 mile walk to the college. Board members spoke of building a “world-class, UW style” bridge to get students across the 6 lanes of SR 99.

The 3 subsequent amendments sought to mitigate the difficulties they had created just minutes earlier by choosing I-5. **Amendment 2** provided for continued analysis of an immediate *deviation away from I-5* to Highline, with analysis of station locations between 30th Avenue and SR 99, including on the west side of SR 99 (requiring a Rube Goldberg-esque 3 crossings of SR 99 between Angle Lake and Highline). **Amendment 3** directed Sound Transit to deviate from I-5 to locate the Federal Way station on the east side of the transit center near 23rd Avenue South. **Amendment 4** requires Sound Transit to undertake an Access Study of the 272nd/Star Lake Station, a study necessitated by the action the board had just taken to worsen station access by choosing I-5.

Against their own misgivings, O’Brien supported I-5 “out of solidarity” while Chair Constantine conceded that “a majority of the Board has a valid point” despite his own initial preference for SR 99. Mayor Murray was not present to vote.



The future Star Lake station area, approximately 1/2 mile from SR 99.

The doublespeak from South King County boardmembers in particular was disappointing. Long vocal about the ‘promises made’ to get their piece of the rail pie, they also described the ‘devastating impact’ the train would have if it were located anywhere near anyone. Echoing a McDonalds owner who in public comment decried Link’s potential impact to his drive-through customers, County Councilmember Peter von Reichbauer argued for the preservation of the strip mall sprawl of SR-99 and the low-wage retail jobs that prevail there:

“There is so much passion coming out of Highline...[your advocacy for a station] has had an impact...and these amendments reflect your deep concerns. But we recognize that the demographics of the college have changed, and their needs have changed. **But to me there’s no better social program than a job**, and the displacement that would occur along 99 if we [build along 99] would affect my district dramatically. We’ve seen large corporations leaving South King County for Seattle, and the displacement that would occur for many small businesses would be devastating for our communities.”

Councilmember Phillips pushed back, even though he too voted yes:

“You start to ask yourself, ‘why don’t we just continue down 99 to Highline?’...When we start to zig-zag to serve interests along the way, we start to lose sight of the overall approach to what we’re trying to do, and **riders will ask**, why are we zigzagging? There is a system view of this we need to be taking.”

So where does this leave us? There seems to be a clear process lesson for advocates, namely that organizing is far more important than making a better argument, and that absent coordinated efforts to make the case on the ground, anti-urban inertia will continue to rule the day. It becomes difficult not to be cynical about Sound Transit's corridor studies, which seem to exist to provide a veneer of rigor over what is plainly a political process. To achieve better outcomes, we have to organize and show up.

But as [I've argued before](#), Link's southward march needs a coherent mobility vision that focuses on mobility *within* the subareas they serve. A political goal of regional connectivity cannot and should not be divorced from the cold math of who can access stations, where they are going, and how long it their trips will take. Whose trips would Link make better, and how? A freeway alignment would be more defensible if it provided faster trips than prevailing alternatives, but Link won't: both SR 99 and I-5 alignments will be 15-25 minutes slower than existing express buses from Federal Way to downtown, and ~10 minutes slower from Star Lake to downtown (though either option improves trip times from downtown to Highline compared to current Metro service). Sometimes there are unavoidable tradeoffs between providing competitive long-distance trips and maximizing local development and connectivity. But if an I-5 alignment does neither, what problem is the Sound Transit Board trying to solve?

From Seattle Weekly, 7/30/15

<http://www.seattleweekly.com/home/959888-129/lawmakers-just-put-sound-transit-into>

Lawmakers Just Put Sound Transit Into the Education Business

By Jerry Cornfield Thu., Jul 30 2015 at 09:31AM

Sound Transit got all it asked for and more than it wanted from state lawmakers this year.

Its leaders sought and obtained permission to put their next phase of expansion known as ST3 and the buffet of taxes to pay for it in front of voters.

This is the \$15 billion undertaking Sound Transit says will enable it to make good on its promise to provide light rail service to Everett and Tacoma, and possibly West Seattle and Ballard as well.

Voters in Snohomish, King and Pierce counties could decide as early as November 2016 whether to fund this added service through a combination of higher taxes on property, retail sales and motor vehicles.

But if it's approved, Sound Transit will be putting millions of those new tax dollars into building affordable housing and funding schools in those counties before any light rail trains reach West Seattle Junction.

That's what state lawmakers demanded of Sound Transit in exchange for fulfilling the regional transit authority's request.

If that sounds like a negotiation, it really wasn't. Lawmakers didn't consider any counteroffers. It was take-it-or-leave-it so Sound Transit took it.

Now, here's what must happen if voters approve the ST3 plan and taxing authority:

Sound Transit must put \$20 million into a revolving loan fund to finance affordable housing projects. Sound Transit, which will administer the fund and cut the loan checks, must ante up \$4 million a year for five consecutive years. It must start depositing that money within three years of voter approval.

Sound Transit must plug a \$518 million hole in the state's general fund with payments starting in 2017 and lasting through at least 2031.

Those dollars will go into a new Puget Sound taxpayer accountability account. They will be doled out to Snohomish, King and Pierce counties to distribute "for educational services to

improve educational outcomes” in early learning, elementary and secondary schools, and colleges.

Counties, which aren't in the education business, must figure out where to send the money.

Right now there are no rules on where the money will go so it could go to public, private or parochial schools or colleges. The only condition is the “educational services” occur within the Sound Transit boundaries.

The two directives emerged in the heat of negotiations among lawmakers on a statewide transportation package and resolved a seemingly irreclaimable dispute on what to do with sales tax the state pays on road projects.

That money now goes into the general fund to pay for schools, among other things. The House Democrats wanted to keep it going there but Senate Republicans sought to divert it to transportation projects.

The majority parties in the two chambers found a compromise — Sound Transit.

As part of the transportation package Gov. Jay Inslee signed into law earlier this month, the state will begin diverting sales tax paid on new road projects in 2019. This will siphon an estimated \$518 million from the general fund through 2013.

Sound Transit must backfill those dollars. To do that, Sound Transit will now start paying sales tax on labor costs associated with its expansion projects. That will make those projects a little more expensive but it's the political price the agency leaders felt they had to pay.

“We didn't ask for that,” said Everett City Councilman Paul Roberts who is the vice chairman of the Sound Transit board of directors.

“It was the cost of doing business. This gives us the chance to build the system voters approved and expect,” Roberts said.

Political reporter Jerry Cornfield's blog, The Petri Dish, is at www.heraldnet.com. Contact him at 360-352-8623; jcornfield@heraldnet.com and on Twitter at @dospueblos

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**Matt
Driscoll**

JULY 17, 2015

Getting Sound Transit light rail all the way to the Tacoma Mall? It's a possibility



With the Legislature having given Sound Transit the flexibility to ask voters in November 2016 for \$15 billion, it's time for us to start fantasizing about the possibilities.

PETER HALEY - Staff file, 2013

BY MATT DRISCOLL

Staff writer



Dream big, Tacoma.

Now is the time.



Drew Perine - Staff photographer

With the Legislature having held up its end of the bargain, giving Sound Transit the flexibility to ask voters in November 2016 for the full \$15 billion in new revenue that it will take to make the next regional transit package everything it can be, it's time to start fantasizing about the possibilities.

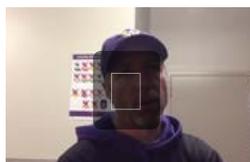
Some things are a given. Any package must include the long-awaited light rail connection between Sea-Tac airport and Tacoma. As traffic continues to worsen on Interstate 5 with no remedy in sight, completing the region's light rail "spine" — from Everett to Tacoma — is essential.

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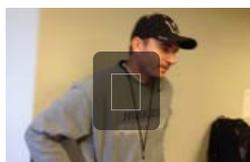
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VIDEO: UW offensive coordinator Jonathan Smith

But there might be a chance to do more.

What about taking light rail not just from Sea-Tac to the Tacoma Dome, but all the way to the Tacoma Mall? Sounds cool, doesn't it?

What about extending Tacoma's Link all the way to Tacoma Community College? That'd be nice.

What about more Sounder service, longer trains with greater capacity, or more express buses? Couldn't hurt, right?

It's a very Tacoma thing to expect the worst and take a believe-it-when-you-see-it approach to big ideas. And there's a historical precedent that backs up the skepticism. I get it, and I've been guilty of it.

But if the 2016 ballot measure dubbed ST 3 is to be successful next year, carrying the vote in the urban center of Tacoma — in a big way — will be part of that. And that means giving Tacoma voters not just something to get excited about, but something to get *really excited* about.

So let's entertain those transit dreams of grandeur, at least for a moment.

According to Andrew Austin, who lives in Tacoma and serves as policy director for the Transportation Choices Coalition, talk of "pushing" the conversation about how far light rail can be expanded is an idea that has been "percolating" recently among local Sound Transit board members.

Among other things, getting light rail all the way to the Tacoma Mall would help realize the city's vision for the area as a regional growth center, which includes creating a dense population hub that's rich with jobs and

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development built around transportation choices.

"I think it has some real legs," Austin says of the idea.

That's one of the reasons getting light rail all the way to the Tacoma Mall was included in the Sound Transit long range plan last year.

But as Austin, and Tacoma City Councilman Ryan Mello tell it, perhaps "long range" won't be as long range as some assumed.

"It's relatively new aspiration," Mello explains. He says extending light rail to the mall is something transit advocates have been talking about quietly for the last "two or three years," but, as far as the general public is concerned, it's "a new conversation for most."

"I think it's very legitimate," Mello says of the conversation. "But it will be a heavy lift."

That heavy lifting is already underway.

First, the Sound Transit board must decide just how much money it will ask voters for next year. Every indication is it will be the full \$15 billion. Deciding which projects will be included is part of that calculation.

While Sound Transit's subarea equity guidelines suggest Pierce County won't be left out to dry, as do the politics of getting a major regional transit package passed by voters, it's safe to say that with Seattle, the Eastside, Everett and others also jockeying for their projects, there won't be enough cash for every jurisdiction to get everything it wants.

The good news for Pierce County is that our subarea has been generating solid sales tax returns and slightly outperforming

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expectations. This means that even after the cost of getting light rail from south of the airport to Tacoma, we *should* have some money to play with.

Which is where goals like taking it all the way to the Tacoma Mall come into play. Soon, local Sound Transit board members will be tasked with vetting and prioritizing the regional possibilities — from Tacoma-centric ideas to proposals like high-capacity bus service to east Pierce County.

They'll then need to sell the worth and potential of those projects to the full Sound Transit board.

Mello tells me he and Mayor Marilyn Strickland recently took Seattle City Councilman and Sound Transit board member Mike O'Brien on a guided tour of T-Town, beginning the process of doing just that. O'Brien probably won't be the last Sound Transit board member to get such treatment. The excursion was important, Mello says, so O'Brien "could really wrap his brain around our projects."

"It was very well received," Mello says. "He has a much better understanding of the opportunity."

By early next year we should know exactly which projects will be included in ST 3.

Until then, when it comes to light rail, perhaps it's the sky — and not necessarily the Tacoma Dome station — that's the limit.

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From Seattle Transit Blog, 8/17/15

<http://seattletransitblog.com/2015/08/17/south-king-countys-st3-comments/>

South King County's ST3 Comments

August 17, 2015 at 7:45 am By [Zach Shaner](#)



Kent Station – Wikimedia

Two weeks ago Martin wrote at length – and then our readers commented at a far greater length – about [Seattle's ST3 input](#), featuring a new alignment proposal that attempted to knit together Downtown, SLU, LQA, and Ballard. As Martin noted at the time, the way the Federal Way alignment process played out reiterated how crucial jurisdictional feedback is to the broader politics of transit expansion. So over the next week or two, we'll take a brief look [at every city or agency letter](#) submitted to Sound Transit as a part of the Draft Priority Project List feedback that will inform the System Plan that will shape the ST3 ballot measure that will go before voters next year. Phew, process!

Auburn: Auburn spent the bulk of their letter addressing parking at Auburn Station. Mayor Nancy Backus notes that Auburn has about 1 parking stall for every 2 Sounder riders, or 633 parking stalls for 1,300 daily riders. The city is fearful both of the impacts of 6,000 new Black Diamond residents, and of the coming shift of Weyerhaeuser employees from Federal Way to Seattle. The letter states that Auburn's support of additional Sounder runs is contingent on the prior provision of new structured parking as consistent with Sound Transit's Station Access work from ST2.

Mayor Backus also called out Auburn's financial support of Pierce Transit Route 497, costing the city \$300,000 per year and reducing parking demand by 90 stalls per day, while also acknowledging that this expenditure compares favorably to the \$4M that would be required to build parking for 90 new cars. She asks for Sound Transit become a "full financial partner" in funding Route 497, similar to Sound Transit's funding of Route 596 between Bonney Lake and the Sumner.

ST Express goes largely unmentioned except for a request to see more details before promising either support or opposition.

Burien: Mayor Lucy Krakowiak primarily lamented Burien's possible exclusion from HCT projects in ST3, twice saying that her community's votes for the eventual plan would be at risk if Burien lacks projects. The letter contains few specifics about what Burien would want, other than stating general support for 2 ideas: "a rib on the spine to connect westward to Burien" and/or the Downtown-West Seattle-White Center-Burien-Tukwila-Renton line that ST included in the recent Long Range Plan.

Des Moines: After beginning by asking for S. 272nd St to be built with existing funds, Public Works Director Daniel Brewer made an emphatic argument for quantity over quality, saying that, "Extending the system south as fast as possible using lower-cost alignments and station locations should be relatively high on the Board's priority project list...and this should be a higher priority than system expansion north or east or more slowly developing an enhanced system with more stations." Yet after going all-in on cheap LRT, the letter then says that infill stations should be studied in South King County, despite an I-5 alignment choice that largely precludes such stations, or at least greatly reduces their potential.

Kent: While similarly concerned about parking and access at Kent Station, Kent's letter struck me as having both a more realistic and broadly transit-supportive tone compared to Auburn. The letter calls for increased Sounder service (especially mid-day/off-peak), supports platform extensions to accommodate 8-car trains, and supports Link through and beyond the Midway area to Federal Way. The letter recognizes that light rail is "just one piece of the puzzle" and calls for more bus service, both local and express, throughout the valley.

SeaTac: Mayor Mia Gregerson's letter made 5 requests of Sound Transit:

- More parking at Tukwila International Boulevard Station. The letter claims that hide-and-ride behavior is negatively impacting SeaTac's residential neighborhoods, and also relays

the SeaTac council's belief that the opening of Angle Lake will only induce parking demand rather than reduce pressure on Tukwila, necessitating further parking there.

- Building the spine all the way to Tacoma Mall.
- Expanding feeder service to SeaTac from West Seattle and Burien.
- Consideration that any West Seattle LRT line be extended to Burien and SeaTac.
- Building Boeing Access Road Station.

Tukwila: Mayor Jim Haggerton requested the inclusion of 3 projects: Boeing Access Road Station, I-405 BRT from Lynnwood to SeaTac, and an I-405 BRT alignment that serves Tukwila Sounder Station. The city attached their own independent analysis of Boeing Access Road station, claiming it would boost Museum of Flight visits by 25% and that the station would attract 1,400 riders per day, which they note 'exceeds ridership numbers at other existing stations'.

You [can read all the letters here](#), and look out for upcoming articles on Snohomish, Pierce, and East King as well.

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Published: Tuesday, September 1, 2015, 12:01 a.m.

Sound Transit's wish list of Snohomish County projects grows

By [Jerry Cornfield](#)

Herald Writer

Sound Transit has beefed up the list of Snohomish County projects it may pursue in its next phase of expansion.

Delivering light-rail service to Everett continues to be agency leaders' top priority for Snohomish County in the \$15 billion expansion known as Sound Transit 3, or ST3 for short.

Last week the agency Board of Directors [made several additions to the roster](#) of potential projects in the county including building a 1,000-stall parking facility at Everett Station and new parking structures at future Link rail stations in Lynnwood and Mountlake Terrace.

Also tacked on for consideration is a study on extending light rail service along State Highway 522 and providing bus rapid transit service between a future rail station on I-5 and the UW Bothell campus.

Not every one of these items is assured of making it into the final ST3 plan expected to be on the ballot in November 2016. Voters at that time will be asked to approve the plan and [the increases in sales tax, property tax and car-tab fees](#) needed to pay for it.

In the next few months [each project on the 'candidate' list will be evaluated](#) on such criteria as cost to build and maintain, projected ridership that might be generated and other benefits and risks it poses.

The agency board could begin as early as December to whittle down the list and may take until next summer to settle on what will wind up in the ballot measure.

"It's not like any decisions have been made," said Paul Roberts, an Everett city councilman and vice chairman of the Sound Transit board. "They've all been put into the bag of things to look at for ST3."

Leaders in Everett and Snohomish County, including Roberts, [have made a strong push](#) for a light-rail route that would serve Paine Field and Everett Station, then continue north to the area around Everett Community College and Providence Regional Medical Center Everett.

The board also wants analysis done of two other routes between Lynnwood and Everett Station. One would follow I-5 and the other would travel along I-5, Highway 99 and Evergreen Way. Only one route will be specified in the ballot measure, Roberts said.

"I want to make sure that we get to Everett. If we don't get to Everett it will be tough to get ST3 passed," Roberts said.

The light rail additions aren't likely to get built until the 2030s, if the schedule holds.

Sound Transit is on track [to begin constructing light rail service to Lynnwood](#) in 2018 and be completed in 2023 under the last voter-approved expansion. The new segment would include stops at the Mountlake Terrace Transit Center, Northeast 185th Street in Shoreline and 145th Street in Seattle. It's predicted to carry 63,000 to 74,000 riders each

weekday by 2035, with a Lynnwood-to-Seattle trip taking an average of 28 minutes.

Potential ST3 projects include adding parking at the station on 236th Street in Mountlake Terrace and constructing crossings on I-5 for buses and vanpools to reach rail stations at 164th Street SW and 128th Street SW — should those stations be built.

Service on the Highway 522 corridor is a significant addition to the ST3 list.

The board wants to consider bus rapid transit on 145th Street between the station at I-5 and Highway 522, continuing on to UW Bothell.

During the Aug. 21 meeting, the board also padded the list of potential projects in King and Pierce counties.

They did so without any controversy. Their mood may change when it comes time to settle on the final components of the ballot measure.

“There is a big demand for service,” Roberts said. “It is time for us to look at the Puget Sound region as a region. That means Everett to Tacoma to Redmond and everywhere in between.”

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To accommodate region's growth, Paine Field should be part of the flight plan

Originally published September 19, 2015 at 4:03 pm | Updated September 23, 2015 at 5:31 pm



Paine Field in Everett, pictured here in 2008, is increasingly part of the discussion for development as a regional commercial airport. (Mark Harrison/The Seattle Times)

With Sea-Tac fast approaching its maximum capacity, now is the time for the state and the

Puget Sound region to begin discussing where to add more passenger-airport capacity.

By **Seattle Times editorial board**

The Seattle Times



Sea-Tac International Airport is the fastest-growing major airport in the country, leaping ahead of its growth forecasts. It's projected to reach maximum capacity in 2034 — or sooner if its recent, torrid growth continues.

Last year, the number of passengers boarding and disembarking airplanes grew 7.7 percent to 37.5 million, a rate more than double the national average. Just through this July, it's up another 13.5 percent.

Adding airport capacity — and making sure we don't get stuck waiting on the tarmac like we are on the freeway — is not a far-off problem. Regional leaders may take a decade or more to reach a consensus on where and how to add additional capacity. Navigating inevitable legal challenges and building that capacity might add another decade to the schedule.

If we start the conversation now, additional airport capacity might be ready around the time Sea-Tac is completely maxed out.

Remember, the region took 20 years to deliberate and build Sea-Tac's third runway after it became apparent that additional capacity was needed.



Now, seven years after that project was completed, the airport's operator is in building mode. The Port of Seattle this year is beginning \$1.9 billion worth of upgrades and capacity improvements.

Topping that list are a new international-arrivals facility that will cost more than \$600 million and a \$521 million expansion

Sea-Tac's growth takes off

Sea-Tac International Airport is the fastest-growing major airport in the U.S. and could approach capacity in the years to come.



Source: Federal Aviation Administration

KELLY SHEA / THE SEATTLE TIMES

of the north concourse, adding eight new gates.

Also planned is the replacement of Sea-Tac's center runway and construction of a new, high-speed baggage-handling system expected to cost \$321 million.

“ A fully functioning airport system is essential to the continued success of Washington's trade-dependent economy.” □

The Port will also be looking to expand to the north and south, potentially relocating maintenance hangars and cargo warehouses to accommodate its growth.

Even with all this remodeling, Sea-Tac could reach capacity in as little as six to 10 years at current growth rates, Port of Seattle Chief Executive Ted Fick recently told The Times editorial board. The current pace is likely to ease up soon. But demand for more airport capacity will continue to rise, especially with Delta Air Lines using Sea-Tac for an international hub.

Connecting flights

Among Sound Transit 3's proposals is a loop connecting Paine Field. In addition to reaching Boeing facilities, it would create a rail link between the two largest airports in the Seattle area.

Boeing Field in Seattle's midsection is not an option for a major expansion because its runway alignment with Sea-Tac creates air-traffic conflicts. That leaves Paine Field in Everett as the most likely candidate.

"There will be a point in time where that's probably the next phase," Fick acknowledged.

Paine Field was built in the 1930s to be a regional transportation hub. It was used by the military before it became an industrial center in the 1960s.

Neighboring communities allowed to develop around Paine Field bitterly oppose passenger service there, although the Federal Aviation Administration decided in 2012 that service wouldn't cause significant harm.

The potential will be tested by a contract the Snohomish County Council approved in March. A New York company, Propeller Airports, could build and operate a small terminal for up to 23 passenger flights per day. Propeller is still lining up financing and airline customers.

The project also faces legal challenges by an opposition group and the cities of Mukilteo and Edmonds, offering a preview of the hurdles the region will face when Sea-Tac is full.

Almost nobody wants a nearby airport to expand — remember the battles over the third runway? But Sea-Tac has finite space



and more people are moving, visiting and doing business in the area.

Snohomish County alone is expected to



Source: Sound Transit

KELLY SHEA / THE SEATTLE TIMES

grow by



200,000 people over the next two decades. Consider how many of those people will travel on Interstate 5 to and from Sea-Tac.

The Sound Transit 3 wishlist includes a light-rail extension to Paine Field. That's a smart move, not just to reach Boeing and other employers but also to prepare for potential airport expansion. It could create options similar to what travelers have in the Bay Area, which has rail connections to the Oakland and San Francisco airports.

The Port of Seattle and the FAA should also address the region's long-range needs for airport capacity when they revise Sea-Tac's airport master plan over the next year. The new plan is likely to call for a new terminal and up to 45 new gates, but it should look at additional growth options, including passenger service at other airports in the region.

National growth

Airport operations growth rates for core airports, FY 2013-2040



Source: Federal Aviation Administration
KELLY SHEA / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Gov. Jay Inslee, the Legislature and the state Department of Transportation should also move major-airport expansion planning off the back burner. A starting point could be to refresh the Long-Term

Air Transportation Study done for then-

Gov. Chris Gregoire in 2009. It warned of the coming capacity crunch, but was overshadowed by the recession.

The still-relevant study said the state's airport system is threatened by land-use encroachment, limited resources and "a lack of clarity as to the state's role in helping it survive."

It also said the region has a critical need for long-range planning and bold leadership to support future airport demand.

A fully functioning airport system is essential to the continued success of Washington's trade-dependent economy. Let's start discussing how and where to add capacity before it's a crisis so we can do this job right.

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



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