



REPRESENTATIVE EDWARD B. MURRAY

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October 20, 2005

Sound Transit Expert Review Panel
401 Second Avenue S, Suite 560
Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Expert Review Panel,

I am writing to express my concern regarding decisions by the Sound Transit Board on the issue of excluding the First Hill Station from Sound Transit's plans to bring light rail to Capitol Hill and the University of Washington.

First Hill is a pre-eminent transit market. 22,000 people work on First Hill making it a major regional destination. This stop would service 3 major hospitals, a university, and a dense residential center with low car ownership. After downtown and the University district, it is the third largest economic center in the city. Under serving this area of rich transit ridership undermines the value of the overall regional transit system.

Sound Transit says that it recognizes First Hill's importance. Nevertheless, the Board has decided to drop the First Hill station, because of the financial and construction risks of building a station 215 feet below ground. With the elimination of First Hill station, there will be only a single station between Westlake and the Montlake cut. In the Draft EIS, at least three stations were under consideration. Sound Transit has investigated other station locations in the area and rejects those options because they don't serve the First Hill ridership adequately or there is too much overlap with the Capitol Hill station.

Serving First Hill from a station on Pike or Pine combined with a relocated Capitol Hill station solves problems of overlap and provides greater service than a single light rail station in these transit-rich neighborhoods.

Sound Transit needs to make decisions that reflect the long-term use of the system. While the location of the First Hill station may pose higher-than-desired financial risks now, eliminating the station poses extraordinarily high ridership risks in the future -- and the future is a long, long time.

The task that you have been given is to review ST's Phase Two. Now that the First Hill station has been dropped from phase one, service to First Hill must be a priority in Phase Two. No destination in Phase Two serves the number of riders that Sound Transit is forsaking on First Hill. Indeed, any serious proposal to serve First Hill will be beyond the scope of ST's Phase One plan.

Sound Transit is currently investigating ways of serving First Hill transit riders, including shuttle service or a spur tunnel from Capitol Hill. Effective service to First Hill deserves a major investment, not simply shuttle bus service from Capitol Hill.

Taking this into consideration, questions that would be appropriate for the ERP to investigate would be:

- Should inadequate service between Westlake and the Montlake cut be addressed in Sound Transit Phase Two?
- What are the systemwide ridership impacts (including Phase 2) of dropping First Hill? Do Sound Transit's models adequately measure the value of First Hill to the system?
- Examine the cost and ridership assumptions underlying the options being considered for First Hill service. How could the proposed investments maximize the utility of the service to the entire system.

In closing, I want to reiterate my belief that the strength of a high capacity transit system lies in its ability to move people to destinations within the city and among urban centers. First Hill should be one of these regional destinations. You were convened to provide an independent review of ST's plan decisions. This is an opportunity to increase the value of the system as a whole in meeting the region's transportation challenges.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "E. B. Murray". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Representative Edward B. Murray
Chairman, House Transportation Committee
Washington State Legislature

October 25, 2005

The Honorable Representative Ed Murray
203 John L. O'Brien Building
P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA
98504-0600

Dear Representative Murray,

Thank you for your letter of October 20th, regarding the Expert Review Panel's role in reviewing the Sound Transit Board's recent decision to eliminate the First Hill light rail station from Sound Move Phase One. We were sorry that you were unable to attend the Panel's meeting last week, but we were pleased that Beth Redfield was able to participate in the two-day session.

As Beth may have reported to you, the Panel received a lengthy briefing on the issues surrounding the First Hill station on the first day of our meeting. Included in the materials we received was the work plan for assessing alternatives for serving the First Hill station area. We learned that those alternatives include evaluation of soils stabilization methods, shifting the location of station platforms, new locations for the station, and providing other transit connections to the community. The Panel also had an opportunity to tour the First Hill area. At the conclusion of our tour of the I-90 corridor on Thursday afternoon, the Panel toured the First Hill neighborhood and the proposed First Hill and Capitol Hill stations. On Friday the Panel reviewed the requests contained in your letter and spoke about our response to it.

The Panel's reactions were varied. Panel members understood the difficult choice facing the Sound Transit Board. The First Hill community is a high density neighborhood with several regional employers and a university nearby. It appears to be the kind of neighborhood that should be served by a regional high capacity transit system. Alternatively, the risks associated with the construction of the proposed station seemed to be significant and could affect the schedule and cost of the entire North Link project.

As you point out in your letter, it is not the Panel's role to review decisions regarding implementation of Phase One of Sound Move. However, we learned on Friday afternoon that the multiple alternatives for providing high capacity transit service (including alternative station locations) to the First Hill community will be considered in the development of an ST2 package of improvements, thus fall within our purview.

We will review the key assumptions for all ST2 projects, and assess the reasonableness of those assumptions. For all ST2 projects, including First Hill projects, we will examine assumptions related to system ridership, capital and operating costs, constructability, and project risks.

The Panel will meet again in mid-January, at which time we expect to be briefed on the draft package of ST2 projects being considered by the Sound Transit Board. After that meeting we will forward to you any comments we have on the assumptions supporting the ST2 projects, including the First Hill station.

If you have any further questions or comments please feel free to contact me at 404-385-2246, or John Howell, the Panel's Administrator, at 206-223-7660, ext. 102.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Meyer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael Meyer
Chair, Expert Review Panel

cc. Governor Christine Gregoire
Secretary Doug MacDonald
Joni Earl