REPRESENTATIVE EDWARD B. MURRAY

203 John L. O'Brien Building · P.O. Box 40600 · Olympia, Washington 98504-0600 · 360-786-7826
murray.edward@leg.wa.gov

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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.

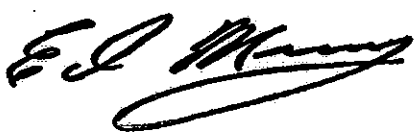
Sound Transit is currently investigating ways of serving First Hill transit riders, including shuttle service or a spur tunnel from Capitol Hill. Effective service to First Hill deserves a major investment, not simply shuttle bus service from Capitol Hill.

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,



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