

CITY COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM
CITY OF SHORELINE, WASHINGTON

AGENDA TITLE:	Adoption of Light Rail Preferred Alignment
DEPARTMENT:	Public Works
PRESENTED BY:	Mark Relph, Public Works Director Kirk McKinley, Transportation Services Manager Alicia McIntire, Senior Transportation Planner
ACTION:	<input type="checkbox"/> Ordinance <input type="checkbox"/> Resolution <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Motion <input type="checkbox"/> Discussion

PROBLEM/ISSUE STATEMENT:

Sound Transit is currently in the process of evaluating alternatives to extend light rail north of Northgate. This extension is part of the 2008 voter approved Sound Transit 2 funding plan that will connect Shoreline to the light rail line. The section from downtown Seattle to the University of Washington is currently under construction. The section to Northgate will follow.

Over the past year, Sound Transit has evaluated several alignment and mode alternatives for high capacity transit in the North Corridor. Two alignment alternatives remain for evaluation and the environmental scoping process is now underway. Scoping is the process to take public and agency input to determine the "scope" of the environmental analysis. Council is being asked to identify a preferred alignment for light rail. A single Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) alignment may be an outcome from the Sound Transit scoping process.



Throughout October, Council reviewed and sought public input on a set of guiding principles to assist with selection of a recommended alignment. These principles were approved on October 24 by the City Council.

RESOURCE/FINANCIAL IMPACT:

At this time, there is no significant financial impact to the City associated with this process, as it is being managed and funded by Sound Transit. The City will need to actively participate throughout Sound Transit's environmental review process by continuing to provide technical and policy direction. This process is scheduled to be complete in 2014. In 2012 the City, will begin engaging the community in policy development for Transit Oriented Communities as part of the 2012 Comprehensive Plan update. Staff will also be reviewing Sound Transit's Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements as they are released. This will require dedication of City staff resources.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that Council identify Interstate 5 as the City's preferred alignment for light rail. This position will be forwarded to the Sound Transit Board for consideration as they move through the environmental process.

Approved By: City Manager  City Attorney 

INTRODUCTION

Over the past several months of analysis and evaluation, Sound Transit has narrowed the alignment alternatives for the North Corridor Transit project down to two options. They include SR 99 and Interstate 5. Sound Transit has begun environmental scoping for these two alternatives in order to identify issues to address in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The scoping process may also result in the determination of a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) for the alignment.

BACKGROUND

In September 2010, Sound Transit began the planning process to extend high capacity transit from Northgate to Lynnwood. This extension is part of the 2008 voter approved Sound Transit 2 funding plan. The North Corridor Transit Project will connect Shoreline to Lynnwood in the north and to Northgate and points south by 2023. The existing light rail line that runs from Sea-Tac Airport to downtown Seattle is currently being extended to the University of Washington, with completion all the way to Northgate by 2021.

The electorate voted for and approved a light rail alignment on I-5, with potential stops at NE 145th and NE 185th Streets in Shoreline. However, in order to qualify for federal funding, Sound Transit is required to examine multiple high capacity transit modes, as well as corridor alignment alternatives, and potential station locations for the North Corridor. The Sound Transit Board is scheduled to select the alternative(s) that will be evaluated through the federal environmental process in late 2011. Sound Transit will make a final alignment decision in 2014 following completion of a National Environmental Policy Act/State Environmental Policy Act EIS (NEPA/SEPA) and preliminary engineering.

The process began with a wide field of alignment alternatives and three different mode options (traditional bus, bus rapid transit and light rail). With each level of evaluation, the review of the alternatives has become more technical and refined. As a result, different mode and alignment alternatives have been removed from consideration.

Sound Transit recently completed their Level 2 screening process and presented the results to Council at the September 12 meeting. Upon completion of the Level 2 screening process, Sound Transit has reduced the alignment options to a mixed profile (elevated and at-grade) I-5 alignment and an entirely elevated Highway 99 alignment. Both alignments include two stops in Shoreline. Environmental scoping for both alternatives is currently underway. Upon completion of the scoping process, the alternative(s) to be evaluated in the EIS will be identified. The EIS will include several options for station locations within the vicinity of NE 145th and NE 185th St on I-5 and potential stations on SR 99, if it is included in the EIS. The alignment for SR 99 shows stations at N 160th Street and the Shoreline Park and Ride (N 192nd Street). Different aspects of the alignment, such as west and east side of I-5, will also be considered. The results of the alternatives analysis are posted on the Sound Transit website at www.soundtransit.org.

Throughout the month of October, Council worked to develop a series of guiding principles to assist with the development of a recommended light rail alignment for the City of Shoreline. These principles were finalized by Council at the October 24 meeting.

DISCUSSION

The extension of high capacity transit into Shoreline will greatly influence transit service in the City. It is assumed that this extension will come in the form of an extended light rail line north of Northgate and continuing to Lynnwood, as Sound Transit has eliminated all other mode alternatives from consideration. The alignment of the light rail line and station locations will greatly affect the future for surrounding neighborhoods, including land use patterns and traffic.

Sound Transit submitted the Alternatives Analysis (AA) to the Federal Transportation Administration (FTA) for review in late July. After receiving FTA and public comments, as well as the completion of environmental scoping, a LPA may be adopted by the Sound Transit Board by the end of 2011. If a LPA does not emerge, more than one alternative would then proceed into the EIS process. Sound Transit staff shared that an evaluation of the I-5 alignment in the EIS would likely include several crossing alternatives to get from the east side of I-5 (Northgate) to the west side (no later than Lynnwood). These options may include locating the NE 185th station on the west side of I-5, closer to Shoreline Center and stadium, and converting the Mountlake Terrace Freeway Station for light rail use. The SR 99 alignment is likely to run up the west side of Aurora Avenue N.

The alignment options will serve different neighborhoods and, as a result, have differing impacts. Sound Transit has asked the jurisdictions affected by the light rail alignment (Seattle, Shoreline, Mountlake Terrace and Lynnwood) to provide input in response to the alternatives under review. The cities of Mountlake Terrace and Lynnwood have identified I-5 as the preferred alternative. The City of Seattle has not identified a preferred alternative at this time.

Staff has prepared an analysis of both alignment options based upon the guiding principles. (Attachment A). Based upon the principles, it is staff's recommendation that Council identify I-5 as the preferred light rail alignment. The I-5 alignment is the less expensive of the two options and performs better regarding travel time and ridership. Additionally, if light rail is located on I-5, the City will be served by three high capacity transit corridors – Aurora Avenue N, I-5 and Bothell Way NE – which will expand transit access and options for Shoreline's residents. While the area surrounding I-5 is predominantly single family, the public uses of the park and ride at NE 145th Street and the Shoreline Center and North City Elementary at NE 185th Street present tremendous opportunities for redevelopment oriented toward transit. An alignment on SR 99 would practically eliminate one half of the businesses on the Aurora Corridor, as right-of-way would be needed and properties would be severely impacted. The opportunities for redevelopment would be very limited, as many parcels would be very small and shallow, with a large, elevated rail line blocking visibility.

STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH

Until recently, Sound Transit has managed the public outreach for the North Corridor Transit Project. Early AA scoping was undertaken in September through October 2010. Three public workshops were held in North Seattle, Shoreline and Lynnwood, as well as one agency scoping meeting, with over 200 people attending the workshops. More than 260 online surveys were completed and over 90 comments were received via mail or email. Sound Transit has also briefed various business and community groups throughout the AA process. Three public meetings, as well as one agency meeting, are being held in October 2011 for the EIS scoping process. The first was held on October 11, 2011 at the Shoreline Conference Center and was attended by about 100 people.

As part of the scoping process, Sound Transit requested comments from the public identifying the issues they should address in the EIS process. Comments received at the October 11 scoping meeting generally identify a preferred alignment for light rail, the majority of which support the I-5 alignment.

The development of the guiding principles included an extensive public outreach process. The draft principles were first presented to Council on October 3 and the public was provided with the opportunity to provide testimony at the October 17 Council meeting. Notice of the release of the draft principles was included in the October issue of Currents and placed on the City's website. The City received five written comments in response to the draft principles. Council approved the principles on October 24.

COUNCIL GOAL(S) ADDRESSED

This project addresses Council Goal 2: Provide safe, efficient and effective infrastructure to support our land use, transportation and surface water plans, as one of the major objectives of the Goal is to work with Sound Transit, neighboring cities, regional agencies and Shoreline neighborhoods to implement the Sound Transit II plan to bring light rail through Shoreline.

RESOURCE/FINANCIAL IMPACT

At this time, there is no significant financial impact to the City associated with this process, as it is being managed and funded by Sound Transit. The City will need to actively participate throughout Sound Transit's environmental review process by continuing to provide technical and policy direction. This process is scheduled to be complete in 2014. In 2012, the City will begin engaging the community in policy development for Transit Oriented Communities as part of the 2012 Comprehensive Plan update. Staff will also be reviewing Sound Transit's Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements as they are released. This will require dedication of City staff resources.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that Council identify Interstate 5 as the City's preferred alignment for light rail. This position will be forwarded to the Sound Transit Board for consideration as they move through the environmental process.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Alignment Analysis Based Upon Light Rail Guiding Principles for Shoreline

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PERFORMANCE	
TRAVEL TIME	COMMENTS
We support a light rail system that provides the shortest travel times for riders traveling to and from Shoreline.	Sound Transit's performance analysis identifies the I-5 alignment as having a shorter travel time from Lynnwood to Northgate. The travel time on the I-5 alignment is estimated to be 14 minutes, approximately four minutes shorter than on the Aurora alignment.
We support development of a complete light rail system that serves the Puget Sound region efficiently and minimizes travel times to destinations.	
RIDERSHIP	
We support the development of a light rail system that will serve the greatest number of riders traveling to and from Shoreline.	The performance analysis prepared by Sound Transit estimated ridership forecasts for the year 2030. The analysis concluded that the I-5 alignment will have approximately 52,000 daily riders, as compared with 48,000 daily riders on the Aurora alignment. This translates to 4.5 million new riders per year on the I-5 alignment versus 3.9 million new riders per year on the Aurora alignment. One of the primary reasons for this difference is related to the travel time and that the longer trip on Aurora would discourage riders coming from Lynnwood and Mountlake Terrace.
ACCESSIBILITY	
We support the development of light rail stations that are easily accessed by foot, bike, bus or car. The stations should expand opportunities for convenient access to other forms of transit, such as Bus Rapid Transit and local bus service. Traffic impacts should also be minimized and mitigated in station areas.	The station areas for both alignments have various levels of existing accessibility. They are all served by existing bus service in some way and it is anticipated that bus service, particularly commuter routes, would be rerouted to serve the light rail stations. The stations on SR 99 would be served by sidewalks on Aurora, however, sidewalks and walkways to Aurora are limited on some streets. Sidewalks are comparably available around the I-5 stations, with sidewalk access on the arterials but limited on the side streets. The Interurban Trail is located in close proximity to the SR 99 alignment, providing improved access for bicycles and pedestrians. The Bicycle System Plan prepared for the Transportation Master Plan identifies bicycle facilities serving all of the potential stations.

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MAXIMIZING FUNDS	
COST	COMMENTS
We want to ensure that as decisions are made, funding remains in the project budget to fund two light rail stations in Shoreline.	Both alignments include two stations in Shoreline. However, the capital cost for the SR 99 alignment is \$600-700 million more expensive and Sound Transit has indicated that adequate funding is not available for this alternative. The SR 99 alignment includes five stations (one in Seattle, Mountlake Terrace and Lynnwood and two in Shoreline), whereas the I-5 alignment has four (one in Mountlake Terrace and Lynnwood, two in Shoreline and zero in Seattle). It is possible that in order to make the SR 99 alignment more financially feasible, one of the stations in Shoreline would be eliminated.
We support minimizing costs associated with right of way acquisition and capital investments as well as ongoing operation and maintenance costs while maximizing performance of the light rail system.	The capital costs associated with right-of-way acquisition and construction of the SR 99 alignment are higher than those for the I-5 alignment. Additionally, the operational and maintenance costs are anticipated to be greater for the SR 99 alignment. This is primarily due to the fact that the route is longer and in order to meet the planned headways (every four minutes during the peak period, every ten minutes off peak), additional trains will be needed. The additional service and vehicle needs translate directly into increased operational and maintenance costs.
We support extension of a light rail system through Shoreline and Seattle that maximizes the available funding in the North King County subarea. In accordance with Sound Transit's subarea equity policy, funds generated in this subarea should be spent only in this subarea and be used to provide high quality transit service and amenities for North King County residents.	Both alignments would be funded utilizing money collected from the North King Subarea. The I-5 alignment is estimated to cost between \$120 million under to \$100 million over the funding allocated in Sound Transit's financial plan, which includes a large grant from the federal government. The SR 99 alignment is estimated to cost \$470 million to \$770 million over the allocated funding amount. Funding is not available to cover the magnitude of costs assumed for the SR 99 alignment.

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LOCAL OPPORTUNITY AND IMPACTS	
SOCIAL EQUITY	COMMENTS
We support the location, alignment and operation of light rail that provides access to a socially, economically and geographically diverse ridership.	High capacity transit in the form of bus rapid transit will be provided on SR 99 beginning in 2013. The addition of light rail on the I-5 corridor would enhance access to high capacity transit for more Shoreline residents by providing two corridors in the City.
We believe Shoreline residents are best served by various modes of transit on multiple corridors within and through Shoreline.	Metro is scheduled to begin operation of bus rapid transit service on SR 99 in 2013. The SR 99 alignment would replicate this service for the portion of the route from N 130 th – N 192 nd Streets, however, light rail would have significantly fewer stops along this segment. It is likely that light rail will draw some riders from BRT service. If I-5 is selected as the alignment, the City of Shoreline would be served by two high capacity transit corridors.
LAND USES AND REDEVELOPMENT	
We are concerned about the future of properties adjacent to prospective light rail stations. It is important to remember that station areas may take decades to transition from its present day use to a future use and plans should be made for how that transition can be accomplished.	The impacts to properties surrounding the station areas of each alignment are significantly different. The station areas adjacent to the I-5 alignment are single family and public uses. Changes in these areas would require up-zoning to allow for more dense, multi-family residential uses, as well as commercial and office uses. On SR 99, the zoning is the most permissive in the City, allowing for multi-family, commercial and residential uses. However, this zoning is generally only one parcel deep and the adjacent uses are single family residential. The location of the light rail alignment on either side of SR 99 would significantly impact the properties through right-of-way acquisition and construction and likely require relocation of many of the businesses. This has the potential to significantly change one side of the corridor. Should the City want SR 99 to remain a commercial corridor, zoning changes (such as expanding commercial zoning to the west) may be needed to compensate for the lost businesses and reduced redevelopment opportunities.
We believe land uses around light rail stations should support a transition to transit-oriented communities over time and in partnership with the local neighborhood.	
We are committed to a robust community involvement process that develops tools and plans to create and enhance vibrant, livable and sustainable transit-oriented station areas.	
We want to ensure impacts on residents and businesses are managed and individual property rights are protected; provide timely information so residents can plan for and respond to changes.	
	Because light rail service is not scheduled to begin in Shoreline until 2023, property owners adjacent to the station areas have over a decade to prepare for its arrival. This provides the City with the opportunity to engage in long range planning efforts that identify the appropriate uses for the station areas. Residents in the area will subsequently have the opportunity to make decisions about their property based upon proposed land use changes.

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LOCAL OPPORTUNITY AND IMPACTS (cont.)	
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	COMMENTS
We support a light rail system that will foster economic prosperity in Shoreline by encouraging existing businesses, enhancing property values, creating family-wage jobs, building sustainable housing stock, and attracting investment.	<p>The ability to accomplish these goals will depend, in part, upon the planning efforts of the City. Station area planning will need to determine the appropriate uses in the vicinity of the stations and the City's development regulations must be crafted to allow and encourage those uses.</p> <p>The SR 99 alignment will significantly impact the west side businesses and is likely to lower property values. Not only will the properties be reduced in size and significantly restricted in their redevelopment capacity, there would be an elevated light rail line in front of their property, blocking visibility of those sites.</p>
NOISE AND VISUAL IMPACTS	
We support the development of a light rail system that minimizes noise and visual impacts to Shoreline residents and businesses.	The performance analysis prepared by Sound Transit identified moderate noise and visual impacts as the primary environmental impacts associated with the Aurora alignment. (The primary environmental impacts associated with the I-5 alignment involve wetlands.)