

February 25, 2021

Kent Keel
Chair, Board of Directors
Sound Transit
401 S. Jackson St
Seattle WA 98104-2826

Re: ST3 Realignment – Station Area Planning, System Access and Parking

Dear Chair Keel:

The current budget realignment process is an opportunity to refine our investments to bolster regional partnerships and our collective commitment to local communities and a thriving region. As we look for cost savings, I suggest we refresh our thinking about station area planning, system access, the role of parking, and the substantial budget for garages.

The WSDOT mission is to provide Washington travelers with a safe, sustainable, and integrated multimodal transportation system. Placing much of the ST2 and ST3 investment on, or alongside, WSDOT right-of-way supports that mission and is a great public benefit. However, this also means the future operation of those state and Sound Transit facilities will be forever intertwined. The design and development of station areas offers tremendous opportunity for communities to achieve housing, public health, mobility, equity, and sustainability goals that all Sound Transit Board members share.

The chart below shows the investment envisioned in the original ST3 system access plan plus Transit Oriented Development (TOD). Investments are envisioned for Bus-Rail integration¹, System Access Fund², Access Allowance³, Parking⁴, and TOD⁵. TOD is an estimated figure based on the Sound Transit 2020 fiscal plan of \$42 million in YOES. The largest investment by far is in parking which reflects 16 new parking garages, two new surface lots and 9,700 new stalls (8,300 net). In 2014 dollars, the average cost is \$80,000 per space. Assuming modest inflation (4%), the parking cost increases to over \$1 billion or \$120,000 per space. At build-out in 2040, ridership is expected to be 500,000 people per day. If filled, the new stalls represent a small fraction of riders – 1-2% of the system’s users. Clearly, garages are the least cost-effective means for system access.

¹ [Sound Transit 3: The Regional Transit System Plan for Central Puget Sound \(windows.net\)](#) page 8

² [Sound Transit 3: The Regional Transit System Plan for Central Puget Sound \(windows.net\)](#) page 10

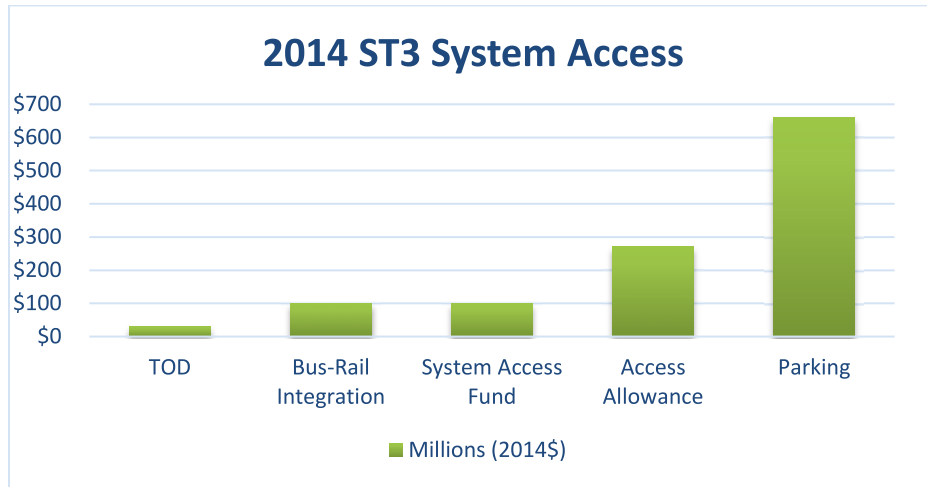
³ [Sound Transit 3: The Regional Transit System Plan for Central Puget Sound \(windows.net\)](#) page 9

⁴ These numbers are not summarized in the ST3 plan; they are tucked into each project. We have not verified the Street Blog math. [ST3 Parking: \\$661M at \\$80k Per Space – Seattle Transit Blog](#)

⁵ <https://www.soundtransit.org/sites/default/files/documents/2020-financial-plan-adopted-budget.pdf>

Sound Transit 2020 Fiscal Plan and Adopted Budget Book, pages 154 & 155

While every community and every ST3 project is different, we know that most riders will access the system without requiring a parking space. A billion-dollar investment in parking will not change that.

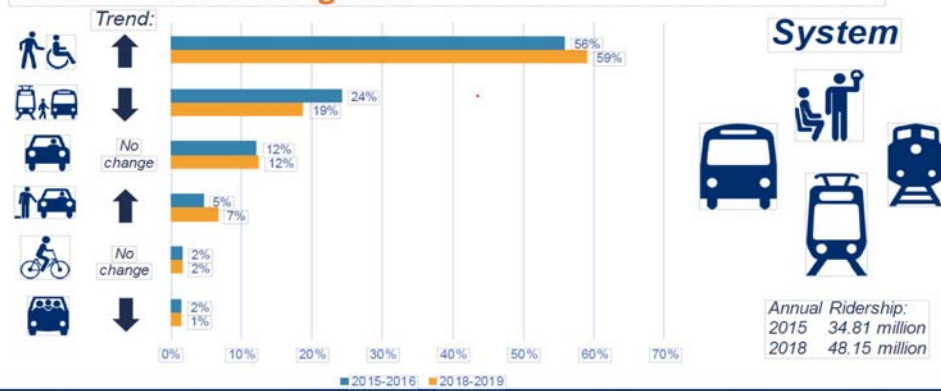


The financial commitment to parking and garages was made over half a decade ago or longer. Now is a good time to take a comprehensive look at station area planning and give system access thinking a refresh.

Accessing the Sound Transit system by a mode other than car is the most popular option today. Only 12% of riders drive alone. The System Access fund has already identified many good access and community-strengthening transportation projects. Communities across our service area are competing against each other over a pot of \$100M in the next two decades while we're spending \$210M on parking garages just for Lynnwood Link. That's \$210M for 2,400 total parking spaces on a suburban extension with an estimated 50,000 daily riders. How will the other 45,000 plus riders get to Lynnwood Link? Biking, walking, and transit. This really shows a disconnect between access priorities for an agency that's focus is to give people mobility choices beyond the car.

Access & Existing System Performance

Mode of Access/Egress



Storing cars adjacent to transit stations is inherently counterintuitive. Garages cause a rush of cars during peak transit demand, bringing congestion and safety conflicts between cars, transit, bicycles, and pedestrians. Many of the proposed garages will exacerbate chokepoints in the state highway system. The construction of a garage almost always requires mitigation for traffic impacts around the garage that come from degradation in level of service. Garages also consume valuable land that could support TOD and mixed income housing – uses symbiotic with transit ridership. Much has changed since 2014. At that time, Transportation Network Companies (e.g., Uber, Lyft) and micromobility (e.g., bikeshare, scooter share) were in their infancy and telework was a rarity. Metro is exploring how to best integrate TNCs and micromobility into future transit hubs such as the WSDOT owned Eastgate facility. Sound Transit should be exploring this integration as well.

Changing travel trends represent another reason to reevaluate parking. The need to store cars for commuters is shrinking. In response to this market reality, the private sector is building very few new stand-alone parking garages today. In 2017 an estimated 5% of workers in the American Community Survey reported that they usually telecommute, a figure that climbed in recent surveys.⁶ In 2019, Commute Seattle found that up to 14% of downtown workers teleworked at least one day a week.⁷ In May 2020, a Commute Seattle survey confirmed that telework has significantly accelerated and 81% of companies believe that telework is going well and plan to increase their telework options.⁸ Indeed, WSDOT is emphasizing telework as an ongoing business approach for as many employees as feasible. The Board needs a clear understanding of these trends as they may portend a pivot for transit to serve the public in new ways.

The realignment process offers a win-win opportunity to find innovative ways to spend less money while providing more people enhanced access to Sound Transit services. By investing funds currently dedicated to parking more strategically, the Board could increase the rate of return by choosing to serve a comparable number of riders for a fraction of the cost of parking or serve many more riders for the same cost.

- Partnerships can be developed with local business areas to develop district parking management programs to address concerns about “hide and ride” behavior. Sound Transit already has significant experience in the City of Seattle with Residential Parking Zones (RPZs) around station areas. Across the country, parking management in business districts has been found to be successful at addressing business access concerns and contributing to economic revitalization.
- An example from the 2019 Sound Transit System Access Grant Program shows how we can invest in significantly safer, climate-friendly access. For a fraction of the cost of a garage, the City of Bellevue Eastgate Non-Motorized Transit Access Project will construct 2/3 of a mile of multi-purpose path to provide access to BRT, Sound Transit and Metro Transit routes.
- Last June, I explored in a letter to the board the opportunity at the Auburn Station. If the size of the garage is reduced and the savings invested in safer walking and bicycling access, then we could potentially benefit more people. If improvements to active transportation attracted 1% of the people who live and work in that area to shift to using transit, then the system could serve an additional 1,200 trips per day. Nearly 10 times more trips than generated by the planned parking.

⁶ <https://www.governing.com/archive/gov-workers-telework-public-transportation-commute.html>

⁷ [2019 Center City Commuter Mode Split Survey Results - Commute Seattle](#)

⁸ [Survey Results: Workplace Experiences During Coronavirus - Commute Seattle](#)

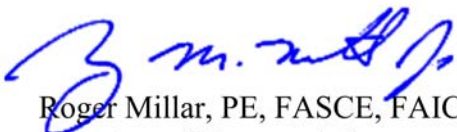
- Redirecting even a few million dollars away from parking to TOD could leverage more private investment to make previously unworkable development projects pencil – bringing the benefits of not only transit patrons but increased access to housing affordable to a variety of income levels – catalyzing a more equitable community. The region continues to add population and employment; we need to ensure that the transit system supports the pattern of growth reflected in PSRC’s Vision 2050. Dedicating land exclusively to storing cars is antithetical to TOD.

The region needs station area land put to the highest and best use. The access investments for the region’s high-capacity transit system should support our collective regional effort to create communities in which people can live, work, play, and learn without being dependent on a car.

At WSDOT, we recognize that the facilities that we steward frequently pose barriers to people walking, bicycling, and taking transit. We are proud to support new active transportation connections across our freeways, including new bridges across SR 520 and at Northgate and NE 148th Street over I-5. We are also ramping up WSDOT led proactive planning work to comprehensively review the station access needs across and along WSDOT owned facilities. We are committed to being part of the solution for safe, sustainable, integrated multimodal station access.

With Sound Transit’s System Expansion program, the region is investing in a transformative shift in the transportation system of our future. The key that unlocks that transformative potential is station areas that provide complete communities where people have the option to comfortably walk or bicycle to transit and their other daily needs. Safe, vibrant station areas help WSDOT, Sound Transit, and local communities. As we grapple as a state and a region with how to address the crises of climate change, inequity, public health, affordable housing, traffic deaths, damaged ecosystems, and economic stress, let us use the realignment process to thoughtfully consider significantly trimming the parking budget and redirecting a portion of funds to get the highest return on our investment in station access.

Sincerely,



Roger Millar, PE, FASCE, FAICP
Secretary of Transportation

c. Peter Rogoff, Sound Transit CEO