

City of
Bellevue



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January 10, 2011

Mr. James Irish
Link Environmental Manager
Sound Transit
401 South Jackson Street
Seattle, WA 98104

Attention: East Link SDEIS Comments

Dear Mr. Irish:

This letter transmits to Sound Transit the City of Bellevue's technical review comments on the East Link Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS). The City recognizes the commitment of effort and resources by Sound Transit to conduct an environmental analysis of this scale and complexity. We appreciate the extended 60-day comment period and the strong and on-going partnership between the City and Sound Transit.

Bellevue staff from multiple departments reviewed the SDEIS and its appendices in detail. The attached table is a comprehensive accounting of staff's comments and are additive to our February 2009 comments on the DEIS. We anticipate working with you in the coming months to clarify any questions and to assist in addressing these comments prior to publication of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). While all of these comments will need to be addressed in detail, we would like to highlight some of the most significant issues we see with the SDEIS:

Transportation and Traffic:

The City views implementation of light rail as an essential component of the future transportation system for Bellevue and the region. It will provide added capacity to a strained system and will serve as the backbone of the City's transit system. In order to fully realize its capacity and functionality, however, light rail must be introduced in a fashion that maximizes mobility, rather than compromising vehicular or non-motorized operations. In the winter of 2010 the City and Sound Transit jointly developed a micro-simulation model (VISSIM) to enhance the analysis of potential light rail alternatives in downtown Bellevue. This was a superior technique to the traffic analysis methods employed in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) because it allowed a finer level of evaluation of intersection operations in downtown. This analysis was a key element for City Council and the Sound Transit Board of Directors decisions regarding downtown alignment preferences. We are concerned that this analysis (summarized in the *Downtown Bellevue Light Rail Alternatives Concept Design Report*, February 2010) was not reflected in the SDEIS and we formally request that it be included in the FEIS. We believe that this analysis and subsequent city refinements portray a more accurate

depiction of future traffic conditions and best informs the integration of light rail into the downtown Bellevue transportation system. A series of attachments from the city's Downtown Bellevue Modeling work and a cover memo summarizing the information is attached to this letter.

Similarly, we are concerned that Sound Transit has not revisited the DEIS traffic analysis conducted for the B7 alternative ("BNSF"). During DEIS alignment preference deliberations it became apparent that the B7 alternative did not reflect the South Bellevue I-405 Project that modified the SE 8th Street/I-405 interchange. Further traffic analysis is appropriate for the B7 alternative to more accurately determine likely traffic impacts resulting from the development of a light rail station and park and ride in the vicinity of SE 8th Street/118th Avenue SE. Regarding other south Bellevue alternatives that would construct a light rail station at an expanded South Bellevue Park and Ride, we believe further analysis is needed to determine appropriate traffic mitigation. In particular, the SDEIS, like the DEIS, uses level of service measures that do not sufficiently reflect the impact of added traffic loads on the operation of key corridors, such as Bellevue Way, 112th Avenue SE, and 118th Avenue SE.

Ridership:

The ridership projections reported in the SDEIS, particularly in Bel-Red (Segment D), are not substantially changed from the DEIS. While the forecasts indicate that East Link will serve a large number of people in 2020 and 2030 we continue to be concerned that they underestimate the effect of the City's redevelopment plans. Bellevue anticipates major employment and population growth in downtown Bellevue and the Bel-Red Corridor by 2030. While the projected downtown growth was reflected in the DEIS, the City has since adopted the Bel-Red Corridor Plan. The Bel-Red Plan calls for dense, transit-oriented development surrounding the 120th and 130th stations. It does not appear that the Plan is accurately reflected in the SDEIS, as the ridership projections for Segment D increased only marginally between the DEIS and SDEIS. We are aware of the Sound Transit ridership model's "incremental" nature and believe that it underestimates future ridership in the Bel-Red corridor. We are concerned that inaccurate projections could result with inappropriately designed stations and other supporting infrastructure in the vicinity of stations.

Noise:

Noise impacts have been a major issue for the Central Link line and are of concern to Bellevue residents that could be exposed to noise from East Link. In reviewing the SDEIS we believe that further analysis of alternate crossover locations is justified. In many cases, the SDEIS proposes crossovers in locations that are close to sensitive receptors such as residential areas. It appears that there is a potential to relocate some of these crossovers away from these sensitive receptors and thereby reduce the impact of potential light rail noise pollution. We also believe that the range of potential noise mitigation methods should be expanded to include reduction at the source (e.g. train bells) and other techniques that reduce the need for tall and lengthy noise walls along the routes.

Another issue is the impact of noise on the City's park lands. According to the FTA, parks are a special case pertaining to noise impacts and local agencies should be consulted about park use. Surrey Downs Park has active and passive uses and Mercer Slough Park is almost exclusively passive. Bellevue believes that both of these parks should be considered sensitive noise receptors for environmental analysis. Further, the noise analysis should address all of the City parks near the various alignments and provide information and mitigation appropriate to their use. The City's Parks Department staff is available to consult with Sound Transit on this issue.

Finally, we are concerned that noise analysis focusing on FTA and FHWA noise regulations, which allow for averaging the noise from train operations over a 24-hour period, may understate the impacts of noise from bells, wheel squeal and track crossovers. The SDEIS does contain L_{max} information for these noise events, which information indicates that the noise associated with these events could be well above the maximum permissible sound levels allowed for other noise sources under the City's local noise control code, Bellevue City Code Chapter 9.18. The FEIS should contain an analysis of these noise events, based on predicted train schedules and the duration of each event, to ensure that these noise impacts are identified and mitigated consistent with requirements imposed on other noise sources in the City.

Visual:

Visual simulations of the project are valuable in showing the context, scale, and design of the project in key locations. We believe, based upon work conducted by independent consultants for the City in July 2010 (*Final Report for the City of Bellevue's Peer Review of Segment B7 of Sound Transit's East Link Light Rail Project*) that the environmental documentation would be improved by the use of the numerical rating system (1-7) for visual impacts and by the inclusion of visualizations from additional observation points. The City's consultants suggested two new visualizations of the B7 alternative, one looking north from the I-90 pedestrian and bicycle path through the Mercer Slough and another along the BNSF corridor. Additionally, the visual assessment methodology in the SDEIS does not capture all visual impacts because of the use of broad categories of visual quality, rather than a numerical rating. Finally, the lack of mitigation for visual impacts is a concern that should be addressed in the FEIS.

Parks, Wetlands, Sensitive Areas:

In reviewing the SDEIS it is clear that, regardless of the alternative, City parks, wetlands, and other sensitive areas will be impacted to some degree. While it is reassuring to see that Sound Transit is committed to mitigating these impacts, the City requires greater detail and a commitment to specific mitigation actions. We anticipate working closely with Sound Transit in the coming months to better define proposed mitigation so that specific actions are described in the FEIS. A specific concern is the calculation of the area of parks impact. It has recently come to our attention that right-of-way located in Mercer Slough may not have been calculated as park land. Under our reading of FWA Section 4(f), the rights-of-way within the park that are functioning as park land and deemed to be park land by Bellevue should be included in the park acreage calculations.

In addition, as we stated in our comments on the DEIS, the SDEIS contains insufficient analysis of the alternatives' consistency with local codes, including shorelines, critical areas and essential public facility requirements. The FEIS should include an identification of the permit processes applicable to East Link. City staff is available to help identify applicable code requirements if needed.

Construction:

As generally described in the SDEIS, East Link project construction will be a major undertaking. While much of the line will be relatively straight forward, there are areas where construction will be complex and high risk. We are particularly concerned about construction impacts to neighborhoods and businesses. The SDEIS suggests the potential need for partial or full street, sidewalk, and park-and-ride lot closures. For alternative C11A, this would also mean the temporary relocation of the Bellevue Transit Center. The construction of the C9T cut-and-cover tunnel will require a significant level of coordination between the City and Sound Transit. As the engineering on the project proceeds and the design becomes more refined, the City and Sound Transit will need to develop construction and mitigation agreements that address the phasing and management of the construction as well as more specific mitigation.

The impacts of the number, timing and duration of these closures on traffic and transit are of great concern to Bellevue and require further information, evaluation and mitigation. The City is highly reliant on these facilities for mobility and cannot afford long-term closures, nor is the City willing to accept traffic diversion into neighborhoods. Sound Transit should revisit its assumptions and consider alternate means of construction prior to issuing the FEIS. The impacts from construction noise that will continue over several years are also of great concern. The FEIS should include additional information about the potential location, duration and mitigation of construction noise. We expect that as design advances, Sound Transit and the City of Bellevue will work together to determine how to minimize construction impacts and to negotiate a formal construction agreement that outlines construction methods, responsibilities, and other project aspects that will balance bearable temporary community disruption and the efficient delivery of the project.

The potential for damage to the Winter's House is a significant issue for Bellevue. According to the City's consultant (Greenbusch, *Final SDEIS Peer Review*, 12/28/2010), "Predicted levels of vibration at the Winter's House during the excavation of the trench are at the threshold for damage to a sensitive structure." The SDEIS identifies "special measures" and monitoring during construction and the City will be seeking additional assurances from Sound Transit prior to construction.

Design:

The conceptual engineering provided as an appendix to the SDEIS shows the basic horizontal and vertical design of each of the new and modified alternatives. This five percent engineering provides a basic idea of the context of each of the alternatives. The typical cross sections for each of the alternatives do provide additional context and information. However, as noted in the *Final Report for the City of Bellevue's Peer Review of Segment B7 of Sound Transit's East Link Light Rail Project*, additional cross sections depicting conditions at more locations along the alignments would be helpful. The Peer Review indicated that additional cross sections would

better articulate the conditions for the B7 alignment, particularly along the BNSF right of way. We believe that additional cross sections would be useful to help reviewers better envision the design of other alternatives also.

In addition to the land use goals described above, the Bel-Red Plan adopted since the DEIS outlines a redeveloped street network to support new transit oriented development in the corridor; this new network does not appear to be recognized in the SDEIS. We are concerned that the proposed LRT guideway design that includes a “tiered” cross section on NE 16th Street between 132nd Avenue NE and 136th Place NE would make it difficult to implement the future street network as described in the Bel-Red Plan.

The SDEIS highlights multiple parcels that would be acquired by Sound Transit for the various alignments. More information should be provided about which are partial and which are full acquisitions of the parcels (the graphics and the text do not always agree); whether certain acquisitions could be reduced after further design (e.g. Stor-House facility on B-7); and plans for disposition of remnant parcels. This information has implications for project cost, environmental impacts and mitigation.

The City has undertaken a number of studies to supplement Sound Transit’s analysis, listed below. By including them with this comment letter, the City is formally submitting them into the environmental record. Many of these were previously provided to Sound Transit. For your convenience, these documents are included as attachments to this letter and also available on the City’s website at the following address: <http://www.bellevuewa.gov/light-rail-documents.htm>.

- Downtown Bellevue Light Rail Alternatives Analysis VISSIM Documentation Report, BKR Documentation Report, and Summary Presentation (City of Bellevue Transportation Department), January 2010
- Peer Review of the Segment B7 of Sound Transit’s East Link Light Rail Project (David Evans & Associates, Inc.), July 2010
- South Bellevue Station Alternative Location Analysis (KPFF), July 2010
- Analysis of Potential Impacts from Sound Transit on Mercer Slough (OTAK), July 2010
- Acoustical Peer Review Concept Design Report – Noise Analysis 112th Avenue Light Rail Options (The Greenbusch Group), July 2010
- Technical Memo: Relative Impacts of Light Rail Alignments, B2M and B7, on Salmon (City of Bellevue Utilities Department), July 2010
- Sound and Vibration Peer Review SDEIS Proposed East Link Project (The Greenbusch Group), December 2010

These comments are submitted by the City as part of the environmental review process and are not intended as final comments for purposes of the City’s review of permits that may be required over various stages of the project. Given the preliminary nature of the plans and information provided, these comments by no means represent an exhaustive review of code issues or impacts presented by the project. Failure to note an impact or the need for mitigation of such impact, or failure to identify potential conflicts with applicable codes and regulations is not a waiver of the City’s ability to raise such issues during subsequent stages of review.

The City of Bellevue looks forward to continued cooperation with Sound Transit as the East Link FEIS is developed and in the subsequent implementation of the project. If you have any questions or would like clarification of the comments in this transmittal or the attached comments, please contact Bernard van de Kamp, Regional Projects Manager, at 425-452-6459 or bvandekamp@bellevuewa.gov.

Sincerely,



Goran G. Sparrman, P.E.
Director, Transportation Department

Attachments:

1. Table of Bellevue comments on SDEIS
2. Supplemental City of Bellevue Studies listed above