

MEETING MINUTES

Bruce A. Harrell
Mayor

Rico Quirindongo
Director, OPCD

Jill Crary, Chair

Kevin O'Neill, Vice Chair

Adam Amrhein

Jay Backman

Phoebe Bogert

Kate Clark

Ben Gist

Brian Markham

Zubin Rao

Molly Spetalnick

Michael Jenkins
Director

Valerie Kinast
Strategic Advisor

Windy Bandekar
Planner

Juliet Acevedo
Administrative Staff

May 16, 2024

Convened 9:00 am

Adjourned 4:40 pm

Projects Reviewed

West Seattle Link Extension – Package 1 (Alaska Junction Station, West Seattle Terminus, Avalon Stations)

Commissioners Present

Jay Backman

Phoebe Bogert

Kate Clark

Jill Crary (Chair)

Ben Gist

Brian Markham

Kevin O'Neill (Vice Chair)

Zubin Rao

Molly Spetalnick

Commissioners Excused

Adam Amrhein

Staff Present

Valerie Kinast

Juliet Acevedo (morning)

Windy Bandekar (afternoon)

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Briefing – West Seattle Link Extension – WSLE Background and Context for Package 1

(9:10 – 10:40 am)

The Commission received a presentation by Sound Transit staff of context and background information related to the Package 1 Preliminary Engineering plans for the West Seattle Link Extension (WSLE) project. Package 1 consists of the Alaska Junction Station, the West Seattle terminus facility, and Avalon Station. The topics presented at this meeting included context, public engagement, racial equity, station design approach, sustainability, and the TOD program.

The following people were presenters and/or provided answers to questions:

1. Dirk Bakker, Sound Transit (virtual)
2. Leda Chahim, Sound Transit
3. Daren Crabill, Sound Transit
4. Jason Hampton, Sound Transit
5. Barbara Luecke, Sound Transit
6. Julie Montgomery, Sound Transit
7. Alex Stevenson, Sound Transit
8. Phoebe Wu, Sound Transit

The following people were present:

1. Amy Chasanov, SDOT (virtual)
2. Justin Clark, WSP
3. Vera Giampietro, SDOT (virtual)
4. David Goodman, SDOT
5. Saranya Gujuluva Rajan, SDOT
6. Katy Haima, OPCD
7. CJ Holt, SDOT
8. Kurt Kiefer, Sound Transit
9. Lindsay King, SDCI
10. Kate Lichtenstein, Sound Transit
11. Soraya Lowry, Sound Transit (virtual)
12. Jennifer Meulenberg, SDOT
13. Brad Phillips, Community member (virtual)
14. Tats Tanaka, Sound Transit (virtual)
15. Benjamin Vigil, Student
16. Jonathan Williams, SDOT

Following the presentation and discussion, the Commission expressed appreciation for Sound Transit's work developing light rail in Seattle. Commissioners appreciate the extensive outreach with communities at this early stage of design. The Commission recognizes the complexity of the project, and the pressures Sound Transit is under to contain costs and build the project as swiftly as possible. We appreciate the direction the agency is taking to simplify design and provide light rail facilities that are context sensitive.

As this part of the presentation focused on programmatic information related to the West Seattle segment, the Commission did not take an action. However, the Commission provided the following recommendations for Sound Transit and the City to consider as both parties continue to develop plans for the West Seattle light rail segment.

Public Engagement

1. Please report on where there are conflicts or discrepancies between what the public is asking for, and where the design reflects tradeoffs between interests.
2. When community expectations cannot be met, provide information on the barriers and what objectives were prioritized with solutions. Report on the constraints, goals, and policies that determined key decisions.
3. Consider how you can aggregate what community is expressing in the various outreach activities being undertaken for art, environmental review, station design, and other aspects of the project. Please provide information on how engagement has informed design solutions in these or other areas of your program.
4. Continue to explore Indigenous outreach strategies that incorporate Indigenous ideas into project features in the landscape, architecture, art, and public space. Consider engaging a consultant who is both culturally based and carries expertise in design of the built environment.

Sustainability

1. Consider how Seattle's emphasis on embodied carbon and climate adaptation can be incorporated within the sustainability metrics for the projects. Heavy infrastructure holds good potential for reducing carbon because of the great amount of concrete being used.
2. Consider a higher rating than LEED Gold.
3. Express a comprehensive sustainability strategy for all elements of the project that ties together the measures Sound Transit has chosen to meet LEED and Envision (the infrastructure sustainability rating system). Address the experience of climate change, such as heat island effect and extreme weather events, in the strategy.
4. Report on where natural environment impacts have been addressed, but also where the project is attaining benefits.

Design Approach and Context

1. Reduce the reliance on using art to provide opportunities for the community to express and shape/set the aesthetics of the place. Expand the places where the design can reflect community identity to areas beyond the use of art, the use of color on building components, and the planting palate.
2. Consider the customization of certain standard elements to save money and allow for culturally and place-specific expression. Work with us to identify these opportunities, such as in the soffit material and entrance paving.
3. When visualizing projects in their built context, illustrate at least full buildout of existing zoning of surrounding buildings, recognizing work underway to increase density in urban areas with good transit.

Review – West Seattle Link Extension – Alaska Junction Station & Terminus Facilities (10:40 am – 12:40 pm)

The Commission received a presentation by Sound Transit staff of the Preliminary Engineering plans for the Alaska Junction Station and the West Seattle terminus facilities of the West Seattle Link Extension (WSLE) project. The topics covered were: Built context, Station Experience Design Guidelines, concept evolution and past community engagements, station access, TOD, public realm, architecture, station circulation. The West Seattle terminus facilities were also presented.

The following people were presenters and/or provided answers to questions:

1. Jason Hampton, Sound Transit
2. Daren Crabill, Sound Transit

3. Julie Montgomery, Sound Transit
4. Dirk Bakker, Sound Transit (virtual)

The following people were present:

1. Amy Chasanov, SDOT (virtual)
2. Justin Clark, WSP
3. Vera Giampietro, SDOT (virtual)
4. David Goodman, SDOT
5. Saranya Gujuluva Rajan, SDOT
6. Katy Haima, OPCD
7. CJ Holt, SDOT
8. Kurt Kiefer, Sound Transit
9. Lindsay King, SDCI
10. Kate Lichtenstein, Sound Transit
11. Soraya Lowry, Sound Transit (virtual)
12. Barbara Luecke, Sound Transit
13. Jennifer Meulenberg, SDOT
14. Brad Phillips (virtual)
15. Tats Tanaka, Sound Transit (virtual)
16. Benjamin Vigil, Student
17. Jonathan Williams, SDOT

Following the presentation and discussion, the SDC thanked the project team for the presentation. The SDC expressed appreciation for the placement of the station buildings and entrances, and the design direction that is being set for the architecture.

The SDC supports the following design characteristics at the Alaska Junction station and for the West Seattle terminus facility:

1. Provision and location of a bus layover area for up to four buses at the midblock of the Jefferson Square block in a transit only private road.
2. A visual connection of the proposed midblock transit layover road with the existing midblock connector between 42nd Ave SW and California Ave SW.
3. Extending the below grade concourse and separating the station entrances to reach out and capture riders from all directions, despite tradeoffs to vertical circulation.
4. Locating station entrances to offset grade differences between 41st Ave SW and 42nd Ave SW and provide better accessibility.
5. Widened sidewalks at and near station entrances.
6. The necessity of locating the terminus equipment south of the Alaska Junction station, because a crossover is needed for trains changing direction and power grid constraints.
7. Prioritizing bus access in choosing station entrance locations.
8. Orienting station entrances onto SW Alaska St, given this will be a transit only street.
9. Including art that changes with time.

The Seattle Design Commission approved the **Preliminary Engineering** phase for the **Alaska Junction Station** unanimously 9 to 0 with the following recommendations.

General, Program, Form, Character

1. Define and develop a recognizable relationship between the north and south entrance buildings. They are two parts of a larger transit facility that will define the public realm in this location.

2. Develop the open spaces and streetscapes at the two entrance buildings in a unified way. Although they are apart, they are part of one station. Knitting the open spaces will help develop the two entrance buildings into a unified expression on SW Alaska St.
3. Explore opportunities to open and let natural light to the concourse, and perhaps the platform.
4. Consider adding activating uses at the concourse level to offset the size and extent of this project feature, with the goal of aiding in wayfinding, and to improve the user experience.
5. Pay attention to the design of the north side of the north entrance building because it will be viewed by residents to the north.
6. Prioritize art in non-fare paying areas that are accessible to the public.
7. Provide performative, interactive, and other temporary or dimensional art.
8. Consider treatments on the ground plane and in the entry for art locations.
9. Consider how Indigenous expression can be layered into the design of all stations in Seattle. Work with treaty tribes and engage with unrecognized tribes to incorporate Indigenous knowledge into the design. Explore incorporating Lushootseed language into the stations.
10. Consider placing the restrooms on the outside of the fare paid areas. Explore partnerships for providing this amenity.
11. As the plans for TOD are developed, plan for how they will hold and activate the corners along SW Alaska St and work together with station architecture to create a cohesive public realm.
12. Design the north side of the north entrance building in a way that is compatible with the residential development north of it.

Access and Circulation

13. Continue to work with the City to address the discrepancy between the EIS mode share estimates and the amount surveys show the community saying they will bike. Choose location, and type of bike parking based on local needs.
14. Be certain that there is a visual connection for pedestrians moving from the bus layover drive to the pedestrian midblock connector in the block west of 42nd Ave SW.
15. Continue to find solutions for providing safe bike movement along a bus transit street.

The SDC also requests that you consider the recommendations provided for the *Background and Context* agenda item earlier this day.

We anticipate reviewing this project again at 30% design.

We request context information before 30% design on the following:

1. A briefing on the joint development TOD planning as it relates to activation and design of the station and public spaces around them.

We request the following information to be presented at 30% design. This list supplements what is requested in City submittal requirements:

1. Please demonstrate that you are providing bike parking that is specific to the needs of cyclists at this location.
2. Label areas that are provided for forward compatibility with TOD, such as the empty spaces at street level and the concourse level.
3. Provide better renderings of the station and public realm than were provided at this meeting, such as:
 - a. Provide drawings showing the relationship between the entrance buildings and associated public spaces on the north and south sides of SW Alaska St, and the cohesive public expression of the station that is being created.

- b. Show full buildout context in all renderings, including drawings of the north entrance building.
 - c. Include TOD in the renderings to provide a more accurate impression of the stations in their built context.
4. Provide information on the parameters set for TOD, such as breakdown and location of uses, design requirements for the public realm, access, and building services (trash, loading, maintenance, etc.).

The SDC was not able to approve the **Preliminary Engineering** phase for the **Alaska Junction Terminus Facility** because of a lack of information and time allotted within this meeting. The Commissioners made the following recommendation:

1. Please provide to a subcommittee or the full SDC a presentation of the terminus facilities design when the plans have been further developed. Visually demonstrate the size, scale and character of light rail facility elements, vehicle and pedestrian access, existing/proposed topography, retaining structures, fencing, and plantings in relationship to the existing and future neighborhood context.

Review – West Seattle Link Extension – Avalon Station (1:35 pm – 4:40 pm)

The Commission received a presentation by Sound Transit staff of the Preliminary Engineering plans for the Avalon Station. The topics covered were: station area context, concept evolution, PE station area concept, PE station architecture concept.

The following people were presenters and/or provided answers to questions:

1. Julie Montgomery, Sound Transit
2. Barbara Luecke, Sound Transit
3. Daren Crabill, Sound Transit
4. Jason Hampton, Sound Transit
5. Dirk Bakker, Sound Transit (virtual)

The following people were present:

1. Phoebe Wu, Sound Transit
2. Kate Lichtenstein, Sound Transit
3. Kurt Kiefer, Sound Transit
4. Soraya Lowry, Sound Transit (virtual)
5. Tats Tanaka, Sound Transit (virtual)
6. Saranya Gujuluva Rajan, SDOT
7. CJ Holt, SDOT
8. Lindsay King, SDCI
9. Jonathan Williams, SDOT
10. Jennifer Meulenberg, SDOT
11. Katy Haima, OPCD
12. David Goodman, SDOT
13. Amy Chasanov, SDOT (virtual)
14. Vera Giampietro, SDOT (virtual)
15. Benjamin Vigil, Student

After the presentation and discussion, the SDC thanked the project team for the presentation and expressed appreciation and support for the following aspects of the plans:

1. The SDC greatly appreciates that this station has not been eliminated in the preferred alternative, recognizing the value of the station to catalyze higher density development in the area, increase ridership, and serve underserved communities in an already urbanized area.
2. We acknowledge that the challenges of this station are the result of decisions that positively affect other areas of the neighborhood – the tunnel in the Alaska Junction and lower guideways in Delridge.
3. We appreciate that equity drove the decision to prioritize bus connections in the orientation of the station and other early design decisions.

The SDC expressed considerable concerns about certain elements of the design, and the design direction that is being set. The SDC is concerned with:

1. Mechanical equipment of heavy infrastructure is being proposed above grade in a highly visible location along a major retail corridor in a residential, mixed-use neighborhood. The enclosed vents at the southern station building are a large, bulky, blank object in the heart of the area.
2. An open, deep trench is proposed at the entry point to the West Seattle neighborhood. The scale, shape, dimensions, and character of its walls, fencing, and bracing have the potential to create a problematic appearance.
3. The three streets that flank the station site - Fautleroy Way SW/the West Seattle Freeway, SW Avalon Way, and 35th Ave SW - currently carry high traffic volumes, freight, and buses. Many vehicles currently travel at high speeds, especially on Fautleroy Way SW. As this is one of the main access points to West Seattle neighborhoods and communities connected via ferries, the volumes of traffic and freight are not likely to decrease. The number of pedestrians and cyclists using these streets will increase when the station is in operation. The plans presented do not currently demonstrate a solution that provides a safe route for community members to access the station from areas around the station.

The Seattle Design Commission approved the **Preliminary Engineering** phase for the **Avalon Station** unanimously 9 to 0 with the following condition:

1. The adequacy of entrance locations and access design of the station is dependent on the location of bus stops, safety of street crossings, and other aspects of the street design. The SDC will review and comment on designs for the streets surrounding the station. If we see the need for changes to the station access design or the street design, we will direct additional recommendations to the responsible agency.

Considering the level of concern about the fan facility and open trench, and how long it will be until the 30% review, the SDC offers as a courtesy a check-in with an SDC subcommittee on progress at a point when the design has been further developed.

The SDC provided the following recommendations:

General, Program, Form, Character

1. Design a 360-degree station, that acknowledges the location at what will be the center of a dense, mixed use, urban node. The station will be seen and approached from all directions, and all sides of it will be experienced from near and far.
2. Explore opportunities for sinking the vent facility into the ground or shifting it to reduce its size, bulk, or scale.
3. A transit facility is an important civic structure in the context of the neighborhood. Explore how the vent facility can be shaped or expressed to feature it. Explore transparency, sculptural form, and other ideas to celebrate it. Consider an authentic expression of the facility, its purpose, and its

functional components. It should not be assumed that art or other surface-level treatment will be sufficient to address the concerns around the structure. Develop a holistic and intentional architectural expression.

4. Consider how the design of the corner with the vent structure works in unison with the building proposed across the street, on the southeast corner of Fautleroy Way SW and SW Avalon Way.
5. Explore opportunities for treating the open cut/trench at the northern portion of the station in a way that makes it more visually appealing. Consider such ideas as special treatment of the upper edge of the aperture. Explore architectural moves beyond fencing at the edges of the trench. Consider how views of this signify to cars that they are entering a more pedestrian environment. Explore an overhead structure above the platform above street level.

Access and Circulation

6. Design a station for pedestrian access from all directions.
7. Prioritize pedestrian safety to the station along and across Fautleroy Way SW, 35th Ave SW, and SW Avalon Way, given the amount of vehicular traffic on abutting rights of way.
8. Provide safe pedestrian access to the station from north of Fautleroy Way SW. This area stands to be redeveloped and the number of people viewing and walking to the station from here will be much different than what is observed today. The at grade crossings of Fautleroy Way SW will be extremely important in creating safe passage for people to the station.
9. If a safe at-grade crossing cannot be achieved on Fautleroy, consider a grade separated pedestrian crossing including a subterranean pedestrian connection or a pedestrian bridge.
10. Develop the designs for the station and Fautleroy Way SW to slow traffic and create a safer and more friendly street environment. Use all the engineering and urban design tools available to move traffic through while communicating that this is an urban place with people on the street.
11. Consider street noise as you develop solutions. Measures to reduce noise, such as vegetation choices, planting strip dimensions, and locating pedestrian areas further away from the curb, can improve the pedestrian sense of safety.
12. Consider wayfinding and comfort for pedestrians and cyclists as you address our concerns about the urban design impacts of the vent structure at the southwest corner of the site. Provide an inviting and welcoming gesture to people approaching the station from the southwest along Fautleroy Ave SW. More people will reach the station from the south than from other sides, at least until the urban center densifies.
13. Reexamine the location of the proposed passenger pick up and drop off (PUDO). Consider the potential needs of connecting streets. The route to and from it from most directions is long and circuitous and this might incentivize ad hoc drop offs in undesirable locations on busy streets.

Consider also the recommendations provided for the *Background and Context* agenda item earlier this day.

We request the following information to be presented at 30% design. This list supplements what is requested in the submittal requirements:

1. Provide diagrams and verbal descriptions of the movements of people transferring to and from transit and to and from the proposed passenger pick up and drop off location.
2. Provide diagrams and verbal descriptions of the bus routing and movements around the station. Include information on destinations, general volumes, hierarchy of movements, etc.
3. When visualizing this project in its built context, illustrate at least full buildout of existing zoning of surrounding buildings, recognizing work underway to increase density in urban areas with good transit.