



Seattle Design Commission

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To Sound Transit’s Elected Leadership Group – West Seattle and Ballard link extension:

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The Seattle Design Commission appreciated the opportunity to provide comments to you at your March 29, 2019 meeting on the Chinatown/International District (CID) and Delridge stations. On behalf of the Commission, I’d like to reiterate and expand on the issues raised by the commission at that meeting, following our role as stewards of design quality and excellence in the public realm of Seattle.

Overall, it is premature for the Sound Transit (ST) Board to select a “preferred alternative” during the SEPA/NEPA scoping process with only concept designs underway and preliminary impacts still not fully understood. ST’s current planning efforts have resulted in narrowing the range of alternative alignments and identified siting choices, all of which need refinement through preliminary engineering to study cost trade-offs with community impacts and benefits. This should occur before any additional narrowing or refinement of options to carry forward for environmental review.

The following are some of the issues and policies that should be resolved during the draft EIS process; it is not a comprehensive list. These comments only reflect our input from the March 29 meeting.

Michael Jenkins
Director

1. CID guideway and stations

Valerie Kinast
Strategic Advisor

- a. Community impacts of a 5th Avenue alignment impacts

Aaron Hursey
Planner

The proposed 5th Avenue alignment poses too many significant impacts on the CID. While it is clear there are technical and engineering benefits to a 5th Avenue alignment created through a cut and cover option, the likely long term economic, social, and cultural impacts on the CID of a 5th Avenue alignment outweigh any short-term construction efficiencies. By contrast, a 4th Avenue alignment will substantially reduce long-term impacts on the business and residential community, create a better opportunity for seamless multi-modal connections, and reduce the likely long-term displacement and gentrification to the CID from a 5th Avenue option. **A 4th Avenue alignment is rooted in equitable solutions.**

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Expensive adjustments to the representative alignment will likely be made to reduce conflicts with the maritime and industrial activities at various places along the alignment, because Port activities cannot be reasonably relocated.

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Similarly, the culture and energy of the CID, Pioneer Square, and Little Saigon cannot be replicated or relocated. ST and the City need to clearly illustrate that the culture, community, and placemaking values of these communities are as important to the core of our City as are the efforts made to protect maritime and industrial operations.

b. Evaluating environmental impacts of all proposed alignments in the CID

Sound Transit (ST) and the City have developed a unique partnership in ST3. The partnership should result in a streamlined planning and permitting process that will have result in real benefits to both parties. As the City's partner, ST must use the environmental review process to study impacts of all options for CID including a 4th Avenue viaduct replacement. ST should also review the short and long-term impacts resulting from the creation of an intermodal hub that will facilitate connection between all modes, including options that assume the reuse of Union Station as a multi-modal hub. If the environmental impacts of all station and guideway options for 4th and 5th are not studied by ST, it will impede the City's ability to implement solutions for the area independent of ST's obligations to its constituents.

c. Development of a multi-modal multi-cultural hub in the CID

Union Station is the ideal inter-modal multi-cultural hub to serve both STs ridership and the CID and Pioneer Square neighborhoods. Making space for the CID community within the limits of Union Station, and not just the plaza area, will go a long way in making this a multi-cultural hub. This option best meets ST purpose and needs statements on equity and multi-modal connectivity, is part of the City's responsibility to advance equity, and meets FTA's expectations about enhancing connectivity where light rail, buses, street car, commuter rail and Amtrak converge. The repurpose and rehabilitation of King Street Station is an important template when looking at Union Station reuse. It clearly shows that you can reuse a historic train station for current and future transportation needs while providing a community asset.

d. Creating a joint governance structure for Transit Oriented Development (TOD) opportunities

There are a myriad of governmental agencies and private enterprises in the CID and Pioneer Square neighborhoods with significant interest in the development opportunities arising from ST3. On an individual basis, ST, the City, the County, and the neighborhood PDA's can shepherd TOD opportunities. However, collective action and partnerships with these agencies that elevate culture, place and community as a TOD organizing principal for the CID will spell success. There are several cities around the US that have done just that, including Denver, Washington DC and Los Angeles. They serve as appropriate models for considering TOD at or near the CID station proposal, including reuse of Union Station.

2. Delridge station and alignments

a. Multi-modal integration

Any viable station location here should maximize multi-modal integration, including Rapid Ride H line. The concentration of diverse populations is south of the proposed Delridge Station locations. This makes seamless integration with the Rapid Ride H-Line along Delridge is a top priority. This integration begins with the placement and orientation of the station and continues with the design details and robust agency coordination.

b. Visualizations are critical to understanding the urban impact

With the proposed heights of the guideway and station through this area, the visual and physical impacts are not apparent. Realistic, to-scale visualizations showing options at the pedestrian and neighborhood context scale are critical to provide the public a sense of the station and guideway impacts and to provide understanding of how these impacts can be addressed. There are clear examples of the relationship of elevated stations to surrounding context at the Tukwila International Blvd, SeaTac, and S 200th Street stations. These examples can be used in the context of proposed ST3 stations to better inform the public now before key decisions are made.

c. Converting staging areas into Transit Oriented Development, including affordable housing

ST and the City needs to be strategic about the properties to use for staging, as this land will then be redistributed for affordable housing in alignment with the 80-80-80 affordable housing policy as part of ST's larger Transit Oriented Development policy. These properties must be acquired with the future in mind, ensuring that the property is developable.

3. Broader urban design implications

a. Seattle sets the vision for ST investments

The City must quickly take the lead in developing an urban design vision for ST investments in Seattle, including stations in sensitive neighborhoods like those in the CID, Pioneer Square, and Delridge. The CID and Pioneer Square sit in the crux of culture, history, multi-modal connections, and has historically served as a unique entryway for the City. It is critical that the CIUD, Little Saigon, and Pioneer Square communities are not just mere stakeholders with the vision dictated to them, but equal partners and leaders in casting and implementing the vision. Similarly, Delridge is a unique neighborhood that will be particularly at risk from displacement impacts resulting from ST investments. With all due respect, ST should not set the vision for integration into City neighborhoods based on their infrastructure needs. The City should lead with a clear vision for how ST will fit into our neighborhoods through the development of policy documents that support ST integration into City expectations including design principals and guidelines, code modifications, City budgetary priorities for capital investments, etc.

b. Effective public engagement in station and guideway designs

As part of the environmental review process, ST will be developing station and guideway prototypes for detailed study for the various options including the preferred alignment and station locations. This will allow ST to evaluate their environmental impacts towards the publication of a final impact statement that will guide permitting. To



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maximize transparency of station and guideway designs, ST and the City should jointly hold robust public engagement sessions once concept guideway and station designs have been developed for study in the EIS. It will be a disservice to the community to not reveal concept designs for stations and guideways until the DEIS is published, as such designs will likely be too far advanced for communities to effectively engage on issues of design, architecture and integration into neighborhoods. This information could likely be generated now for stations like Delridge, and Ballard, using elevations and site plans from existing stations at Tukwila International Blvd. and S 200th Street as a template.

Again, thank you for your ongoing support of the Seattle Design Commission. We look forward to our long-term work with you on successfully integrating ST3 investments into our neighborhoods

Sincerely,

Ben deRubertis, Acting Chair