



City of Tacoma

City Council

March 8, 2023

Board of Directors
Sound Transit

Re: Delays in light rail connection (ST3) to Tacoma

Dear Members of the Sound Transit Board of Directors,

The three-year delay we now face around the much anticipated Tacoma Dome Light Rail Extension project / ST3 – which would connect Fife and Tacoma to King County – is deeply frustrating and concerning. Like others on the Pierce County Council, we are troubled about the impact these public transit challenges will have on our workforce, the environment, economic development and tourism across our broader region.

Light rail is vital as Tacoma strives to meet the present and future needs of a growing and rapidly evolving community. We know from our partners at Workforce Central that one in four Pierce County workers travel to other counties for employment each day and of, those, more than 80 percent head north to work in King and Snohomish counties. This adds well over a hundred thousand drivers to the I-5 corridor every day, a statistic that doesn't even include those commuting south, or those traveling for leisure to enjoy all our region has to offer.

Sound Transit has long connected our community to King County with the 590 and 594 express bus routes and to the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport with the 574 express route; the Sounder Commuter Rail; and the Hilltop Link Extension within Tacoma. However, the reality is that the present impact of the TDLE delay as the largest project in the south sound requires immediate remedy.

With this in mind, we request that Sound Transit partner with us to expand transit options for our community, elevating their awareness of the benefits of public transportation in Tacoma and building their support for current and future projects.

Sound Transit should continue to prioritize solutions for public transportation in the South Sound that provide additional service sooner rather than later. Some options we have identified as potential relief points for Tacoma include:

- Increasing opportunities for people to use Sounder Commuter Rail services throughout Pierce County with more daily train runs serving the South Sound. There is an opportunity to shift Sounder service from commuter rail to truly all-day regional rail. We urge Sound Transit to prioritize bringing more frequent Sounder trips to the South Sound as quickly as possible (and deprioritize increasing the capacity of Sounder trains at this time). Additional trips through the ST3-funded Sounder Improvement Plan or redistributing existing trips will require negotiations and approval from Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railroad. We urge BNSF to enter these negotiations in good faith to expand regional Sounder rail service and we are ready to support Sound Transit in these discussions.
- Increasing ground transportation options with an expansion of the span and frequency of the express bus route services between Pierce County and King County points of interest. These routes continue to have the highest ridership in the system, and are vital connections for Tacoma workers and visitors alike. We stand ready to support Sound Transit's efforts to work in earnest with Pierce Transit and their local operator partners to address the driver shortage and implement increased bus service to the South Sound.
- Partnering with Pierce Transit to increase point-to-point transportation options like dial-a-lift or the Pierce Transit Runner to connect to Sound Transit express bus service stations and Sounder train stations. Sound Transit should focus on partnering with communities in their taxing district with no local bus service connecting to Sound Transit services, namely Sumner and Orting.

We understand issues arise in projects, especially one the size and scope of ST3, however, these delays in large public projects hurt the credibility of our collective voices advocating for the expansion of public transit. We look forward to partnering with Sound Transit and Pierce County to address our community's connection to the broader region by expanding the great services we know and love, and jointly working to proactively find ways to prioritize completion of TDLE and local projects and support the South Sound's connection to the greater Puget Sound Region.

We look forward to your response, as immediate action is needed to alleviate this situation.