



TO: T.C. Broadnax, City Manager
FROM: Kurtis D. Kingsolver, P.E., Public Works Director/City Engineer */ks*
Alisa O'Hanlon, Government Relations Coordinator, City Manager's Office
COPY: City Council and City Clerk
SUBJECT: Resolution – Tacoma Link Expansion project recommendation to Sound Transit Board of Directors – August 11, 2015
DATE: July 20, 2015

SUMMARY:

A resolution recommending to the Sound Transit Board of Directors that the project to be built for the Tacoma Link Expansion be the alignment and stations examined in the Environmental Evaluation completed by Sound Transit in June 2015 and as approved by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

STRATEGIC POLICY PRIORITY:

- Foster a vibrant and diverse economy with good jobs for all Tacoma residents.
- Assure outstanding stewardship of the natural and built environment.

In 2008, voters approved ST2, a Sound Transit expansion plan that included partial funding for a partnership to expand Tacoma Link. Sound Transit and the City of Tacoma have been working in earnest since 2010 to identify a plan to advance this partnership to expand the Tacoma Link. The Tacoma Link expansion supports the City's Strategic Policy Priorities through the following goals:

- Improve mobility and transportation access for Tacoma residents and visitors
- Increase transit ridership in Tacoma
- Serve underserved neighborhoods and communities
- Use transit to spur economic development and other types of investment
- Ensure the project is environmentally sensitive and sustainable
- Establish a project that is competitive for federal funding

BACKGROUND:

On September 9, 2014, pursuant to Resolution No. 39004, the Tacoma City Council recommended a single alignment and seven stations to be included in the environmental review process of the Tacoma Link Expansion project. The seven stations are (1) Martin Luther King Jr Way ("MLK") and South 19th Street; (2) MLK and South 11th Street; (3) MLK and 6th Avenue; (4) MLK and Division Avenue; (5) Stadium District; (6) Stadium Way and South 4th Street; and (7) Old City Hall (Relocated Theater District Station). The alignment, first recommended pursuant to Resolution No. 38837, adopted on February 4, 2014, is generally described as north along Commerce Street to the Hilltop District via Stadium Way, North 1st Street, Division Street and Martin Luther King Jr. Way (MLK Jr Way).

Sound Transit and the FTA as the NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) federal lead agency for this project, and in coordination with the City of Tacoma, completed environmental review for the Tacoma Link Expansion project. The Environmental Evaluation approved by the FTA under NEPA was posted on the Sound Transit website on June 25, 2015, and made available for public review. A Determination of Nonsignificance (DNS) was issued under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) in July. The public outreach and comment period on the DNS and environmental documentation is being coordinated by Sound Transit from July 13-27, 2015, and includes an open house at the Evergreen State College, an online comment form via tacomalink.org, online and print ads, mailings, Listserve notifications, and several community and property owner briefings. A summary of the public comments will be provided to the Council at the conclusion of the public comment period. The Planning



Commission and Transportation Commission also have provided comment letters on the project to the Council. Copies of those letters are attached.

ISSUE:

In late summer 2015, the Sound Transit Board of Directors will take action to select the “project to be built” for the Tacoma Link Expansion. After this action, preliminary engineering will be completed and the project will move into final design. The City Council is invited to advise the Sound Transit Board of its recommendation for the project to be built.

ALTERNATIVES:

If the Council determines it would prefer a project to be built that includes an alignment or stations other than those reviewed in the Environmental Evaluation, additional environmental review would need to be completed. The cost and time of that additional review would need to be determined.

RECOMMENDATION:


A resolution recommending to the Sound Transit Board of Directors that the project to be built for the Tacoma Link Expansion be the alignment and stations examined in the Environmental Evaluation completed by Sound Transit in June 2015 and as approved by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

FISCAL IMPACT:

The Tacoma Link Expansion Project is being jointly developed and funded by a partnership between the City of Tacoma and Sound Transit. The City’s funding commitment to the project, as articulated in the Term Sheet executed between the parties in 2014, is up to \$40 million less grants received.



TO: T.C. Broadnax, City Manager

FROM: Peter Huffman, Director, Planning and Development Services Department 

SUBJECT: Link Light Rail Expansion – Planning Commission’s Comments

DATE: May 26, 2015

The Planning Commission received a briefing from Sound Transit staff on April 1, 2015, on the status of the Tacoma Link Light Rail Expansion Project and the draft results of the environmental evaluation. The Commission was informed that the City Council is scheduled to make a recommendation to the Sound Transit Board in May-June 2015 for its consideration in selecting “the project to be built” in July 2015. The Commission felt it would be timely to provide comments and recommendations for the Council’s consideration.

Upon rigorous deliberations at their meetings on April 1, April 15, and May 6, the Commission formulated the following comments and recommendations:

1. The Commission is concerned if the need for the Stadium and S. 4th Street Station is justified at this time due to the extremely low ridership projection for this location.
2. If the Stadium and S. 4th Street Station were to be built, specific strategies and funding plans should be developed to effectively address the challenging steep slope along the S. 4th Street corridor, better accommodate riders’ walking to and from the station, and increase the potential ridership at this stop.
3. Consider adding a station near Martin Luther King Jr. Way and S. 15th Street to better serve the neighborhood, as called for in the Hilltop Subarea Plan.
4. Important issues to consider in station design include the creation of a “sense of place” and the contribution to the urban fabric, particularly within the core of the mixed-use centers (when deciding on median vs. curbside stations), and the accommodation of bicycling safety and mobility.
5. Consider establishing a Link Expansion Design Advisory Committee to help review and advise city decision makers on the stations’ design and development as they progress.

Attached is the Planning Commission’s letter of recommendations, dated May 6, 2015. If you or Council members have any questions, please contact Lihuang Wung, Senior Planner, at lwung@cityoftacoma.org or (253) 591-5682.

Attachment

PH:lw



City of Tacoma
Planning Commission

May 6, 2015

Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council,

On behalf of the Planning Commission, I am forwarding our comments regarding the current phase of the Tacoma Link Light Rail Expansion Project.

Back in 2013-2014, when Sound Transit was soliciting the City Council's recommendation on the selection of alignments for the Link Expansion, the Planning Commission submitted a letter to the City Council (dated January 15, 2014), suggesting that the selected alignments should offer the best opportunity to maximize economic development, stimulate urban revitalization, incentivize transit-oriented development, be consistent with the *Hilltop Subarea Plan*, and ensure that access and accessibility near station areas are properly addressed.

Recently, the Commission received a briefing from Sound Transit staff on April 1, 2015 on the project status and schedule, funding situation, public engagement strategies, and draft results of the environmental evaluation. The Commissioners had intense and passionate discussions at the April 1st meeting and subsequently on April 15th and May 6th on many issues such as ridership projections, station locations, station area access and accessibility, and station design.

Following on and adhering to the same principles reflected in our previous recommendations, we would like to offer the following comments and recommendations for your consideration:

1. **Station at Stadium and S. 4th Street** – The projected ridership (daily boardings in 2035) of 100 at the Stadium and S. 4th Street station is extremely low as compared to the other 5 proposed stations along the selected alignment along Stadium Way, Division Avenue and Martin Luther King Jr. Way. While we recognize the physical limitations associated with this station location, the ridership projections still appear surprisingly low considering the dense residential area surrounding the station, which is expected to see significant additional residential growth over the next 20 years. We acknowledge that the City Council made a recommendation to Sound Transit (Resolution No. 39004, September 9, 2014), suggesting Stadium and S. 4th Street be studied as a station location. But, we also understand that the recommendation was made before the ridership projection became available. Based on this very low ridership projection, we are concerned if the need for this station is justified at this time.
2. **Access to Station at Stadium and S. 4th Street** – If the Stadium and S. 4th Street station were to be built, we strongly suggest that Sound Transit and the City of Tacoma develop more specific strategies and funding plans to effectively address the challenging steep slope along the S. 4th Street corridor, better accommodate riders' walking to and from the station, and increase the potential ridership at this stop. If the station is not constructed at this time, we recommend that the system be designed so that a stop could later be added if it becomes needed.
3. **Station at MLK and S. 15th Street** – Judging from Sound Transit's mapping information of the ¼-mile walksheds around the proposed station areas, we have concerns about whether the proposed stations along MLK Jr. Way will adequately service all of the residents, employers and community amenities that should be connected along this corridor. The *Hilltop Subarea Plan* (Fig. 5-23, page 93) calls for a station located in proximity to S. 15th & MLK Jr. Way, which would help service the S. 15th Street corridor (a primary east-west connection between the neighborhood and downtown) and significant community amenities, such as the People's Community Center/Pool. Such a station would more appropriately cover the long gap between

the two stations at S. 11th and S. 18th, and together, make the Link Light Rail a better system serving the Hilltop community and connecting the neighborhood to other destinations around the Greater Downtown. We expect that the expenses needed to study the addition of the MLK Jr. Way and S. 15th station could be covered by the cost saving from removing the Stadium and S. 4th station from the system.

4. **Station Design** – Station design should not only focus on the stations themselves, but also their thematic relationship to surrounding districts, providing an opportunity through creative design to enhance the “sense of place” at these locations. Design considerations should not only consider station aesthetics but also materials used and their appropriateness under normal usage, anticipated weather exposure, and probable vandalism over their projected life. In terms of median vs. curbside stations, we understand that either type has its own merits and constraints. We would like to offer that, from an urban design perspective, median stations would make the light rail system more visible and prevalent, adding a more significant ingredient to the urban fabric particularly in the core of the Stadium and Hilltop Mixed-Use Centers. We are also concerned about issues relating to bicycling safety and mobility near station areas, especially for curbside stations. We acknowledge that these concerns have been raised by the Bicycle and Pedestrian Technical Advisory Group in its letter of January 8, 2015 to the Transportation Commission and the City Council and are being addressed by Sound Transit.
5. **Design Advisory Committee** – Because of the importance of ensuring that the expanded Link Light Rail fits in, to the greatest extent possible, with the City’s recently adopted *North Downtown and Hilltop Subarea Plans*, we urge the City Council to consider creating a Link Expansion Design Advisory Committee to help review and advise city decision makers on the stations’ design and development as they progress. Such review should occur, as a minimum, at the schematic, preliminary and final design development stages for this major capital project. It is suggested that such an advisory committee include representatives of the surrounding neighborhoods and business districts, as well as representatives of the local architectural, urban design, and historical preservation communities. This committee will be an effective mechanism to implement the *Hilltop Subarea Plan*, specifically, Action M-15 (page 94): “Actively engage Sound Transit to collaborate on station siting and design that will most effectively support Hilltop’s visions and goals.”

According to Sound Transit’s environmental decision process and timeline, the City Council is scheduled to make a recommendation to the Sound Transit Board in May-June 2015 for its consideration in the selection of “the project to be built” in July 2015. To assist you in formulating your recommendation, we respectfully submit the above comments and recommendations for your timely consideration.

Sincerely,



Chris Beale
Chair

c. Transportation Commission



City of Tacoma
Transportation Commission

July 15, 2015

Ryan Mello, Chair
Infrastructure, Planning, and Sustainability Council Committee
747 Market Street, Suite 1200
Tacoma, WA 98402

Re: Sound Transit Tacoma Link Expansion Project

Dear Chair Mello,

The Transportation Commission received a presentation from Sound Transit on July 1, 2015 regarding the Tacoma Link Expansion project. The presentation included discussion of the Environmental Review analysis, results, and timeline. Sound Transit will be holding a series of open houses during the two-week comment period starting July 15, 2015 and will present their findings to City Council early August. It is anticipated that City Council may recommend a Light Rail alignment at that time. With this letter, the Transportation Commission respectfully submits our recommendations to the Infrastructure, Planning, and Sustainability Committee for consideration.

On June 18, 2014, the Transportation Commission submitted a letter of recommendation to the Infrastructure, Planning, and Sustainability Committee regarding Tacoma Link Expansion station location. The recommendations outlined in that letter remain valid and are still a priority to this project.

The Commission feels strongly that the station location at South 4th & Stadium Way is crucial to the expansion of Tacoma Link. There is an incredible amount of developable land in the vicinity, public access is available in at least 3 pedestrian access corridors between Broadway and Stadium Way within a one-block radius of the future station, and people with limited mobility or ability will not walk uphill to the Stadium District Location or downhill to the Theater District.

In addition, there has been discussion about the relocation of the Theater District Station. The Commission would prefer to keep the station near the current location, which is closer to complementary transit routes on South 9th. This would also prevent the station from cannibalizing passengers from South 4th, which could be incorrectly interpreted as a lack of demand for a station at South 4th. While the Commission does not wish to delay the project with continued discussion of the Theater District Station, and thus can support the proposed relocation, the Commission emphasizes the importance of retaining the stop at South 4th and Stadium Way.

The Commission also discussed the importance of maintaining or improving signalization along the Link corridor, such that Light Rail will complement the existing traffic system for buses, autos, pedestrians, and bicyclists.

The Commission applauds Sound Transit's efforts to engage the community on the design and alignment of the Link expansion including utilizing an ongoing Stakeholder process to ensure Tacoma's values are embedded in the overall projects. There have been numerous opportunities to comment and participate, as a community and as a Commission. We hope the Council will consider the Transportation Commission's Station Location priorities when it communicates the City's priorities to Sound Transit. We look forward to the better, brighter Tacoma we will become!

Sincerely,

Jane Ann Moore, MD
Co-Chair

Justin D. Leighton
Co-Chair

cc: Mayor Marilyn Strickland
Tacoma City Councilmembers
Tacoma City Manager
Chris Beale, Planning Commission Chair
Chelsea Levy, Sound Transit