

**CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION**

Sound Transit 2 Line (East Link) project update

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**DIRECTION NEEDED FROM COUNCIL****INFORMATION  
ONLY**

Sound Transit's Executive Director for Design, Engineering and Construction Management, Ron Lewis, will provide an update on the opening of the 2 Line in Spring 2024.

No Council action is required. Tonight's presentation is an opportunity to learn about Sound Transit's work to prepare for light rail operations on the Eastside, ask questions and provide feedback.

**RECOMMENDATION**

N/A

**BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS**

Since 2008, Bellevue has planned for growth with greater density and mobility connections in anticipation of Sound Transit's East Link Extension light rail project. The East Link Extension project is 14 miles long and includes 10 stations from Seattle's International District, across I-90 to Mercer Island and South Bellevue, and through downtown Bellevue and the Bel-Red area to Redmond Technology Station. When East Link connects to Downtown Redmond Link Extension and the Lynnwood Link Extension through Bellevue and Seattle, it becomes the 2 Line. The full 2 Line will include 26 stations across two counties and seven cities.

**Project delays lead to phased 2 Line service**

The full 2 Line light rail service between Redmond and Lynnwood was originally scheduled to open in 2023; however, construction quality issues on I-90 have delayed the full opening of the 2 Line. In response, the City of Bellevue – along with a broad stakeholder group – asked Sound Transit to open the completed portion of the 2 Line on the eastside while finishing construction from South Bellevue Station to the Chinatown/International District Station. Bellevue Mayor Lynne Robinson signed a joint letter supporting the "Starter Line" option with the cities of Redmond, Kirkland and stakeholders across the Eastside. The letter is included as Attachment A.

In August 2023, the Sound Transit Board of Directors authorized the first phase of 2 Line service, expected to begin in spring 2024. Sound Transit determined that regional mobility would improve by opening the completed portions of the 2 Line sooner rather than waiting for the remaining portion along I-90 to finish construction. The new 6.3-mile light rail line will serve eight stations in Bellevue and Redmond: South Bellevue, East Main, Bellevue Downtown, Wilburton, Spring District, BelRed, Overlake Village, and Redmond Technology.

## 2 Line service levels

The 2 Line will be serviced with cars from the Operations and Maintenance Facility – East in Bellevue. Sound Transit's 2024 Service Plan outlines the following service levels for first phase of the 2 Line:

- **Frequency:** Arrival every 10 minutes
- **Hours of Service:** Approximately 16 hours a day from 5:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m.
- **Train size:** 2-car trains

No changes to service are planned for the ST Express bus routes that serve East King County (Routes 542, 545, 550, 554, and 556) until the full 2 Line opens and crosses Lake Washington. When the full 2 Line opens, Sound Transit will work with King County Metro, local jurisdictions and the public to finalize the planned East Link Connections bus restructure, which will eliminate the need for some ST Express routes. Sound Transit plans to increase service levels to meet demand after the 2 Line connects to the full regional system.

## Preparing for passenger service

In late-January, Sound Transit began running simulated service to prepare for the first phase of the 2 Line opening. Simulated service allows for the stress testing of operations in anticipation of passenger service this spring. Since civil construction has finished, test trains are running between South Bellevue Station and Redmond Technology Station every 10–15 minutes. Residents, employees and visitors can expect to see more frequent trains moving through the corridor, and the tracks will be treated as a live railroad at all times. In preparation for simulated service, Sound Transit and the City of Bellevue communicated safety tips to the public for street-level rail crossings – particularly in the Bel-Red area.

Sound Transit is leading activation events at each of the eight stations for the first phase of the 2 Line opening, including a ribbon-cutting event at the Bellevue Downtown Station. City staff are coordinating with Sound Transit on the event preparations, external communications and internal coordination.

Light rail service starting this spring will begin a multiyear transition and transformation of how people move through Bellevue. The 2 Line represents a transformational opportunity to reimagine the current bus network in Bellevue, respond to changing mobility needs and improve transit access for historically underserved populations. This may lead to future needs for Bellevue operations or policy adjustments.

Sound Transit anticipates opening the remaining 2 Line stations in 2025, including: Mercer Island and Judkins Park, as well as two additional stations in downtown Redmond. At that time, the 2 Line will be fully operational between Redmond and Lynnwood.

## Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)

Bellevue continues to partner with Sound Transit on TOD in the East Link project corridor, including at OMF-East and the future BelRed Station area.

### OMF-East TOD

Sound Transit and Bellevue partnered on a TOD on the southern portion of the site. Each agency contributed approximately an acre of land with the vision to create a mixed-use, mixed-income community with significant residential, office and retail uses. After a competitive process, BRIDGE

Housing was selected as the master developer for the site. Sound Transit approved key project and financial terms in late-2021. Plan development is underway with construction slated to begin by 2024.

#### 130<sup>th</sup> Station-area TOD

The original Sound Transit-City of Bellevue Memorandum of Understanding contemplated construction of a 300-stall surface park-and-ride facility. The City agreed to construct a park-and-ride facility in exchange for ownership of the underlying property, as well as the option to build a housing development with an integrated parking garage for transit riders. Because the agencies were expecting the 2 Line to open in 2023, the City originally elected to construct a surface parking lot on the site with the option for redevelopment in the future.

The City is preparing a competitive procurement to select a development partner to deliver the Sound Transit park-and-ride facility in tandem with a mixed-use development. Staff is currently identifying public benefit objectives, procurement approaches, funding mechanisms for the park-and-ride facility, and timing for release any request for proposals. In addition, staff is working with Sound Transit on reducing the number of interim parking stalls required during construction of the park-and-ride facility and use of adjacent Sound Transit property to house the interim parking.

### **POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS**

#### **Policy Impact**

The City Council has identified transportation as a high priority, and transit solutions as an important part of the local and regional transportation system. Bellevue is expected to see an increase of 30,000 jobs by 2025, and improving multi-modal transportation options is an integral part of the City's strategy to support planned growth. Bellevue's Transit Master Plan (TMP) envisions a transit network that serves a more diverse ridership and trip purposes, where transit is the mode of choice to increase the number of people who live, work, shop and play in Bellevue. The TMP identifies service and capital investment priorities needed to establish a frequent and connected transit network.

#### **Fiscal Impact**

There are no direct fiscal impacts associated with tonight's briefing.

### **OPTIONS**

N/A

### **ATTACHMENTS**

A. Joint Support Letter for East Link Starter Line

### **AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY**

N/A