

May 2, 2016

Sound Transit Board
c/o Board Administrator
Sound Transit
401 S. Jackson Street
Seattle, WA 98104

RE: City of Bellevue comments on Draft Sound Transit Phase 3 Plan

Dear Chair Constantine and Members of the Board:

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the draft Sound Transit Phase 3 (ST3) System Plan. We write this letter just days after the groundbreaking ceremony for East Link, and wish to acknowledge and thank you for this important ST2 investment in our community. As communicated in our July 14, 2015 and January 21, 2016 comment letters, the City of Bellevue has a vital interest in ensuring that future regional transportation projects maximize the investments of ST2 and meet the growing needs of the Eastside, and the greater region, in a potential ST3 ballot measure.

Bellevue's priorities acknowledge and emphasize the many interests and goals shared among Eastside cities, which are interconnected both geographically and economically. Eastside cities are projected to reach nearly 700,000 residents and more than 550,000 jobs by 2040. ST3 represents an opportunity to build upon the transportation network already in place and advance a transit system that effectively and efficiently addresses the growing transportation needs of our region. As noted in Bellevue's Transit Master Plan vision, transit service should be designed to help more people reach more destinations in less time.

Our specific comments on the ST3 plan include the following:

Light Rail to Redmond

A key priority for Bellevue has been and remains finishing the East Link light rail spine to Redmond. Finishing East Link now is critical because ST2 did not complete light rail to Redmond. This must be the highest priority. We are pleased to see this included in the ST3 plan.

Bus Rapid Transit Must Operate in Center Lanes on I-405

As indicated in the attached I-405 corridor cities joint ST3 comment letter, for the I-405 Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project to meet the needs of the growing Eastside, buses must be in the center lanes of the interstate and serve in-line stops, as envisioned in the I-405 Master Plan. Unfortunately, the proposed system appears to be only slightly better than current Regional Express bus service and cannot be considered high capacity transit (HCT). This is not acceptable.

As proposed, BRT service north of Kirkland will operate in the general purpose lanes and serve existing outside transit stops. Because of this, we are concerned BRT will be subject to I-405 corridor congestion and result in system-wide service delays and unreliable trip times, even with the proposed "shoulder running pilot program," on short segments in the southbound direction of the interstate. The same concerns exist for the segment from South Renton to the Tukwila International Boulevard Link Station where service is again described as operating in the general purpose lanes.

Although we are pleased that the proposed system will operate in the Express Toll Lanes between Kirkland and South Renton, we are concerned that the absence of stops between Bellevue and Renton leaves a significant portion of the I-405 corridor without access to this much needed HCT service.

We request that the Board amend the ST3 plan to include a center running BRT system the length of the I-405 corridor that serves, at a minimum, in-line stops at the following locations:

- Canyon Park (Bothell);
- Northeast 85th Street (Kirkland);
- 112th Avenue Southeast (Bellevue/Newcastle);
- Northeast 44th Street (Renton); and,
- North 8th Street (Renton).

The final element of successful BRT on I-405 is providing sufficient parking to allow commuters from the lower density areas of the Eastside to access the system by car. Expanding existing park-and-rides and adding new ones is critical to the success of the project. We request that Sound Transit work with its partner agencies and neighboring cities to plan for these parking facilities and include them in the final plan.

We understand the Board must make project decisions based on the available finances in each subarea, and we applaud cost conscious planning to maximize the public's investment. To achieve this goal, while still delivering a BRT system that meets the needs of the growing Eastside, Sound Transit must work with the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to coordinate the build-out of the in-line system and capitalize on the investments the state is already planning to make in the I-405 corridor in the coming decade. Near term examples include the expansion of I-405 between Renton and Bellevue, and improvements to the corridor north of Kirkland.

The Record of Decision for I-405 calls for BRT. It is Sound Transit's duty to implement BRT on I-405. This means working in tandem—and working transparently—with WSDOT to innovate ways to partner to plan and build a BRT system that functions like light rail on rubber tires. The City of Bellevue stands by to help facilitate this partnership in any way either agency finds helpful.

Connecting Bellevue to Issaquah

There has been little, if any, local discussion about an HCT connection between Bellevue and Issaquah, and the public is being asked to weigh in on projects many years before they are designed and built. It is critical that Sound Transit allow maximum flexibility that will address changes over time to ensure the best options are considered for implementation. Any future HCT connections between Bellevue and Issaquah must be thoroughly vetted to ensure the most effective service between these regional growth centers is provided.

We request that the Board complete an in-depth analysis of the proposed light rail system. The analysis should examine this corridor and determine the most effective way to serve it. This could include light rail, trolleys, BRT, or other emerging technologies. If light rail is the option, our Council prefers that it run on the east side of I-405 and connect at the Wilburton Station. If a BRT system option is chosen, it should consider options for connections at South Bellevue, East Main, Downtown or Wilburton. In addition, developing an interim BRT system to Issaquah before a long range plan is initiated for light rail should be considered.

Transparency in Subarea Equity

Subarea equity remains an important element of Sound Transit planning. The transportation and mobility needs of the Eastside are of equal importance to those of other subareas, and there is a fundamental principle to apportioning projects by subarea. It is critical that the Board maintain the principles of subarea equity as defined in ST2 (i.e., utilizing local tax revenues for transportation programs and

services that benefit the residents and businesses of a subarea generally in proportion to the level of revenues contributed by that subarea).

Before a measure is placed on the ballot, we look forward to a thorough cost breakdown of how the ST3 projects will be paid for by each subarea and the amount of funding each project will receive from Sound Transit-collected funds versus funding from other sources, such as grants.

Moving Forward and Early Wins

Traffic congestion and overcrowding on transit are a reality today. Given the length of the package, to 2041, the Board should take measures to expedite project delivery wherever possible. Sound Transit should work with other agencies to capitalize on early opportunities to collaborate and deliver early wins that provide near term transit service improvements as they present themselves, particularly in the I-405 and I-90 corridors. Sound Transit should prioritize working closely with King County Metro Transit to integrate its long term transit plan services with the services provided by Sound Transit.

The Bellevue City Council recognizes there are no easy decisions for the Board. We are committed to working with the Sound Transit Board to implement light rail, true bus rapid transit, and regional express transit services.

Thank you for considering the City of Bellevue's comments. Please contact David Berg, P.E., Transportation Department Director (dberg@bellevuewa.gov, 425-452-6468) if you have any questions or want to discuss our comments in greater detail.

Sincerely,



John Stokes, Mayor

cc: Bellevue City Council
Brad Miyake, City Manager
Peter Rogoff, CEO, Sound Transit
Dave Berg, Transportation Department Director, City of Bellevue
Ric Ilgenfritz, Deputy Director, Sound Transit

Attachments:

- City of Bellevue January 21, 2016 ST3 Candidate Project Scopes Comment Letter
- City of Bellevue Interest Statement Concerning Sound Transit's Phase 3 (ST3) System Plan
- City of Bellevue July 14, 2015 ST3 Comment Letter
- I-405 Cities Coalition ST3 Comment Letter