

CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION

Introduction of Sound Transit's Chief Executive Officer and Eastside project updates

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DIRECTION NEEDED FROM COUNCIL**INFORMATION
ONLY**

Sound Transit's new Chief Executive Officer, Julie Timm, will provide an update on Eastside high-capacity transit projects, including East Link light rail and I-405 Stride bus rapid transit (BRT).

No Council action is required at this time. Tonight's presentation is an opportunity to learn about Sound Transit's work for a potential East Link Starter Line, ask questions and provide feedback.

RECOMMENDATION

N/A

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

Bellevue is anticipating several transformational transit projects in the coming years. Due to an affordability gap and construction quality issues, several Eastside projects are delayed. Chief Executive Officer Timm, who started in September 2022, will update Council on the following projects:

- **East Link Light Rail** includes ten stations from Seattle's International District, across I-90 to Mercer Island, through Bellevue and on to Redmond. Six light rail stations are in Bellevue.
- **East Link Starter Line** is a proposal to operate light rail between South Bellevue and Redmond during the interim of Spring 2024 – Spring 2025.
- **I-405 Stride BRT** will provide faster, more reliable bus service along a 37-mile corridor stretching from Lynnwood to Burien. There will be ten BRT stations, including the Bellevue Transit Center.

More information about these projects is included below.

Sound Transit Capital Projects

In March 1992, the Washington State Legislature authorized King, Pierce and Snohomish counties to create a single agency to develop public transit alternatives to meet the region's travel needs. Sound Transit's capital projects were established through three voter-approved funding packages:

- In 1996, voters approved the **Sound Move** regional transportation funding measure. It funded light rail between Sea-Tac Airport and the University of Washington, Sounder commuter rail and ST Express bus routes between the region's centers.
- In 2008, voters approved the 15-year **Sound Transit 2 (ST2)** measure. ST2 increased the ST Express bus and Sounder commuter rail service. It also added 36 miles of new Link light rail service, extending Link service north to Lynnwood, East to Mercer Island, Bellevue, and Redmond, and south of Sea-Tac Airport.
- In 2016, voters approved **Sound Transit 3 (ST3)**, a \$54 billion program to expand the region's transit system over 25 years. ST3 projects in Bellevue include the I-405 bus rapid transit (BRT), System Access funding and South Kirkland to Issaquah Light Rail.

Like other agencies, Sound Transit has experienced challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, steeply rising cost pressures, regional workforce constraints that have reduced transit service, and a concrete strike that stalled capital projects.

In August 2021, the Sound Transit Board of Directors approved a "realignment plan" to address an estimated \$6.5 billion affordability gap for delivering projects on their previous schedules. Sound Transit points to regional real estate and construction costs driving up future project estimates. This plan now serves as the agency's framework for delivering projects in the planning or design phases as rapidly as possible. Realignment did not affect projects already in construction.

More recently, Sound Transit has experienced design and construction quality issues on several light rail extension projects, including East Link, Redmond Link Extension, Lynnwood Link Extension, Federal Way Link Extension and Hilltop Tacoma Link Extension. A risk assessment was performed on all Link projects in construction to identify likely opening timelines for each project.

East Link Light Rail Update

After over 15 years of planning, design and construction, East Link was anticipated to open for revenue service in June 2023.

The close out process for all civil contracts is currently underway and is anticipated to be complete in the second quarter of 2023. The electrical and systems contract is ongoing and is anticipated to be complete in 2023. Live-wire light rail vehicle testing is occurring on the East Link tracks, with trains moving at speeds of 5-30 mph between the 120th/Spring District and Redmond Technology stations. Full-scale testing with multiple train cars at high speed is anticipated in the third quarter of 2023.

In August 2022, Sound Transit announced project delays to East Link related to construction quality and durability concerns about plinths and the raised concrete structures that support the tracks on the I-90 segment (except for the floating bridge). The contractor is re-casting the plinths to ensure they resolve the issues and assure long-term durability, reliability and safety.

At present, East Link and Downtown Redmond Link Extension are anticipated to open together in Spring 2025. Further, the East Link delay has a negative impact on service to north King and

Snohomish counties because the Operations and Maintenance Facility (OMF) East supplies the light rail vehicles required for full-service frequencies on the Lynnwood Link Extension. Service to Lynnwood will be limited until the full East Link alignment opens service across Lake Washington. This results in eight-minute service frequency on Lynnwood Link rather than the planned four-minute service frequency.

East Link Starter Line

On January 26, the Sound Transit Board of Directors voted to authorize up to \$6 million to develop an East Link Starter Line option. The Starter Line option, proposed to operate in Spring 2024, would open a significant portion of East Link (South Bellevue Station to Redmond Technology Station) and the OMF East, which are unaffected by the I-90 corridor construction impacts. Bellevue Mayor Lynne Robinson signed a joint letter supporting the East Link Starter Line option with the cities of Redmond, Kirkland and stakeholders across the Eastside. The letter is included as Attachment A.

However, Board members have expressed concerns about impacts to the Lynnwood Link Extension. An East Link Starter Line could potentially delay opening the Lynnwood Link Extension because Sound Transit requires at least six months between two Link openings. Additionally, an East Link Starter Line opening does not supply the light rail vehicles required for full-service frequencies on the Lynnwood Link Extension. Sound Transit is working to address concerns and will update the Board quarterly.

In fall 2023, the Board will be asked to consider an action to open the Starter Line.

Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)

Bellevue continues to partner with Sound Transit on TOD in the East Link corridor, including at OMF-East and the future Bel-Red/130th 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.

130th 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 and the option to build a housing development with an integrated parking garage for transit riders. Because the agencies were expecting East Link 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.

In 2022, the City issued a Notice of Intent to sell the property to a developer, which will result in the construction of a mixed-use, mixed-income development featuring almost 600 housing units (about 40

percent of which would be affordable at 80 percent Area Median Income or below). The development will include first-floor retail, arts, and community spaces, and a 300-stall park-and-ride facility. Bellevue and Sound Transit continue to work through solutions for interim parking, parking facility layouts and other elements. Negotiations remain underway with the goal to finalize an agreement with the developer in 2023.

Access to Transit

East Link implementation 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. Metro and Sound Transit co-led East Link Connections, a process for improving transit connections throughout the Eastside as light rail service expands. The proposed transit plan supports the City's transit network vision by adding more all-day, all-week service and creating more transfer opportunities so that riders can travel to many different local and regional destinations.

The East Link Connections proposal is anticipated to be approved by the Sound Transit Board and the King County Council before full East Link service begins. Bellevue Mayor Lynne Robinson signed a letter supporting the East Link Connections proposal, which was sent to the Sound Transit Board and the King County Council. The letter is included as Attachment B.

In addition to East Link Connections, the City is working to ensure that transit riders have safe, comfortable and accessible ways to access East Link when it opens. For example, the Bellevue Transit Center Raised Intersections project includes construction of new raised intersections on NE 6th Street at 108th and 110th avenues NE in downtown Bellevue. The raised intersections will provide a seamless street crossing for pedestrians traveling from the Bellevue Downtown light rail station and the Bellevue Transit Center. Additionally, the City is working with Sound Transit, King County Metro and the Bellevue Downtown Association to make passenger improvements at the Bellevue Transit Center as part of the I-405 BRT Project.

I-405 Stride BRT

I-405 BRT will connect communities along the I-405 corridor from Lynnwood to Burien with buses running as often as every ten minutes. Council has supported I-405 BRT since it was included in the I-405 Master Plan in 2002. Sound Transit's BRT service, called "Stride," will operate in two segments on I-405. I-405 BRT is estimated at \$1 billion and will serve about 18,500 daily riders.

The Board's adopted "realignment plan" identified a project delay for both segments. The Burien to Bellevue (S1 Line) segment will begin service in 2026. The Bellevue to Lynnwood (S2 Line) segment is scheduled to begin service in 2027.

The project is approaching the 60 percent design milestone and anticipates public engagement to request feedback on updated plans. Sound Transit and the City of Bellevue are currently studying bus layover options including electric charging infrastructure for Battery Electric Buses (BEB). Ideally, a site can be identified that is close to the downtown Bellevue Transit Center and light rail station.

POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS

Policy Impact

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. Multi-modal transportation options are a major part of the City's efforts to accommodate that growth. Bellevue's TMP envisions a transit network that serves a more diverse variety of people and trip purposes, where transit is the mode of choice for an increasing number of people who live, work, shop and play in Bellevue. The TMP identifies service and capital investment priorities needed to establish a frequent 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
- B. East Link Connections letter

AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY

N/A