

January 19, 2016

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

RE: City of Bellevue comments on Sound Transit Phase 3 Candidate Project Scopes

Dear Chair Constantine and Members of the Board:

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the candidate project scopes under consideration for inclusion in the Sound Transit Phase 3 (ST3) System Plan. Thank you for building on lessons learned from ST2, and engaging local jurisdiction on the project scopes early in the planning process. ST3 will be most successful if its projects mirror local land use and transportation plans, and blend with community character by incorporating elements like grade-separated crossings, for example.

As communicated in our July 14, 2015 comment letter and “Interest Statement,” 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 region in a potential ST3 ballot measure. As the candidate project scopes are solidified and the draft plan is formulated in the coming months, we expect ST3 to maintain subarea equity, enhance intra-eastside connections, and demonstrate multi-agency coordination.

Maintain Subarea Equity

It is imperative that the ST3 System Plan address the needs of the Eastside in a comprehensive fashion to serve the substantial expected population and employment growth in the East King subarea, and to 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).

Should ST3 be approved by the voters, the Eastside will be making a significant tax investment into the package. A responsible plan will carefully balance planned projects with available funds from each subarea, rather than borrow across subarea lines. This balance should be transparent to the voters so that the public can clearly understand the full cost of ST3, and be confident their investments will deliver a system that gets them where they want to go. We have invited Sound Transit staff to our February 8 Council meeting to explain how the plan will address these important considerations.

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Enhance Intra-Eastside Connections

Bellevue's priorities acknowledge and emphasize the many interests and goals shared among Eastside cities. The ST3 System Plan must recognize that High Capacity Transit (HCT) connections between Eastside cities are as critical to the overall regional network as cross-lake connections. As noted in Bellevue's Transit Master Plan vision, transit service should be designed to help more people reach more destinations in less time.

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Bellevue strongly urges the Sound Transit Board to move the following HCT projects forward into the draft ST3 System Plan, including the altered project scope elements described below:

- 1. Project E0-2: Fully implement I-405 Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) from SeaTac to Lynnwood, consistent with the I-405 Master Plan **early in the ST3 funding cycle**.** As currently described, the lower capital I-405 corridor BRT option is only slightly better than current Regional Express (REX) bus service. For example, the proposed low capital BRT from the Lynnwood Transit Center to the Bellevue Transit Center is essentially the current 535 REX route. This service will be subject to I-405 congestion and delays as buses weave from the Express Toll Lanes (ETL) to the general purpose lanes and back to serve outside transit stops. This is not BRT, and is not acceptable **because it will not to** adequately serve the growing Eastside **or maximize the taxpayer's investments**.

ST3 implementation must be full BRT, which includes dedicated transitway with inline flyer stops, or at the very least remain in the ETL lanes serving only inline stops; vehicles with multiple doors for entry/exit, designed to "dock" with stations to eliminate a step-up onto the bus; frequent, all day service, intuitive maps and simple schedules; off-board fare collection; transit signal priority for faster, more efficient service; and sophisticated communication systems to track vehicle locations and provide real-time arrival information directly to passenger cell phones or kiosk displays.

For the I-405 BRT project to meet the needs of the growing Eastside travelling public, the scope must include:

- In-line BRT station at Canyon Park with a connection to the pedestrian overcrossing of I-405;
- Expanded parking garage at Canyon Park;
- In-line station in Kirkland at NE 85th Street;

- **Extending NE 6th Street to 120th Avenue NE Extension** in Bellevue;
- In-line station at 112th Avenue SE with a pedestrian bridge connection to the park-and-ride;
- Expansion of the 112th Avenue SE Park-and-Ride;
- In-line station at North 8th Street in Renton;
- Direct access to the Tukwila Sounder Station;
- At least one additional in-line station south of I-90;
- Non-motorized access improvements and other service improvements paired with related capital improvements (signals, signage, lighting);
- Consideration of alternative routing for northbound BRT that exits at I-90 to Bellevue Way SE to serve the South Bellevue Station, East Main Station, and Bellevue Downtown Station along arterial streets before returning to I-405 via the NE 6th Street direct access ramp; and
- Expanded vehicle fleet to meet service/headway goals (project number R-02).

2. Project E-03: Build light rail from Totem Lake to Issaquah via Bellevue to connect these three regional growth centers with fast, frequent and reliable transit service.

Move forward with the project as described in the E-03 project analysis, including the Bellevue College Connector project, with the following scope modifications:

- Allow for the project to be built and opened for service in phases;
- Provide flexibility to allow for alternative High Capacity Transit considerations on certain segments of the route;
- Include an elevated non-motorized crossing of NE 8th Street at the Eastside Rail Corridor to provide access between Wilburton Station, located on the north side of NE 8th Street, and the redeveloping Wilburton area on the south side of NE 8th Street. Additionally, the crossing will serve people walking and bicycling along the planned Eastside Rail Corridor multi-use trail as well as provide access from the street level of NE 8th Street; and
- Ensure the Eastside Rail Corridor multi-use trail be preserved for recreational use in addition to transit use.

3. Project E-04: HOV Direct Access at Renton/N 8th Street. In lieu of the proposed North 8th Street HOV direct access ramps in Renton, provide a new transit center and parking garage at Rainier Avenue South and South Grady Way.

As supportive elements of greater connectivity on the Eastside, Bellevue supports inclusion of the following projects (as described in the project analysis sheets released on December 4) for inclusion in the draft ST3 System Plan:

- Project E0-1: Complete ST2 East Link LRT to Downtown Redmond (per the Record of Decision) **as early as possible**.
- Project E-05: Build the North Sammamish Park-and-Ride.

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- Projects N-09 and N-10: Implement BRT on 145th Street and State Route 522 to create a HCT connection between the Eastside and the greater Seattle area via the north end of Lake Washington.

Demonstrate Multi-Agency Coordination

While we appreciate the time constraints that Sound Transit is under to meet the June deadline for potential inclusion in a November 2016 ballot, we are concerned that there is not sufficient time or information available to understand the complete transportation network for which the ST3 candidate projects are integral to creating.

We continue to work with Sound Transit staff to understand specific elements from the December 4 project sheets, **however as presented** these analyses are missing several critical components, **including detailed information** pertaining to the:

- System Access Improvements (project number R-05);
- Regional Express Bus Service (project number R-01);
- Transit Oriented Development Program (project number R-07); and
- Coordination with King County Metro, both current service and Long Range Plan integration.

Furthermore, Bellevue staff has met with Sound Transit staff to better understand the ridership forecasting modeling used throughout the candidate project sheet analyses. There are serious concerns that the ridership assumptions do not fully capture local land use plans, localized trips, and regional transit integration, which affect ridership estimates for all the Eastside candidate projects. City staff will submit a technical memo to address these concerns.

This information is critical to understanding how the candidate projects will integrate into a complete regional transportation network—no matter the operator—and maximize the public’s investment in ST3. **It is important to note that connecting people to places they want and need to get to with frequent, reliable and affordable transit is a social equity issue. ST3 provides a real opportunity to close current service gaps, but must be closely integrated with other transit agencies and local jurisdiction plans for this opportunity to be fully realized.** The public deserves a thorough update on how this coordination is coming together, and we invite you to provide this at an upcoming Council meeting.

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Bellevue will continue to be engaged in the development of the ST3 System Plan in collaboration with other Eastside cities and Sound Transit. **Ongoing coordination between our staffs will be vital as we work to carefully align city planning efforts—such as our Grand**

Connection, which will provide a non-motorized crossing of I-405 between the east and west sides of Bellevue—with the work underway in ST3.

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 in greater detail.

Sincerely,

John Stokes, Mayor

Attachments:

- City of Bellevue Interest Statement Concerning Sound Transit's Phase 3 (ST3) System Plan
- City of Bellevue July 14, 2015 ST3 Comment Letter

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

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