

DATE: July 24, 2017

TO: Mayor Stokes and Bellevue City Councilmembers

FROM: Joyce Nichols, Intergovernmental Relations Director
Dave Berg, Transportation Director
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SUBJECT: One Center City Initiative Update

At the March 27 Council meeting, staff provided an overview of upcoming transportation projects and initiatives that will impact regional mobility through 2024 (Attachment A). In particular, both the Eastside and the downtown Seattle area will see construction and completion of several critical regional interstate and state route expansions, light rail lines, regional trails and supporting infrastructure during this time period.

One of the Seattle initiatives, One Center City, has refined its alternatives and the potential impacts to the Eastside have changed. The following memo will provide an update on these recent developments.

Background

As you may recall, the City of Seattle, King County Metro Transit, Sound Transit and the Downtown Seattle Association launched the One Center City Initiative last fall to strategize how to get maximum benefits from the transportation system in Seattle's downtown core in the face of ongoing growth and construction activity.

One Center City will include strategies to address future mobility issues facing the downtown Seattle core due to temporary construction challenges occurring from 2018 – 2023. These projects include:

- Demolition of the Alaskan Way Viaduct and construction of a new Seattle waterfront;
- Construction of a new downtown streetcar (connecting First Hill and South Lake Union streetcar lines via 1st Avenue and Stewart Street);
- Continuing public and private construction, including expansion of the Washington State Convention Center set to begin in late 2018; and
- Conversion of the Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel to a rail-only facility.

Updates to Eastside Impacts

The circumstances and mobility issues in downtown Seattle and surrounding neighborhoods often affect the entire region, in part, due to the many people who

commute to Seattle from all over the Puget Sound region—including the Eastside. The One Center City proposals with the most impact to Bellevue and the Eastside are bus service restructuring on I-90 and SR 520, and a 2018 conversion of the Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel to a rail-only facility. One Center City released its round II revisions to its original proposals in June, and the proposals that impact the Eastside have either been removed from consideration, refined for improved timing, or held for further analysis as follows:

- **Proposal to truncate the Sound Transit (ST) 550 bus route at the International District Station:**

The preliminary One Center City proposal for I-90 included truncating bus service at the International District Station. This would have required ST 550 riders to transfer to Link light rail at the International District Station to get into downtown Seattle, rather than continuing on the bus to their final downtown destination as they do now. With the closure of the South Bellevue Park and Ride, this change could have resulted in ST 550 passengers transitioning from a one-seat ride to a two-seat or potentially three-seat ride to reach their final destination.

After conducting initial public outreach on this concept and completing further technical analysis, this proposal has been eliminated from consideration. The ST 550 will continue to operate in the Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel until the tunnel closes to buses, and then the route will operate on surface streets in downtown Seattle.

- **Timing for the conversion of the Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel to a rail-only facility:**

The region has long anticipated that the Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel, which serves both buses and light rail, would convert permanently to a light rail only tunnel in September 2019 when the tunnel will need to accommodate increased light rail capacity. King County's sale of the Convention Place Station to the Washington State Convention Center was slated to accelerate the removal of buses from the tunnel to fall of 2018. There is a significant transit advantage to leaving buses in the tunnel as long as possible, as travel times are expected to be longer once buses operate on the surface streets.

King County Councilmember Claudia Balducci introduced an amendment to the King County/Washington State Convention Center purchase and sale agreement that restores the closure to a default of September 2019. The amendment allows for buses to be removed from the tunnel in March 2019 if the Convention Center construction has received permits and is ready to move forward before that time. The King County Council unanimously approved the agreement, including Councilmember Balducci's amendment, on June 26.

- **Proposed reorientation of SR 520 bus service:**

The One Center City proposal for SR 520 includes reorienting some all-day bus service from directly serving downtown Seattle to serving Montlake and the University of Washington. King County Metro routes 252, 255, 257, 268 and 311 and Sound Transit route 545 are under consideration for this change. No Bellevue bus routes would be impacted.

This proposal is still under consideration for implementation through One Center City. Under this proposal, riders would need to transfer to Link light rail at the University of Washington Station to access downtown Seattle. The proposal includes a \$2-\$3 million investment to improve the transfer environment at the Montlake Hub.

Some Eastside cities have expressed concerns that the necessary Montlake Hub improvements would not be constructed prior to the bus service restructure, resulting in slow transfers and longer travel times for Eastside commuters. These concerns are reiterated in a July 7 letter to King County Metro from several Northeast King County cities, including Bellevue (Attachment B).

One Center City Next Steps

The One Center City Advisory Committee—comprised of nearly 40 Seattle area community leaders—will continue to collect public input on the proposed plan concepts, and is scheduled to release a third round of refinements this fall. In 2018, final decisions on any King County Metro service changes will be made by the King County Council, and any Sound Transit service changes by the Sound Transit Board. Public outreach is expected to continue up until those final decision points. Bellevue staff will continue to monitor the work of the One Center City effort and will provide updates for Council as appropriate.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Regional Timeline
- B. Mayor's Letter