

WEST SEATTLE TRANSPORTATION COALITION

May 15, 2018

Sound Transit
401 S. Jackson Street
Seattle, WA. 98104-2826
Sent by Email: wsblink@soundtransit.org



Re: *Comments on the ST3 West Seattle and Ballard Link Extension Phase 1 Alternatives*

Dear Stakeholder Advisory Group, Elected Leadership Group, and Sound Transit Board Members:

The West Seattle Transportation Coalition (WSTC) is a peninsula-wide organization working to address transportation and mobility issues for Seattle’s largest constituency – the nearly 100,000 people living on the 10 square miles of the West Seattle Peninsula. WSTC’s top issue has always been ingress-egress and mobility issues between our Peninsula and points beyond. The West Seattle Bridge Transportation Corridor (WSBTC), which connects us with major north-south arteries from SR 99 and E Marginal-Alaskan Way to Airport Way and I-5 is the city’s busiest transportation artery. It carries nearly 118,000 vehicles a day – 10,300 on the Spokane St Swing (low) Bridge, and 107,300 on the High Bridge (*SDOT 2014*).

Since WSTC sponsored the first public Light Rail Planning Workshop in West Seattle in June 2017, our constituents have known that ST3 light rail to West Seattle may be the single biggest transportation project to affect our neighborhoods this century, and our supporters want to ensure we make significant improvements for the benefit of all our neighbors while limiting negative impacts wherever possible.

Comments presented here are based on input received and outreach conducted to-date and reflect WSTC suggestions for further refinement of the Phase 1 alternatives and concerns to consider in developing Phase 2. We seek to help reduce the number of alternatives eventually included for study in the ST3 West Seattle and Ballard Extension EIS process. We also seek to identify options that will best meet the needs of *all* communities affected by ST3 expansion – the West Seattle Peninsula, including White Center and further points south(west), and SODO – which includes not just those in the walkshed or living near the guideway and stations but also those arriving by bicycle, bus, and other modes.

Summary of West Seattle Recommendations

Alternative	Keep?	Drop?	Notes/Comments
ST3 Representative Project	✓		Noise impacts, property acquisitions, traffic congestion
Pigeon Ridge/West Seattle Tunnel	✓		Better access, increased costs, reduced impacts, tunnel
West Seattle Bridge/Fauntleroy	✓		Reduced impacts, access
Yancy Street/West Seattle Tunnel		✓	Poor bus access, longer tunnel
Oregon Street/Alaska Junction		✓	Greater noise, property and view impacts than ST3 Representative
W. Seattle Golf Course/Alaska Junction	✓		<i>Contentious debate</i> , tunnel option

1. **ST3 Representative Project:**

- There is significant concern about noise impacts to North Delridge residents due to the tight curve between Delridge Ave SW and SW Genesee St, and about how the speed of the trains will be affected here depending upon placement of the stations on either side of this curve.
- There is also significant concern about noise generated by trains running through the Delridge neighborhood – literally a “dell between two ridges” – on rails supported by columns at perhaps 150’-160’ tall, as well as the necessary cost and impacts of noise mitigation that may be required to run elevated on SW Genesee St to/from the Alaska Junction station.
- Many people are uneasy about the number of residential properties impacted by the elevated portion between Delridge Ave SW and Fautleroy Way SW from noise, pollution, view and shade impacts, and actual property acquisitions.
- Significant apprehension has been raised about how an elevated guideway coming into an already narrowly restricted and traffic congested space at the Alaska Junction will affect such key items as multimodal transportation, business operations, preservation of historical buildings, and more.
 - *If this alternative continues forward as-is, many stakeholders would like to see a more detailed study of impacts to ground level and visual renderings of how a potential guideway and station would look in this area.*

We believe that the following Higher Performance elements measures of the proposed Oregon Street/Alaska Junction elevated alignment alternative are *better* for study than this current ST representative project baseline, and should be incorporated *through revisions to this baseline* or other alternatives that move forward:

- *We would like to see further study of an elevated Delridge station on the west side of Delridge Way SW in the vicinity of the parking lot at the DSHS facility; and*
- *Consideration of the significant impacts of an elevated guideway at, and opportunities to avoid, the Fautleroy Way SW & SW Alaska St intersection.*

2. **Pigeon Ridge/West Seattle Tunnel:**

- We do not understand why this alternative scores at a Lower Performance level compared to others on its ability to Serve Regional Centers. Some of our supporters believe it would serve residential neighborhoods, Metro access, and some significant community destinations much *better* than other alternatives.
 - *By moving the Delridge station further south, it offers a greater walkshed to the North Delridge neighborhood; and its elevated location next to Puget Ridge should offer much better access to the Pigeon Point, Puget Ridge, and Highland Park neighborhoods in a way that no other alternative proposes.*
 - *An underground Alaska Junction station would better serve the Junction business node directly as well as allow for improved transition to extend south in the future.*
- We also would like to learn more about how placement and depth of the tunnel portal near West Seattle Stadium impacts potential costs for undergrounding the Avalon station (i.e., could it be built using cut-and-cover construction, or by simply digging out and accessing from the tunnel end itself).
- Some have expressed fears that this alternative only addresses reduced impacts to Port and maritime business operations without much consideration of reduced impacts to residents. Others worry that a future refinement might only consider a tunnel through Puget Ridge while abandoning the tunnel portion to the Alaska Junction, and have stated that this would be “unacceptable.”

- *We would like to see further study of how the Cost impacts of this alternative could be mitigated by reducing the need for real estate acquisitions and noise mitigation; might increase train speeds and travel time by eliminating curves and straightening out the line; and whether reduced impacts to Port operations might yield 3rd Party funds to support construction.*

3. **West Seattle Bridge/Fauntleroy:**

- We believe this alternative should be advanced to the next phase because it provides an excellent all-elevated route that avoids impacts to the Delridge and Alaska Junction residential neighborhoods and sensitive environmental areas on Pigeon Point and at Longfellow Creek.
- We agree with the Lower Performance score on its Station Proximity to Urban Centers/Villages, as it pertains to serving the Alaska Junction neighborhood.
- *However*, we question the Lower Performance score on its Station Proximity to Urban Centers/Villages, as it pertains to serving Delridge. While its “isolated station” location significantly reduces walkshed to the North Delridge neighborhood, a significant number of riders will be accessing this station through multimodal means. This location has an existing built Metro facility that could be easily modified to provide bus turnaround and layover locations, easy access to an existing bicycle and jogger trail connecting Alki to Harbor Island, SoDo and Downtown, a pedestrian walkway to access the North Delridge business node that was improved not long ago by SDOT, and a significant number of parking spaces in a de facto Park & Ride lot under the high bridge.

4. **Yancy Street/West Seattle Tunnel:**

The WSTC Board recommends dropping this alternative from further consideration. East of Delridge, other alternatives provide for study of an elevated alignment north of the West Seattle Bridge. Entering the Delridge area, this alternative dramatically reduces impacts to residential neighborhoods and improves the transition to extend south in the future, but raises some concerns that may be too difficult to overcome:

- While the Yancy location for a Delridge station improves walkshed for the neighborhood, the ability to serve the station by Metro buses and other transit from the Delridge Way corridor may present significant challenges.
- The much longer tunneled section west of Delridge significantly increases cost and risk for the project without providing benefits gained in other proposed alternatives.
 - *If this alternative moves forward, we recommend also studying the possibility of the line remaining elevated by traveling up Avalon towards the Alaska Junction station location.*

5. **Oregon Street/Alaska Junction:**

The WSTC Board recommends dropping this alternative from further consideration. East of Delridge, other alternatives provide for study of an elevated alignment north of the West Seattle Bridge. Entering the Delridge area, this alternative simply duplicates the many concerns already raised above in regard to the ST3 Representative Project. Additionally, this alternative proposal of traveling to/from the Alaska Junction station via SW Oregon St only serves to multiply many of those concerns in navigating the significant elevation changes as the columns and guideway rise up the hill from Fauntleroy Way SW.

6. **West Seattle Golf Course/Alaska Junction:**

There is considerable debate within our Board, amongst many of our stakeholders, and in participant discussions witnessed by those of us who attended the recent ST3 Neighborhood Forum held in West Seattle on May 5th. **While many express significant enthusiasm for an alignment running across some**

portion of the golf course, others are equally vehement that no portion of the ST3 alignment – even a minor one – should have an impact on this public amenity and Parks green space.

Those in favor highlight the following, *but also recognize that some of these benefits could be gained from a crossing running further north than currently proposed in this alternative (closer to SW Genesee St) or by turning just south of the northeast corner in the vicinity of the Delridge Skatepark and Community Center and then returning to a SW Genesee St alignment:*

- Significantly reduced neighborhood impacts by acquiring fewer residential and business properties;
- Reduced noise and less impact to travel speeds for the trains by relaxing the curve at Delridge Way SW & SW Genesee St;
- A much shorter tunnel with a station under SW Alaska St which would better serve the entire Alaska Junction Urban Village at once;
- Ability to avoid the impacts from an elevated guideway crossing the Fautleroy Way SW & SW Alaska St intersection; and
- Elimination of the Avalon station could provide additional funds for tunneling.

Those opposed highlight the following concerns:

- Considerable impacts to the Golf Course, which is seen as a regional amenity by both users and non-users alike – with historical and design significance beyond our region;
- Complete elimination of the Avalon Station as well as any future (deferred) possibilities to serve that growing neighborhood at the eastern edge of the Alaska Junction Urban Village; and
- Significantly increased risk to the project timeline due to the challenges of meeting federal 4(f) requirements and the City of Seattle’s Initiative 42 restrictions on compensation for the taking of Parks land.

WSTC also wishes to raise the following concerns regarding the alternatives refinement process:

- 1) Why did the discussion and input of the Stakeholders Advisory Group occur *prior to* completion of all of ST3’s neighborhood forums? West Seattleites have expressed concern in public and in online social media forums that this makes it appear that SAG’s input is out of step with the citizen input provided by the significant numbers of people present at the May 5th West Seattle Neighborhood forum.
- 2) Why does the work progress of the Stakeholders Advisory Group suggest a significant reduction in the alternatives under consideration after only the first phase of a three-phase process, and well before alternatives have been selected for consideration in the project’s EIS process?

The summary of the Group’s April 24th meeting suggests that only *two* of the alternatives in West Seattle are recommended to be carried forward to Phase 2 – which is in stark contrast to the recommendations in the Interbay / Ballard area where millions of dollars were spent on outreach and planning by SDOT in the years prior to Sound Transit’s preparation for the ST3 ballot initiative.

Additionally, *West Seattle Blog* coverage of this meeting reported that Group members “had barely seconds to discuss” some alternatives “when discussion was shut off” and “[c]oncerns were also voiced about whether SAG members had enough information to fully rule some options out or in.”

If Sound Transit staff are aware of specific details that would rule specific alternatives out, then those details should be shared publicly. Additionally, if staff have already ruled out some of these alternatives – and/or are looking to significantly narrow the alternatives which move forward for consideration – then this should have been made clear to the members of the public in attendance at the neighborhood forums, and in subsequent news coverage, and should be made public as soon as possible.

If only two alternatives are to move forward for Phase 2 consideration, there must be a viable elevated and tunnel option for continued comparison of the benefits and costs to both alternatives for grade separation.

The WSTC looks forward to working with all of you throughout Alternatives Development and beyond. Together, we are committed to helping Sound Transit deliver the elegant solution that will benefit all of the 100,000+ people living, working, and visiting the West Seattle Peninsula for many years to come.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

In Community,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Taylor". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael Taylor-Judd
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Cc: WSTC Board
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