

August 29, 2023

Julie Timm
Chief Executive Officer
Sound Transit
401 S. Jackson St Seattle WA 98104-2826

Re: Motion M2023-18 – Additional analysis and scenario development requested

Dear CEO Timm:

On March 23, 2023, the Sound Transit (ST) Board adopted Motion M2023-18 to modify the preferred alternative light rail route and station locations for the Ballard Link Extension, for evaluation in the draft Environmental Impact Statement. The motion contained several amendments¹ providing directives for staff to further study the Chinatown-International District (CID) 4th Avenue Shallower Alternative. As staff execute on these amendments, we are asking for details about (1) a construction feasibility, impact and schedule review; (2) a service and connectivity review; and (3) a project cost review that will fulfill the Board intent of these amendments included in M2023-18.

We co-sponsored these adopted amendments in Motion M2023-18 because we believe strongly that planning should always prioritize (a) system functionality (i.e., reach of the system, compatibility with good land use, prioritizing locations/activity centers to be served, centering on communities to be served, expanding equity of service access, etc.); (b) creating and maintaining a world-class rider experience (i.e., station access, travel times, trip experience, transfers, safety); and (c) improving project “deliverability” methods – including ways to refine scope, schedule, project impacts and cost.

Sound Transit is now tasked with completing a new Ballard Link Extension Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) as required by the Federal Transit Administration. Below, we offer direction for staff as it carries out the work included in Motion M2023-18:

Construction Feasibility, Impact and Schedule Review: to further study and compare the CID 4th Avenue Alternatives, the North of CID/South of CID Alternative, and the 5th Avenue Alternative, as part of ongoing environmental review, we request ST determine the best path forward to get feedback from outside experts. Options could include convening an expert review panel that could include participants with expertise in tunnel construction and geotechnical engineering or conducting a constructability review and and/or value engineering effort, perhaps in conjunction with the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) Peer Review program. In addition to technical feasibility, these

¹ The adopted amendments in Motion M2023-18 provided directives for staff to further study the Chinatown-International District (CID) 4th Avenue Shallower Alternative as part of ongoing environmental review; to study connections to all regional/local transit modes comparing the opportunities of the 4th Ave Shallower alternative to the Station North of CID and Station South of CID alternative; and to study ways to minimize/eliminate construction impacts to CID and to significantly reduce the duration of construction

reviews should also consider strategies for cost and schedule savings, risk mitigation, minimization of environmental impacts, and minimization of community impacts.

Service and connectivity review: the preferred alternative adopted by the Board in March 2023 significantly changes light rail station access/egress for the CID and First Hill neighborhood and changes transfers for certain trips, particularly those originating from or going to the east and south from the CID. Because the Ballard Link Extension has officially split from the West Seattle Link Extension, and because it includes station alternatives not included in the prior DEIS, we request an update to the ridership forecasting model to better understand how these changes will impact the transit rider experience in using the modified system we are now proposing to build. To ensure we maximize connections, we would like to receive an update on the ridership model used by Sound Transit for its analysis. A comparison of the CID area alternatives should include an analysis of: system-wide boardings, total downtown boardings, individual downtown station boardings, transfer volumes at downtown stations, total in-system travel times for trips, loads on station-to-station links in downtown, the percentage of trips with one transfer, the percentage of trips with two transfers, as well as additional concepts recommended by ST's service planning team and information about rider demographics and who is and who is not being served. This inquiry could build off the update to service assumptions and operating costs, which the Annual Program Review indicates will be complete at the end of 2023.

Knowing that there might be some difficult trade-offs to make with the CID alternatives, including the reality that some travel markets will not be served as well as they might be with a station alternative that directly connects with the existing International District Station, it is important to start exploring what sorts of improvements to transit service, wayfinding, or infrastructure might help the travel markets that could lose out on system functionality or rider experience. Depending on the outcomes of the above analysis, we hope staff can explore concepts such as infill stations that could improve regionwide connectivity, new service concepts for Link Light Rail, alternative routing of existing or planned transit, as well as improved transit and pedestrian access concepts. These improvements or mitigations would not necessarily happen within the scope of the Ballard Link Extension; many or all could take the form of future system expansion projects, investments taken in conjunction with the City of Seattle's Downtown Activation Plan, or any number of other pathways.

Project costs review: Because a continuing issue relates to the high project costs of the 4th Avenue Shallower alternative, we request a refined cost estimate in conjunction with the above reviews. We would ask that staff develop cost estimates for all alternatives that allow for an "apples to apples" comparison of the cost drivers.

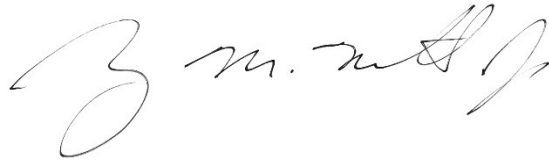
Given these needs for a construction feasibility, impact and schedule review, a service and connectivity review, and a project cost review, we request an immediate update on next steps forward in developing the new Ballard Link Extension DEIS, as well as in upcoming discussions around advancing preliminary engineering for the Ballard Link Extension. We would also like to discuss the possibility of presenting the information gathered on the above topics to CID stakeholders to facilitate an understanding of what project is eventually selected by the Board to build.

As the September board meeting is fast approaching, we would appreciate an immediate update and timeline for getting us the above requested information in advance of the meeting.

Sincerely,



Claudia Balducci
Board member, System Expansion
Committee Chair



Roger Millar
Board member