



**COMMISSION**  
**AGENDA MEMORANDUM**

**Item No.**

11a

**BRIEFING ITEM**

**Date of Meeting**

April 12, 2022

**DATE:** March 25, 2022

**TO:** Stephen P. Metruck, Executive Director

**FROM:** Geraldine Poor, Regional Transportation Senior Manager  
Matthew Mateo, Senior Environmental Planner

**SUBJECT: Sound Transit 3 – West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions (WSBLE) Briefing on Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and Ballard/Interbay Segments**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In January 2022, Sound Transit published their WSBLE DEIS for a 90-day comment period, closing April 28, 2022. At this April 12th meeting, Sound Transit will provide an overview of this significant Seattle area infrastructure project and show that the Port of Seattle must remain closely engaged with project development as the environmental review, design and construction efforts move forward. This briefing follows an April 5 briefing to the Northwest Seaport Alliance Managing Members on the WSBLE Duwamish Crossing. Here, Port of Seattle Commissioners will learn more about the project and have the opportunity to ask questions.

**ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND**

Sound Transit's mission is to plan, build and operate mass transit service throughout central Puget Sound. The initial phase of the regional mass transit system, called Sound Move, was approved by voters in 1996. The second phase, Sound Transit 2 (ST2), was approved in 2008. Under these plans, the regional light rail system will more than double in length from just over 20 miles today to over 50 miles by 2023. Service is also increasing on the 83-mile Sounder commuter rail line from Everett to Lakewood, and ST Express buses continue to serve major highways in the region.

Sound Transit 3 (ST3) provides the next phase of high-capacity transit improvements for central Puget Sound. In November 2016, voters of the Central Puget Sound region approved the ST3 ballot measure. With this plan, the light rail system will more than double again to 116 miles with over 80 stations. Light rail will expand north to Everett, south to Tacoma, east to downtown Redmond, south Kirkland, and Issaquah and west to Ballard and West Seattle, building 62 new miles of light rail. ST3 will also invest in Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) in two corridors: connecting Lynnwood to Burien via I-405 and SR 518; and on SR 522 between Bothell and Shoreline. Finally, the plan will extend Sounder commuter rail to serve Joint Base Lewis-McChord and DuPont.

The ballot measure included a "representative project alignment," essentially acting as a baseline and budget for further development of the link extensions.

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- The “representative” project for the West Seattle Link Extension builds light rail from West Seattle's Alaska Junction neighborhood to downtown Seattle primarily on an elevated guideway with a new rail-only fixed span crossing of the Duwamish River. The West Seattle Link Extension will connect to existing Link service, continuing north to Lynnwood and Everett.
- The “representative” projects for the Ballard Link Extension and downtown Seattle Light Rail Tunnel build light rail from Ballard's Market Street area through downtown Seattle with both tunneled and elevated alignments and a rail-only movable bridge over Salmon Bay. These connect to Link service, continuing south to Tacoma.

The focus of this briefing will be on the Interbay/Ballard segments of the Ballard Link Extension. It would be about 7.1 miles from Downtown Seattle to Ballard's Northwest Market Street area and include a new 3.3-mile rail-only tunnel from Chinatown-International District to South Lake Union and Seattle Center/Uptown. Stations would serve the following areas: Chinatown-International District, Midtown, Westlake, Denny, South Lake Union, Seattle Center, Smith Cove, Interbay, and Ballard.

In early 2018, Sound Transit launched an “alternatives development” process including broad stakeholder involvement with the goal of building consensus around a “preferred project alignment” for the WSBLE in advance of starting the EIS. That process includes the formation of an Elected Leadership Group (ELG), Inter-Agency Group (IAG) and a Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG). Alongside ten other elected officials, former Port of Seattle Commissioner Stephanie Bowman represented Port of Seattle and NWSA interests on the ELG. Port and NWSA staff were represented on the IAG and closely monitored the SAG and other outreach efforts. In April 2018, the Managing Members received an overview presentation and provided comments regarding Sound Transit's West Seattle and Ballard Extensions.

In 2019, Sound Transit embarked on an environmental process for WSBLE. The Port of Seattle and Northwest Seaport Alliance submitted scoping comments to Sound Transit on April 2, 2019, which can be viewed as a separate attachment.

Later in 2019, the ST Board identified alternatives for review in the EIS, considering recommendations from these groups. They included a preferred alternative for most of the segments. For the Ballard Link Extension segments of interest to the Port, these are described below.

- **South Interbay Segment Preferred Alternative:** The Galer St Station/Central Interbay Alternative would continue the tunnel beneath lower Queen Anne to a tunnel portal on the east side of 5th Avenue West. From the tunnel portal, the alternative would become elevated and cross to the west side of Elliott Ave W and continue northwest. The guideway then would cross back to the east side of Elliott Ave W near W Mercer Place and would continue northwest between the east side of Elliott Ave W and Kinnear Park. North of Kinnear Park, the alignment would transition to the west side of Elliott Ave W to

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enter the Smith Cove Station, which would be elevated above the W Galer St bridge. From the Smith Cove Station, the elevated guideway would cross over the Magnolia Bridge and continue north along the east side of the BNSF Railway tracks to W Armory Way. It would then continue north along the western edge of the Interbay Golf Center and Athletic Complex. The elevated guideway would continue over W Dravus St and connect to the Elevated 14th Ave Alternative in the Interbay/Ballard segment. For this alternative to connect to the tunnel alternatives (Tunnel 14th Ave Alternative and Tunnel 15th Ave Station Option) in the Interbay/Ballard segment, it would transition from elevated to at-grade along the Interbay Athletic Complex to continue under W Dravus St.

- **Interbay/Ballard Segment Preferred Alternative:** The Elevated 14th Ave Alternative would cross over W Dravus St on an elevated guideway parallel to the BNSF tracks and curve northeast to the Interbay Station. The station would be just north of W Dravus St between the railroad tracks and 17th Ave W. The alternative would continue on an elevated guideway from the Interbay Station northeast over the Emerson St interchange and then curve north to cross Salmon Bay on a fixed-span bridge on the east side of the Ballard Bridge (15th Avenue Bridge). The alternative would continue north within the 14th Ave NW right of way before transitioning to the east edge of the road south of Northwest Market Street. The Ballard Station would be on the east side of 14th Ave NW, straddling NW Market St. Elevated tail tracks would extend north of the station along the east side of 14th Ave NW and would then curve west to end above the center of the roadway.

The Board also selected a **Preferred Alternative with Third Party Funding**. For this segment, the alternative replaces the fixed-span bridge with a tunnel under the Salmon Bay portion of the Lake Washington Ship Canal.

In August 2021, the Board adopted a Realignment Plan for projects not yet in construction. The COVID pandemic and related changes in economic forecasts had caused the Sound Transit Board to recognize and affordability gap due to steep rises in real estate and construction costs in the region. After 17 months of discussion and public engagement, the Board extended completion dates for the West Seattle Extension to 2032 and for the Ballard Extension to 2037 to Smith Cove, and a target of 2037 to Ballard (depending on improved funding) but budgeted by 2039.

### **Current Status**

The Sound Transit Board has published the DEIS which evaluates potential impacts and benefits of the alternatives on the natural and built environments and transportation system and identifies potential mitigation measures. It is available for review and public comment from January 28, 2022 to April 28, 2022. Port of Seattle staff are reviewing the document and will provide detailed comments in addition to executives' policy comments in a joint letter from the NW Seaport Alliance and the Port of Seattle.

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Through construction and subsequent operations, as outlined in the 2019 scoping comments, this project has the potential of impacting the following Port of Seattle and NWSA-managed facilities:

- Terminal 5
- Terminal 18
- Terminal 25 (east side of East Waterway, north of Spokane St)
- Terminals 30 (north of T-25)
- Terminals 102, 103 and 104 (south of Spokane St)
- Old Tsubota Steel site (near Magnolia Bridge)
- Interbay/Magnolia cruise and fishing terminals (Terminals 90 and 91)
- Fishermen’s Terminal

These extensions could significantly improve transportation in our region; however, given the route of the current representative alignment, there could be significant negative impacts to the region’s maritime and industrial sectors if key issues are not appropriately addressed.

After completion of the public comment period on April 28, the Board will identify the preferred alternatives for evaluation in the Final EIS (FEIS). The Board is not bound by its 2019 identification of a DEIS preferred alternative in the various segments. After completion of the FEIS, anticipated in 2023, and issuance of the Record of Decision by the Federal Transit Administration, the Board will make a final decision on the project to be built based on the alternatives evaluated in the EIS.

#### **ATTACHMENTS TO THIS BRIEFING**

- (1) 2019 West Seattle Ballard Link Extension Scoping Letter (April 2, 2019)
- (2) Presentation slides

#### **PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTIONS OR BRIEFINGS**

July 2, 2020, the NWSA Managing Members approved a Partnering Agreement among Sound Transit (ST), the Port of Seattle (Port) and The Northwest Seaport Alliance (NWSA) for the West Seattle Ballard Link Extensions (WSBLE), GA 0089-20.

April 3, 2018, Sound Transit staff briefed the Managing Members on the West Seattle Ballard Link Extensions.

Staff provides regular Sound Transit updates to Managing Members.