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Parking at Sound Transit Capitol Hill TOD Sites

Parking is one element of the future Transit Oriented Developments (TOD) at the Capitol Hill station site that will be addressed through the TOD proposal and design process. This paper describes some of the considerations around that issue.

BROADWAY ECONOMIC VITALITY ACTION AGENDA (BEVAA) GUIDELINES:

In 2006, the Capitol Hill Chamber of Commerce and the City of Seattle Office of Economic Development developed a series of recommended actions to address immediate needs and issues on Broadway, as well as long-term public and private investment strategies. The action agenda addresses parking as follows:

- Incorporate parking for the business district in redevelopment plan
 - Access from Broadway should not be permitted
 - Provide permanent, predictable, affordable parking supply for customers (not commuters)
 - Use the less desirable areas of the site (especially below grade) for parking
- Consider creative ways to construct parking as part of site development
 - Sound Transit could concurrently build the station and underground parking, saving significant construction costs for an incoming developer
 - Sound Transit could also construct and lease back the garage

According to the Capitol Hill Chamber, the business district lacks sufficient business and retail parking. In addition, Sound Transit has removed several public pay parking lots (approximately 113 stalls) to construct the Capitol Hill station. The Capitol Hill Chamber has expressed concerns that light rail riders may utilize remaining public parking for commuter parking; thereby further decreasing retail parking supply.

CODE AND POLICY REQUIREMENTS AND CONSTRAINTS

Code and policy requirements and constraints are a consideration to including business district parking at the TOD sites. The City's code eliminated minimum parking requirements for development within the Station Area Overlay (SAO). Due to the area pedestrian designation and SAO, access to parking would not be allowed from Broadway.

The SAO prohibits single-purpose parking structures however it would allow community-serving short-term parking. There are no parking maximums in the code.

Sound Transit policy is to not provide new commuter parking at Link stations in urban areas. The Station Area Plans specifically proposed actions that created station areas predicated on transit oriented development and urban design that was supportive of non-auto access to Link. Although short-term parking could be operated so that it is not used by commuters, attracting large numbers of cars to garages at station entries would compromise the desired pedestrian orientation of the sites and station areas.

The City has not financially supported the development of community parking garages. Neither Sound Transit nor the City can contribute toward a parking facility that could be defined as a “gifting” of public funds. Chapter 35.87A RCW authorizes Parking and Business Improvement Associations (PBIAAs).

Finally, use of federal funds is not eligible for construction of commercial parking. FTA guidance lists as Ineligible Activities at 72 FR 5792, III. a.:

- “Eligible costs do not include construction of commercial revenue producing facilities (other than intercity bus station or terminal) or part of a public facility not related to public transportation.”

Sound Transit may not use federal funds for or allow developers to create parking that is incidental to TOD project purposes (short term convenience retail, long term segregated residential parking).

SOUND TRANSIT RESPONSE

Sound Transit has maintained its position that as a regional transit agency, increasing community parking supply is inconsistent with its mission of providing transit service. Construction of a light rail station in this area will in fact mitigate loss of parking. Sound Transit will also not provide commuter parking at the Capitol Hill station.

Sound Transit’s business and policy positions to date have been:

- TOD site developers will likely provide some level of parking for tenants and retail customers (short-term) of TOD businesses.
- Developers will not provide commuter parking or additional parking to serve business district (contrary to mission and not financially feasible).
- ST will not build parking concurrent with station construction, construct parking and lease back garage, or subsidize parking for developers.

MARKET/LENDER INFLUENCE ON PARKING SUPPLY

The elements of the TOD could include a number of uses: residential, office, and/or retail. In recent local developments, developers typically provide between 1 and 1.2 parking stalls per housing unit. To be competitive in the market each of these elements will need to be supported by some amount of parking. The number of parking spaces needed to compete with other space in the market in 2015 is unknown at this time; however, today the ratios in the table below provide some indication of market demand.

Residential	.75 to 1.0 spaces per unit
Office	1 to 2 spaces per 1,000 square feet
Retail	None necessary – more is better

Initial assumptions regarding the future TOD sites (west site not included) are that a minimum of parking of less than one parking stall per unit would be supplied. However, more detail would be developed based on market conditions closer to the time of development. In general, it is contrary to TOD (and Sound Transit’s mission) to encourage parking at conventional commercial ratios at Link stations.

Parking Alternatives at Capitol Hill TOD Sites

Capitol Hill is a dense urban community with many people who do not own or drive a car, and are more likely to walk, ride bicycles and use public transit. Sound Transit also has a strong agency policy regarding sustainability, which promotes practices that encourage decreased reliance on automobiles, even in its TOD projects. For these reasons, Sound Transit will explore the need for various types of parking and parking alternatives at the future Capitol Hill Station TOD sites.

Aside from below-grade parking for cars directly connected to the residential or retail uses above, there also exist alternative parking scenarios for tenant needs. These alternative parking scenarios could provide additional non-car or decreased car parking options that would still be attractive to developers/lenders, increase access to and from the neighborhood and Link station, and encourage sustainability by decreasing reliance on automobiles. These alternatives encourage car sharing, transit, bicycle and pedestrian use. Sound Transit will encourage or require the TOD developer to provide alternatives to car parking.

Parking Management

Parking Management involves strategies that encourage more efficient use of existing parking facilities and expands alternatives to personal car use. Some examples of these strategies that could potentially be developed at the Capitol Hill TOD sites include:

Reducing total parking provided to meet minimum development needs: In the station area overlay zone, there is no minimum requirement for parking. However, developers generally need to provide some parking for tenant use which is often a requirement for construction loans. Sound Transit will encourage the developer to keep parking at a minimum amount that makes sense for the development. As fewer parking spaces are provided for personal car parking, users will look to other access options.

Shared parking: Depending on the uses in the developments, parking can be shared between uses at different times of the day. For example, a parking space could be utilized by an office employee during the daytime and a restaurant or other customer in the evening.

Commuter Financial Incentives: Residential parking spaces could be offered to tenants only at an extra fee, and not bundled in overall rent costs. Residents could be provided an opportunity to forgo a parking space for transit pass discounts and lower rental rates. This would encourage use of transit, while lessening the need for parking within the development and/or in the neighboring community.

Encourage retail use of transit: Future retailers could promote use of transit instead of driving cars by offering small discounts to shoppers using transit when shopping. Developing such incentives would be at the discretion of retailers to determine, but in a situation where limited parking is available directly at the site, more shoppers could be encouraged to use transit to get there.

Provide transit information: Property managers could provide up to date transit information, ride-sharing opportunities, bicycle services and facilities and other non-car information.

Reserved parking spaces for one or more car-sharing vehicles (Zip Car): Developers could incorporate parking spaces for a flex car that can be utilized by the tenants of the developments. This arrangement would offer use of cars for specific occasions but would not require the consistent need for parking for individual car ownership. Tenants would have the option of a car when they need it, but would rely on transit, biking or walking at other times.

Electric Car Charging Stations: Providing facilities and parking for electric car charging stations provides an alternative to typical car parking, while also working to achieve sustainability goals.

Bicycle Parking: The Capitol Hill Station west entrance plaza will provide bike racks for light rail patron bike parking. In addition to this bike parking space, there will likely be a need for additional bike parking for transit users as well as tenants of the TOD sites. Bike parking facilities will continue to be a need in the Capitol Hill neighborhood, so Sound Transit may pursue some additional bike parking arrangement with the TOD developers. This could entail below grade bike parking for tenants (customers) of the TOD sites, and/or could also consist of some street level or below grade public (customer) bike parking. Sound Transit may encourage or require the developers of one or more of the TOD sites to consider creating more bike space as a public amenity.

Sound Transit or the developer may also seek grant opportunities or partnerships to explore how bike parking can be further incorporated at the TOD sites.

Next Steps

Many choices about what types of parking alternatives will be developed at the future Capitol Hill TOD sites will take place closer to the time of the RFQ/RFP. However, it appears that there are many feasible transit-oriented alternatives to providing parking only for cars. Sound Transit is seeking additional community feedback on these alternatives and other ideas that may have similar merit. Sound Transit expects to develop a policy that will encourage future TOD developers to shift some of the usual automobile parking requirements to alternatives, such as bicycle parking, flex cars, and/or incentives for tenants to use transit.