

11/9/2023 System Expansion Committee
Meeting Written Public Comment
Submissions

Submissions

<i>Seattle Center Foundation</i>	2
<i>Downtown Seattle Association</i>	2
<i>Uptown Alliance</i>	3
<i>Stephen Fesler</i>	3
<i>Joe Kunzler</i>	3
<i>Comments received after the meeting's deadline</i>	4
<i>Betty Lau – Verbal Comment Transcript</i>	5
<i>Brien Chow – Verbal Comment Transcript</i>	5
<i>Matthew Curry for South Lake Union Community Council</i>	6

Seattle Center Foundation

The substance of this comment is within a letter included at the end of this summary.

Attached please find comments regarding further study for 5th & Harrison for the 11/9/23 System Expansion Committee Meeting.

Thank you.

jz

jane zalutsky
Executive Director
Seattle Center Foundation

Downtown Seattle Association

Dear Chair Balducci and members of the Sound Transit System Expansion Committee,

On behalf of the Downtown Seattle Association (DSA), I am writing to you in support of the proposed feasibility study of the 5th and Harrison station for potential inclusion in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for Ballard Link Extension.

We appreciate the efforts of the Board and staff to address concerns that the DSA and other stakeholders have identified around construction-related closures on Westlake Avenue. As this work continues, it is important that all the options under study in the DEIS include two stations to serve South Lake Union. This will ensure that we have robust alternatives to choose from when the final alignment is determined by the Board.

We think that a station at 5th and Harrison in conjunction with the Denny West alternative could have the potential to minimize impacts on Westlake Ave while preserving two stations for the South Lake Union neighborhood. It is also prudent to study a viable alternative to the 7th and Harrison station as part of the DEIS work that is underway.

The DSA represents some of the largest employers in the state, along with hundreds of small businesses, non-profit and arts and cultural organizations employing more than 300,000 workers and a residential population of nearly 100,000. We are Seattle's epicenter of jobs and economic activity and the Puget Sound region's hub for arts, entertainment, professional sports and tourism.

We believe that the Ballard Link Extension will be key to the success of downtown and South Lake Union's future for generations to come. To that end, the decisions we make on where to site the South Lake Union stations should be informed by a thorough analysis of options that address near term impacts while ensuring great transit connections in the long term. This feasibility study of 5th and

Harrison will help the community and the Board to better understand the benefits and tradeoffs of station locations to build the best possible project for the region.

We thank you for your consideration and look forward to continuing our work with you through the environmental, design and construction of this project.

Sincerely,

Kylie Rolf
VP, Advocacy & Economic Development

Uptown Alliance

The substance of this comment is within a letter included at the end of this summary.

Please accept the attached comments to be distributed to members of the System Expansion Committee for their meeting on 11/09/2023.

Thank you!
Uptown Alliance

Stephen Fesler

The substance of this comment is within a letter included at the end of this summary.

Good morning:

I'd like to pass on my comments around this agency's struggle to deliver promised Link frequencies and capacity. My attached op-ed highlights the multifaceted problem that this agency faces and a variety of solutions this agency and board should pursue to tackle them. Only taking a **single** bona fide action that service planners are offering would be wrong and an unserious response to what will be become a grave operational and political problem for the agency and boardmembers alike.

Kind regards,
Stephen A. Fesler

Joe Kunzler

Hi there ST Board System Expansion Committee;
I understand you have R2023-35 on deck.

Listen, I think when you can get more trains and more spare parts, you should. It's clear Sound Transit is a rock star brand again. It's also clear manufacturing capacity for light rail is what it is. I would rather please you had the additional trains and spare parts on hand than not and then have to scramble to find compatible trains and/or spare parts.

It's past time to stop trying to be cute about trying to replace capacity and get capacity. Furthermore, we need to expand the MOAs to have more capacity.

Finally, and you probably knew this was coming, BUT **FOR THE LOVE OF TRANSIT FANDOM NAME YOUR TRAINS AFTER THE TRANSIT HEROES WHO STEPPED UP TO MAKE TRANSIT HAPPEN.**

Start with the first East Link Train can have one and only one name: BADASSUCHI EXPRESS. YEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEAAAAAAAHHHHH!!!

Then name a train after KAREN "Touchdown" KITSIS.

Then name a train after HEIDI WILLS. YOU THINK? Heidi saved our collective azzes from Tim Eyman and helped give birth to Sound Transit. The greatest hero of Sound Transit.

Then name a train after Shefali Regnathan, Ric Illgenfritz, and all the other ST3 heroes. Like Dow Constantine.

There you go.

Transit history matters. It's time transit fans demanded that history be preserved and *taught*. The end of history is not here, just ask the warfighters giving Tsimerman hell. We cannot grow complacent.

I want to conclude with this thought that is not about anything on the agenda, but I feel is a teaching moment before I sit down with my mother to watch MSNBC's The Last Word by Lawrence O'Donnell, who helped write "The West Wing". Today I got news that Denis Agar is leaving a 10-year career at TransLink to start a transit advocacy group for Metro Vancouver modeled on our Transportation Choices Coalition in Movement. If you think we can be complacent, note that even Sarah Ross' TransLink has gotten blocked twice since 2019 in building out bus lanes. Without a Movement to bring the public onboard, we're not going to get transit done - period. It is a movement of my own that is fighting Tsimerman for a more inclusive democracy. It was a movement that bought time for Karen Kitsis to throw the football down the field to get ST3 on the ballot - and passed. It will take a movement in many places to get transit done - whether that be bus lanes, building out transit history, or making sure we have sufficient vehicles and spare parts on hand.

As they say on "The West Wing" and I consider a creed to live by: **DECISIONS ARE MADE BY THOSE WHO SHOW UP!**

JOE SENDS

[Comments received after the meeting's deadline](#)

Betty Lau – Verbal Comment Transcript

Public Comment by Betty Lau at System Expansion Committee Meeting Thursday, 11/9/23, 1:30 p.m., Union Station

Hello, I'm Betty Lau.

This week, KIRO TV ran a news segment on South Everett's plan to alter the light rail route by going west to Boeing and then back east to I-5.

The problem is that light rail plans to go back to I-5 on Casino Road, displacing a major grocery carrier to create a food desert for local residents who are majority Latinx. That route will also force out numerous Latinx small businesses, killing off another community of color.

That's what's happening here in Seattle with the preferred alternatives being outside of the CID.

The result will be the demise of Seattle's CID, which will happen from not having access to light rail.

Today is the sad 6 month anniversary of CID being named to the National 11 Most Endangered Historic Places List. Don't keep us there for a hundred years!

Thank you.

www.transitequityforall.org

Brien Chow – Verbal Comment Transcript

Public Comment by Brien Chow at System Expansion Committee Meeting, Thursday, 11/9/23, 1:30 p.m.;
Union Station

Hello, I'm Brien Chow from Transit Equity for All.

I've been studying the south Everett light rail plan to extend light rail to west to Boeing and Paine Fields and then back east to I-5...

It will cost an estimated 2 billion dollars...

That's a bold vision and a bold plan...

Good for you Snohomish County... Bad for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion!

But in King County, we're told \$800 million is too expensive for the 4th Avenue Regional Hub at Union Station...

The N/S alternatives require a new DEIS and are full of flaws...

chief among them lack easy access and connectivity to other transit modes (Sounder, Amtrak, buses, streetcar, ferries, airport) ...

with excessive negative impacts to people of color, the elderly, and Americans with Disabilities from the Chinatown, Japantown, Little Saigon neighborhoods, the Southend and Eastside.

Bad for Chinatown, Japantown and Little Saigon neighborhoods and the Region.

Having "NO" 4th Ave regional transportation hub "will isolate" ...

Chinatown, Japantown and Little Saigon neighborhoods from the mainstream...

I will say that again...

Having "NO" 4th Ave regional transportation hub "will isolate" ...

Chinatown, Japantown and Little Saigon neighborhoods from the mainstream...

Which will cause the demise of Chinatown, Japantown and Little Saigon neighborhoods.

Bad for the whole State of Washington!

Let's have some Space Needle thinking and bold action by spending two billion on a Regional Transportation Hub at Union Station that will serve the Region for 100 years!

Be on the right side of history... Move Forward on 4th!

Thank you.

Matthew Curry for South Lake Union Community Council

OUR VISION

To steward a livable, vibrant, urban neighborhood supporting a diversity of residents of all ages and incomes while driving an innovative local economy and providing rich, cultural community opportunities.

OUR VALUES

Inclusiveness | Integrity | Respect | Transparency | Impartiality

**SOUTH LAKE UNION
COMMUNITY COUNCIL**

DATE: November 9, 2023

TO: Sound Transit System Expansion Committee
From: South Lake Union Community Council

RE: ST3 stations serving South Lake Union, Denny and Uptown Triangles

Members of the System Expansion Committee,

The SLU Community Council adamantly supports two stations in the area of South Lake Union and the Denny and Uptown Triangles. We do not support the consolidated station option and request that it be removed from further DEIS study.

In line with Motion M2023-57, our prime support is for the Revised Preferred Alternative that proposes stations at Denny Shifted North and 7th/Harrison.

At the same time, concerns have been raised about utilities and other technical constraints that may make 7th/Harrison untenable.

With that in mind, we ask that a station option be studied further west toward 5th/Harrison for possible inclusion in the DEIS.

Thank you to Sound Transit for working with us on light rail solutions that promote neighborhood access, transit integration, and equity for all.

Cordially,



Matthew Curry
Chair, Policy & Planning Committee

Julie Holland
President
Mirabella

Geoff Eseltine
Secretary
Cascade People's Center
(YMCA)

Paul Wahnoutka
Treasurer
Allen Institute

Rebecca Bryant
Director
Fred Hutchinson Cancer
Center

Kiki Gram
Director
Vulcan Real Estate

Ross Leventhal
Director
NBBJ

Renee Notkin
Director
415 Westlake/Union
Church

Von Perkins
Director
PCMC LLC

Stacy Segal
Director
Seattle Parks Foundation

Jill Wiggins
Director
Fearey for Amazon

Our priorities within the SLU Urban Design Framework & SLU/Uptown Mobility Plan

Equitable Housing | Design Review Collaboration | Public Safety
Equitable Community Engagement | Activation of Public Places | Sustainable Urban Mobility

Connect with Your South Lake Union Community!

SLUCommunityCouncil.org | Facebook.com/SLUCommunityCouncil | Twitter.com/SLUCCouncil



November 8, 2023

Council Member Claudia Balducci
Systems Expansion Committee Chair
Sound Transit
401 South Jackson Street
Seattle, Washington 98104

Sent via email

Council Member Balducci and System Expansion Committee Members:

Seattle Center Foundation stands behind our previous support of three stations in North Downtown (Republican Shifted West at Seattle Center, a South Lake Union station, and a Denny Station). At this time, we believe it is prudent for Sound Transit to add the further study of a 5th & Harrison station location coupled with a modified Discovery Center station.

A well-studied and viable South Lake Union station alternative at 5th & Harrison has tremendous value in case the technical and engineering challenges at 7th & Harrison prove insurmountable, and could lead to eliminating a station in this dense and vibrant area of our city.

Best,

Jane Zalutsky

Jane Zalutsky
Executive Director
Seattle Center Foundation

Cc:

Julie Timm, Sound Transit
Cathal Ridge, Sound Transit
Leda Chahim, Sound Transit
Mayor Bruce Harrell
Elliot Helmbrecht, City of Seattle
Marshall Foster, City of Seattle



November 9, 2023

Neighborhood
with a Sense
of Community

Inclusive
and diverse

Thriving
Arts District

Home to
Seattle Center

Great local
businesses

Walk, Bike,
Bus, Monorail,
(and drive)

Diverse and
affordable
housing

Historic buildings
with character

Open space for
healthy living

Distinguished
cultural and
philanthropic
organizations

Council Member Claudia Balducci
Systems Expansion Committee Chair
Sound Transit - Sent via email
401 South Jackson Street
Seattle, Washington 98104

Re: BLE - SLU Stations and Alignment

Council Member Balducci and System Expansion Committee Members:

It has been noted in the agenda that under discussion today may be a request for further studies for the Ballard Link Extension regarding the alignment and station locations in South Lake Union. Uptown Alliance has a long history of working together with SLU as these stations have a tremendous impact on walkshed and ridership in Uptown. Below are key points we ask you to consider:

- Support the Preferred Alternative voted by Sound Transit Board of Directors in ST Motion M2023-57 on July 27, 2023 which describes the Denny Station as the Denny Westlake Shifted North alternative with a station located at the current Vulcan Discovery Center site and a second station at 7th & Harrison.
- Additionally, because of concern for technical and engineering challenges, there has been growing community support to add to the upcoming DEIS, a new "further study" with an evaluation of a shift of the 7th and Harrison station west closer to 5th Ave while also shifting the location of the station on the SLU Discovery Center for better alignment. We support this added further study if it does not add significant delay or cost to the project and assumes keeping two (2) SLU stations that ultimately provide similar ridership and walkshed coverage of the current Preferred Alternative.
- Of utmost importance to our community, is that this discussion today allows for a **major correction** from the Board to their Motion M2023-57 and vote to eliminate the consolidated station alignment known as "*Denny Westlake Shifted West alternative*" from the DEIS studies which has virtually no support in any of our communities. Let's not spend staff time and cost on something no one wants.

Thank you for your consideration,

Rick Hooper
Uptown Alliance Co-chair

Mercedes Fernandez
Uptown Alliance Co-chair

Op-Ed: Sound Transit Must Deliver the Link Frequencies It Promised

By Stephen Fesler · November 7, 2023



A crushload Link train dwells at Westlake station as a large crowd alights and some try to embark on it. (Stephen Fesler)

The agency needs more trains, fewer pinch points, and a commitment to operational efficiency.

Sound Transit has been slow-walking details about the agency's inability to provide long-promised service levels on Link. As light rail expands without sufficient fleet capacity, service is poised to regress to **no better than 10-minute frequencies and many more trains could run with three cars instead of the usual four**. A compounding set of errors by agency planning processes and unforeseen circumstances have led to the problem, which could persist not only for a few years **but decades**.

The agency's **best effort has been a suggestion that 10 additional Series 2 Link cars** be procured to offer more four-car trains later this decade. But that suggestion doesn't negate the long-term service frequency and capacity problems that riders will be condemned to face without more substantial actions. The likelihood of crowding issues and missing frequency promises should be raising alarms and spurring Sound Transit boardmembers to action.

Fundamentally, Sound Transit is failing riders by not delivering on promised headways and consistent four-car trains.



Link service shouldn't be going off the rails

Looking just at weekday PM peak hour times, the Link 1 Line is expected to be overcrowded and may leave riders stranded at many platforms in Seattle once the Lynnwood Link Extension opens next year. (Sound Transit)

Link has always been billed as the region's central spine for transit mobility, making it the critical connection point for other transit service and a workhorse for rapid movement across key corridors. Fewer trips and train cars doesn't just squeeze riders with longer waits and unboardable trains, it also suppresses transit ridership throughout the network relying upon it.

For some, it may be politically expedient to blaze ahead with Link expansions for the sake of earlier ribbon-cuttings, but the latest round of revelations show that solving for capacity and frequency issues should be the top priority. The fix may involve slowing expansions, if need be, so that Sound Transit can take a comprehensive approach to fully deliver on the promise of the Sound Move and Sound Transit 2 capital expansion programs. That promise is to reliably provide eight-minute frequencies, four-car trains, and extra service when needed, and those programs are not complete until that promise is met.

Ribbon cuttings, like this one for Northgate Link, are fun, but getting day-to-day operations right is the hard work that bears fruit over the long-term. (Doug Trumm)

It's important to recognize that ridership patterns were different before the pandemic. A lot more trips are now happening in the midday period and on weekends. Growing ridership is putting pressure on the system and if that continues it will be a recipe for disaster without corresponding service increases.

Segments of the system should be getting the level of service that truly reflects the demand. That's why just four years ago the system was brimming with ridership prior to the pandemic when Link only operated between Angle Lake and University of Washington stations. It's easy to forget that service was running at six-minute frequencies during peak hours then to support robust ridership.



Weekday Link 1 Line ridership in 2023 is trending toward closer to the high ridership forecast. (Sound Transit)

Sound Transit's own service planners are saying that Link ridership growth is trending closer to their higher ridership forecasts. That portends a likely scenario that ridership growth will continue to rise at faster rates than the average and lower forecast models, and the consequence of that could be leaving riders stranded at platforms and additional cascading operational problems.

So far, Sound Transit has been acting like it's an innocent bystander with problems being heaped on it with little agency to solve them. But Sound Transit does have other strategies that it could put into action to restore service and blunt future problems.

Strategies that could improve the situation now and in the future

The at-grade Link intersection on Martin Luther King Jr. Way S at S Myrtle Street. The intersection and crossing are massive with a Link station immediately south of it. (Stephen Fesler)

One of the biggest drags on Link vehicle utilization and availability is its at-grade segments and rail infrastructure. That's led to trains running six to eight minutes slower, requiring more trainsets to provide the same level of system frequency and capacity. Some relatively low-cost strategies could be employed to rectify that:

- **Corrective actions in the Rainier Valley segment of Link** and other at-grade sections could be taken, such as closing more intersections to cars, trimming down the width of rail crossings, and installing protective crossing gates. This would help improve reliability in the corridor, allow faster speeds, cut travel times, and keep more Link cars in-service, in addition to knock-on safety benefits for other users of the corridor.
- Installing more crossover tracks throughout the network would help trains navigate around stalled trains or other temporary service disruptions. That would allow for better system reliability and operations when there is a pinch in the system.
- Repairing and replacing any other deficient infrastructure that is unnecessarily slowing trains would give a big bang for the buck. Sound Transit has already been doing a lot of this as part of the Future Ready program but there may be additional opportunities abound.



Riders test out Northgate Link during a soft opening ride in 2021. Crowding will become an increasing issue as Link expands without capacity issues addressed. (Doug Trumm)

The interior design of Link trains is inefficient, leading to long dwell times as riders fight to get on and off trains during heavier ridership periods. That means longer trip times. Some things Sound Transit could do to improve the situation include:

- New tools and audio announcements on- and off-board could be developed and deployed to help with efficient boarding and deboarding practices, directing riders to less crowded cars, and avoiding confusion.
- Train interiors could be retrofitted to switch at least half of the main forward-facing seating to longitudinal seating to allow for easier circulation and more standing room. Giving more clearance near doors could also allow for more space to shuttle on and off trains.

Two additional storage tracks could be constructed at OMF Central to storage more Link cars. (Stephen Fesler / Google Maps)

Six additional tail tracks could be constructed and connect to existing tracks to offer more s Fesler / Google Maps)

The lack of trains is certainly a challenge, regardless if the aforementioned strategies are implemented. The agency has already reported that **90 or so additional light rail cars than planned would be needed to provide six-minute frequencies** promised in Sound Transit 3 Link expansions. But that problem exists imminently, too, so tackling this issue now seems prudent. Strategies that could be pursued include the following:



- Sound Transit could commit to shuttling extra trains to run on the 1 Line as soon as the I-90 corridor is operational for non-revenue service.
- Going well beyond the 10 additional Link Series 2 cars that the agency may wind up procuring, Sound Transit could purchase several dozen more cars — flawed as they may be. Under the current contract with Siemens, Sound Transit has remaining options for 16 cars but could be well positioned to exercise the extra six and push for more. According to the agency, staff are only settling on the 10 extra cars because of remaining storage capacity at its two operations and maintenance facilities (OMFs).
- Getting more creative with storage of Link vehicles overnight would further increase the agency's ability to take on a larger fleet earlier. Earlier this year, agency [staff suggested alternative storage locations at select stations](#) but have since retreated from this without a clear explanation, but that idea could go much further until more storage space at OMFs can come online. For instance, the agency could leave trains parked at tunnel stations, some elevated stations, and on pocket tracks, allowing for storage of dozens of cars. Indeed, wrapping up and starting up service as well as transporting staff to and from those locations may be an operational challenge, but it could be a very worthwhile one for an intermediary period of time.
- OMF Central in Seattle appears to have remaining space within it that could be reconfigured for storage of 20 or so Link cars. That could involve construction of two new parallel tracks and access space to the tracks for staff by eliminating some car parking and landscaping. That type of action has the potential to be exempt from both [federal](#) and [state](#) environmental review processes, so it could happen relatively quickly as a construction solution.
- Sound Transit could further expand OMF Central to take in adjacent properties. For instance, acquiring two lots to the southwest of the facility could support up to eight tail tracks for storage of many more Link cars. The process for this would obviously be more involved than on-site improvements and could trigger heftier environmental review processes, but a strategic expansion could solve most of the intermediate system service level and capacity problems.

In March, King County Councilmember Claudia Balducci and Washington State Department of Transportation Secretary Roger Millar suggested study of an alternative Link system operating plan (the "Maintain Regionwide Connectivity" alternative) to offer a better system for all riders in absence of a second Chinatown station. (Sound Transit)

On top of this all, Sound Transit planners would be well within their rights to fully rethink the Sound Transit 3 system operating plan. This could involve coupling the West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions (WSBLE) into a single unified line. And while that would mandate a new OMF in Seattle and some design rework, it would allow the agency to mitigate a lot of problems it faces in the future and serve riders and communities better. A closed line could reduce the size of planned OMFs in Federal Way and Snohomish County and greatly reduce the number of Series 3 Link trains needed. That's because a unified WSBLE line could be fully automated and run with just two-car trains at much higher frequencies than other Link lines. Another upshot is that the footprint of WSBLE stations could be considerably smaller, less impactful and easier to construct, and less costly to build. Even [semi-automation](#) of other lines could be a useful goal to improve system operations.

These ideas are by no means exhaustive of potential solutions, but they're a lot more ambitious and impactful than the ideas agency staff have been publicly sharing. Management and the board need to press staff to bring more ideas into the fray now, rather than letting them be squashed by internal agency processes. Agency staff offering only one bona fide solution to Sound Transit 2 Link expansion woes couldn't be a more clear signal that things aren't working well on the inside right now.

Long-standing promises shouldn't be brazenly broken

Ultimately, Sound Transit and its board need to understand that Link isn't a bus, and the agency shouldn't be in the business of treating it as such. Voters and partner agencies have approved billions of dollars to construct Link exactly because it's a train, not a bus. But 10-minute frequencies and short trains tell the tale that Link is being run like a glorified bus. A rail line needs high frequencies and sufficient capacity to serve as the backbone of the regional transit network.

If Sound Transit won't improve service to six-minute frequencies and restore train capacity long before Sound Transit 3 Link extensions open, it could have a public relations nightmare on its hands as the agency continues to fall short of promised service levels and overcrowding squeezes out riders in the busiest segments. Without rebuilding trust and getting the details right, the agency has no business pursuing any of those expansions.

Sound Transit is running headlong into an operations mess and at risk of breaking the promises that sold the region on light rail in the first place. The agency's board should start forcing the agency to deliver on those promises instead. Time is of the essence.

Support Us

Article Author

Stephen Fesler

[Website](#)

Stephen is a professional urban planner in Puget Sound with a passion for sustainable, livable, and diverse cities. He is especially interested in how policies, regulations, and programs can promote positive outcomes for communities. With stints in great cities like Bellingham and Cork, Stephen currently lives in Seattle. He primarily covers land use and transportation issues and has been with The Urbanist since 2014.

