



Motion No. M2024-46

A motion of the Board of the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority directing Sound Transit staff to (1) conduct a comprehensive study on potential safety improvements for the at-grade Link light rail corridor in the Rainier Valley; (2) work with Seattle's Department of Transportation where appropriate to develop a detailed master document outlining the feasibility of each potential improvement; and (3) transmit the prepared master document to Sound Transit Board members in October 2024.

Background

As Sound Transit expands its Link light rail, the agency must continue to improve rider and pedestrian safety along the existing lines, especially where service has disproportionately impacted BIPOC communities. In 2022, Sound Transit and the Seattle Department of Transportation signed a partnership agreement reaffirming a shared commitment to enhancing safety, equity, community access, and mobility in the Rainier Valley. This motion seeks to build upon that partnership to study and expeditiously implement enhancements for at-grade stations in the area.

When the 1 Line was constructed, it was built at-grade through the Rainier Valley with three stations along Martin Luther King Jr. Way South: Columbia City, Othello, and Rainier Beach. MLK Jr. Way S is one of the two main roadways in the Rainier Valley, making it a vital and highly used corridor for various modes of transportation. The Rainier Valley is also historically one of the most diverse zip codes in the Puget Sound region.

The at-grade design along MLK Jr. Way S means that pedestrian and vehicle collisions with the light rail can and have occurred. The Seattle Times has reported that since service began in 2009, light rail train vehicles have collided with a vehicle, person, or object at least 136 times in the Rainier Valley. In 2023, Sound Transit reported 26 collisions with light rail vehicles for the year. Of these collisions, 20 occurred at grade crossings and 18 occurred along the MLK Jr. Way S corridor. Of the 11 collision-related fatalities throughout the Link's operating history, 8 individuals have tragically lost their lives in the Rainier Valley.

Collisions in the MLK corridor also have significant effects on the operations of the overall Link system. When collisions occur, trains may be one tracked, but the disruption and delay often interrupt scheduled service for the entirety of the 1 Line. This poses future service and rider experience concerns as the Link system expands and new lines are integrated with this corridor.

As evident by the above data, a disproportionate amount of train collisions occur along the MLK Jr. Way S corridor, negatively impacting communities that live, work, and commute through this region. Sound Transit and SDOT have affirmed that reducing collisions and near misses is a top priority for both agencies. The direction provided by this motion will expand upon their work to understand the feasibility of safety enhancements that can help achieve these goals.

This action will direct Sound Transit staff to:

- Conduct a comprehensive study in which:
 - Sound Transit staff will analyze MLK Jr. Way S Link light rail safety events.
 - Staff will identify and evaluate short-, mid-, and long-term safety improvements that could be implemented at at-grade stations along MLK Jr. Way S.
 - Staff will explore the feasibility of different options in their evaluation such as gates, pedestrian spaces, reduced speed limits for cars, lane reductions, grade separation, and

other possible upgrades, as well as develop a potential funding plan identifying any possible grant sources.

- Staff will build upon work already underway to work collaboratively with the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) and other regional partners where appropriate to assess safety enhancements.
- Staff will identify any opportunities to accelerate actions under their current safety studies/planning work.
- Develop and compile a Rainier Valley Safety Master Plan in which:
 - Staff will evaluate the feasibility, costs, benefits, and potential impacts of each proposed potential improvement.
 - Staff will ensure the language used in the document is easily understandable or use layman's terms if highly technical language must be utilized.
 - Staff will detail what actions would be needed to implement improvements including any required collaboration with other agencies.

Staff will transmit the Rainier Valley Safety Master Plan to Sound Transit Board Members in October 2024.

Motion

It is hereby moved by the Board of the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority that Sound Transit staff is directed to (1) conduct a comprehensive study on potential safety improvements for the at-grade Link light rail corridor in the Rainier Valley; (2) work with Seattle's Department of Transportation where appropriate to develop a detailed master document outlining the feasibility of each potential improvement; and (3) transmit the master document to Sound Transit Board members in October 2024.

APPROVED by the Board of the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority at a regular meeting thereof held on _____.

Dow Constantine
Board Chair

Attest:

Kathryn Flores
Board Administrator