



# South Lake Union Feasibility Study Community Engagement Summary

## Background

In December 2023, the Sound Transit Board directed staff to assess the feasibility of a potential new alternative in the South Lake Union (SLU) and Denny area. This light rail alignment concept would locate the SLU Station roughly two blocks west of the current preferred alternative, near 5th Avenue North and Harrison Street, in tandem with a Denny Station Shifted West, outside of the Westlake Avenue right of way.

From January to April 2024, Sound Transit staff studied:

- New tunnel alignment and station location concepts
- SLU Station box concept, assessing depth and passenger access
- Environmental implications including roadway closures/access, utilities, noise & vibration, and property effects
- Ridership and equity implications
- Transit integration
- Cost and schedule implications
- Regional Link system implications

Between December 2023 and May 2024, Sound Transit engaged the public in various forums to share information and gather feedback about the SLU Feasibility Study and its findings. These engagement activities included an online survey, two live webinars, and over 40 stakeholder and community briefings.

## Engagement by the numbers

- 40+ stakeholder briefings
- 1,463 people engaged with the online survey
- 50 people attended one of two live webinars
- 6 project email updates sent to over 12,000 recipients
- 320 posters distributed throughout the SLU neighborhood
- 13,106 impressions on digital ads promoting the survey and webinars

## Community feedback themes

- Overarching interest in delivering voter approved plan, limiting delays, cost increases, and regional system effects
- Concerns with construction disruption for either alternative, particularly effects to the vitality of the SLU commercial core with the preferred alternative and to Seattle Center with the potential new alternative



Additional themes by topic are highlighted in the table below, organized by the current preferred alternative and the potential new alternative:

|   | Current preferred alternative  | Potential new alternative  |
|---|--|--|
|   | <b>Denny Shifted North and SLU 7th/Harrison</b>  | <b>Denny Shifted West and SLU 5th/Harrison</b>   |
| <b>Performance</b><br><i>Ridership/Transit Integration/Equity</i>                     | Interest in better transfers, higher ridership, shallower stations.<br><br>Interest in more convenient access to SLU   | Some interest in more convenient access to Seattle Center  |
| <i>System implications</i>  | Broad interested in avoiding regional system effects   |  |
| <b>Construction effects</b><br><i>Street closures, Utilities, Noise and Vibration</i> | Concerns about effects to traffic and pedestrian realm during construction and utility relocation, particularly along Westlake Avenue<br><br>Concerns with construction disruption impacting the vitality of SLU commercial core | Interest in avoiding effects to traffic and pedestrian realm during construction, particularly along Westlake Avenue<br><br>Concerns about traffic (particularly during events), pedestrian access and noise and vibration effects to Seattle Center during construction |
| <b>Cost and Schedule</b>  | Broad interest in limiting delays and cost increases   |  |

## Notifications

The online survey and webinars were publicized throughout the South Lake Union area and the BLE corridor. The survey and webinars both served as platforms where people could learn more about the new concept first, then provide feedback. Materials including posters and digital ads were placed to inform the community of these feedback opportunities. The project website and GovDelivery emails were also used, and several community groups and businesses associations also spread the word by sharing feasibility study information and the survey with their members and networks.

## Survey

The online survey was open from April 25 – May 7, 2024. 1,463 people engaged with the survey and 1,304 respondents provided feedback.

The survey first asked people to identify their relationship to the South Lake Union and Denny station areas, followed by a series of three open-ended questions:

1. What are your thoughts on the current Preferred Alternative (Denny Station North and SLU Station at 7th and Harrison)? What opportunities and challenges do you see?



2. What are your thoughts on the potential new alternative (Denny Station West and SLU Station at 5th and Harrison)? What opportunities and challenges do you see?
3. Is there any other feedback you would like to provide to Sound Transit regarding your priorities and opinions related to the comparison of this potential new alternative with the current Preferred Alternative?

## Who we heard from

### What is your relationship to the South Lake Union and Denny station areas? (Select all that apply)

|                                      | Responses | Percent |  |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|---------|--|
| I live here                          | 332       | 23.9%   |  |
| I work here                          | 633       | 45.6%   |  |
| I own a business here                | 33        | 2.4%    |  |
| I visit here                         | 807       | 58.1%   |  |
| I currently use transit in this area | 910       | 65.5%   |  |
| I plan to use transit in this area   | 634       | 45.6%   |  |
| Other                                | 41        | 3.0%    |  |

Respondents were able to select more than one option to identify their relationship with the station areas. About a quarter of respondents indicated that they live in the neighborhood (23.9%). Nearly half reported that they work in the area (45.6%). Over half indicated that they visit the study area (58.1%). The largest portion of respondents indicated that they currently use transit in the area (65.5%), and nearly half plan to use transit in the area in the future (45.6%).

## Overall survey themes

There was overarching interest among survey respondents in maintaining the current preferred alternative as compared to the new concept. Predominantly, respondents who support maintaining the current preferred alternative cite limiting schedule delays as the primary reason for their preference. Additional reasons for supporting the preferred alternative include better transfers, higher ridership, more convenient access to SLU, reduced small business displacement, and lower costs.

Respondents who supported the new concept as opposed to the preferred alternative primarily cited concerns about effects to traffic and the pedestrian experience during construction. Some respondents also noted more convenient access to Seattle Center as a positive implication with the new concept.

## Webinars

Two live webinars were held at different times of the day to accommodate more people. The first webinar was held on April 29 from 5:30 – 6:45 p.m., the second on May 2 from 12:00 – 1:15 p.m. Approximately 50 people attended the webinars. Sound Transit staff presented slides shared at the April Board meeting, responded to questions submitted by attendees, and directed webinar participants towards the online survey.



## Stakeholder briefings

Between December 2023 and May 2024, Sound Transit staff conducted over 40 stakeholder briefings for property owners, businesses, transit users, and community groups. These briefings targeted potential future riders as well as individuals, employers, and institutions that may be directly affected by either alignment concept. Examples of the groups and associations briefed on the feasibility study include:

- Ballard Alliance
- Downtown Seattle Association
- Fremont Neighborhood Council
- North King Mobility Coalition
- Seattle Center resident organizations
- Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce
- SLU Chamber of Commerce
- SLU Community Council
- Transportation Choices Coalition
- Uptown Alliance
- Various individual businesses, property owners, and large employers

### ***Overall stakeholder briefing themes***

For the institutions, businesses, and employers who are immediately adjacent to or potentially affected by station construction, there are broad and deep concerns about how construction and traffic impacts will negatively impact them, their visitors, and their employees. There are strong concerns about construction effects disrupting the SLU commercial core with the current preferred alternative. Similarly, there are strong concerns about construction of the 5th/Harrison station location negatively affecting Seattle Center events and visitors.

Transit users, community groups, and business associations that are not located adjacent to station construction and staging areas typically expressed preference for optimizing broader system implications such as ridership, transit integration, cost, and schedule by moving forward with the existing alternatives.

## Next steps

The Board may take action at the May Board meeting on whether to add this new alignment concept as an additional alternative for study in the upcoming Ballard Link Extension Draft Environmental Impact Statement.