

Memo

March 13, 2025

To:	Sound Transit Board of Directors
From:	Goran Sparrman, Interim Chief Executive Officer; Terri Mestas, Deputy CEO, Chief Capital Delivery Officer; Brad Owen, Executive Director; Sandra Fann, Acting Executive Corridor Director
Subject:	South Graham Street Infill Station project location for environmental review

Summary

Staff will be advancing a station alternative for the South Graham Street Infill Station for environmental review. The proposed location for the station is at Martin Luther King Jr Way S and S Graham St.

No formal action by the Sound Transit Board is necessary at this time, as the station alternative has always been proposed at S Graham St. The station design option that will be advanced would provide a center platform south of S Graham St, offset to the east.

Background

The voter-approved Sound Transit 3 Regional Transit System Plan for Central Puget Sound included funding for a new infill station on the Central Link (now 1 Line) light rail line in the vicinity of S Graham Street. This new station would bridge the approximately 1.6-mile gap between the Columbia City and Othello Stations. It would increase light rail access in the Rainier Valley and would serve the growing Hillman City neighborhood. This project includes an at-grade station with a center platform along with potential modifications to roadways, sidewalks, landscaping, drainage, and utilities.

In November 2023, the System Expansion Committee via Motion No. M2023-101 approved a Project Development Services contract award for the South Graham Street Infill Station project, which included Phase 1 (Alternatives Analysis), Phase 2 (Conceptual Engineering/Environmental Review), and an option for Phase 3 (Preliminary Engineering). Under that contract, staff has completed Phase 1 and identified and evaluated a station alternative at Martin Luther King Jr Way S and South Graham Street.

The local planning and alternatives development processes included technical analysis, public engagement, and input from affected local, state, and federal agencies. Sound Transit developed an initial range of station design options from the ST3 representative project and from agency and public input during Alternatives Analysis from March 2024 through September 2024.

The project has been using Sound Transit's Racial Equity Tool (RET) since alternatives development began in January 2024 to ensure non-discriminatory decision-making and to identify new opportunities to assist the affected communities. Applying the RET resulted in enhanced engagement practices that identify issues that may disproportionately adversely impact historically disadvantaged communities. Using of the RET does not replace other federally-required analyses.

The Board adopted schedule for the project is 2031.

Staff Recommended Next Steps

Consistent with the ST3 project template, staff will be advancing a station alternative at Martin Luther King Jr Way S and S Graham St into Phase 2, Conceptual Engineering/Environmental Review.

Staff recommends a station design option for the S Graham St Station that is located on the south side of S Graham St, has a center platform, and is offset to the east of the existing southbound track. This station design

would have good multimodal access, improved safety, flexibility for service interruptions, and avoid disruption of an existing large sewer main.

The next anticipated Board action will be to amend the project budget and execute a contract option for Phase 3, Preliminary Engineering, in Fall 2025.

Equity Considerations

Sound Transit and the City of Seattle are collaborating on the use of a Racial Equity Tool. After extensive engagement with the affected neighborhoods and communities-of-interest, the needs and priorities identified during this engagement were enhancing safety and access, minimizing construction disruptions, preserving businesses, and minimizing displacement. There was also strong support for a station located along at S Graham St and for opening the station as soon as possible. The community's needs and priorities then were used to establish the project's desired racial equity outcomes, alternatives analysis criteria, and station design option recommendation.

Alternatives evaluation included an analysis of the station alternative at Martin Luther King Jr Way S and S Graham St using criteria that measured potential effects on community resources in the study area, as well as opportunities for supporting non-discriminatory community development and access outcomes. The station at Martin Luther King Jr Way S and S Graham St has the potential to increase access to transit for core ridership, disinvested neighborhoods, and people of color, as well as provide access to minority-owned businesses near the proposed station.

The station at Martin Luther King Jr Way S and S Graham St would provide access to the regional light rail system for the communities of Beacon Hill, New Holly, Hillman City, and Othello and is consistent with the ST3 project description. In addition, locating the station at S Graham St would serve census tracts considered "Highest Equity Priority" in the City of Seattle. Combined with new potential east-west bus service implemented in partnership with King County Metro, a South Graham Street station would connect more people to jobs, housing, schools, and other destinations to create more equitable opportunities.

The project team will continue analyzing how the selected station design option meets community-driven priorities for the station. Areas of analysis in Phase 2 include potential relocation or temporary construction effects on small businesses, potential relocation of community assets, including a place of worship and small businesses, and potential effects of construction on existing riders.

Fiscal Information

The Fall 2024 Financial Plan Estimate for the South Graham Street Infill Station project is \$118 million in 2024\$ with an assumed in-service date of 2031. As this project is pre-baselined, both the authorized project allocation for project development work and a forecasted cost estimate for the remaining project delivery and construction work are reasonably assumed in the existing Long Range Financial Plan forecast.

There is no direct fiscal impact associated with this update. During Conceptual Engineering and Environmental Review, the project team will conduct a detailed cost estimate analysis to compare the Opinion of Probable Cost with the Financial Plan value. Based on cost trends, future cost estimates may exceed the Financial Plan estimate.

Public involvement

Sound Transit conducted several engagement activities in 2024 to involve community members.

In March through May 2024, staff conducted seven community interviews. The goal of these interviews was to share project information, build relationships with the surrounding communities, and inform the Community Engagement and Communications Plan. Staff spoke with community members and representatives of community-based organizations. During the community interviews, staff heard support for the station.

The project team hosted an online open house and survey from July 2 through July 28. The online open house shared project information including site selection considerations. The survey gathered input on community members' priorities and concerns and had 525 respondents.

Survey respondents noted that enhanced access and safety for people walking, biking, or taking transit are important design considerations. Respondents also noted that the station design should minimize the disruptions and impact to local businesses, sharing their concerns over rent, noise, and overall impacts to the area.

In addition to the online open house, Sound Transit hosted an in-person open house and attended five community events, engaging over 220 people. Staff heard from those that attended the in-person open house event and community events that they support having a station in the vicinity of South Graham Street. The project team heard that people want to enhance safety for those traveling to the station, especially for people walking. Staff also heard community member suggestions for investment in pedestrian infrastructure and bus connections for easier access. In addition, community members requested to preserve the existing local businesses.

In February 2025, Sound Transit hosted a follow-up in-person workshop and companion online survey to confirm community priorities and get feedback on station design options. Key themes from the feedback were prioritizing safety and access, minimizing impacts to traffic, business/property, and 1 Line service during construction, and providing a safe, secure, and comfortable station environment.

Business inclusion and workforce

Moving forward with a station alternative at Martin Luther King Jr Way S and S Graham St would not impact Sound Transit's commitment or ability to support disadvantaged and small business participation in this project, nor will it impact the workforce development provisions in the Project Labor Agreement.