



CITY OF KIRKLAND

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To: Dave Ramsay, City Manager
From: David Godfrey P.E., Transportation Engineering Manager
Date: June 8, 2006
Subject: Technology choice for high capacity transit on I-90

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Council authorize the Mayor to sign the attached letter to Sound Transit recommending light rail transit as the preferred alternative technology for the I-90 corridor.

BACKGROUND:

Sound Transit is developing a second phase of transit investments called ST2. In order select a group of projects for the second phase, the Sound Transit board first developed a revised long range plan, then selected a potential set of ST2 projects based on cost and performance. The Board plans to further narrow this set of projects to a group that it plans to put before voters (along with a joint RTID measure) in November of 2007.

The long range plan specifies two possible high capacity technologies in the I-90 corridor between Seattle and the eastside. One is light rail transit (the same technology that is being constructed as part of Sound Transit's current phase) and the other is rail-convertible bus rapid transit. The following technology descriptions are from the Sound Transit Long Range Plan:

Light Rail Transit. Light rail is provided primarily in separated rights-of-way with traffic signal preemption, enabling fast and reliable service. It includes a number of supporting technologies and enhancements, such as off-vehicle fare collection and real-time arrival information to increase customer convenience and satisfaction. It also includes supporting access facilities for pedestrians, bicycles, local buses as well as, in some cases, park-and-ride lots.

Rail-Convertible BRT. Rail-convertible BRT is built to the design standards for light rail but used initially by buses. Light rail design standards are built into this type of BRT and include appropriate grades, curves, station platform lengths, and the like. Designing busways in this manner allows for the easiest possible future conversion to light rail, when appropriate. In all other respects, rail-convertible BRT functions like Busway BRT. Busway BRT routes... offer high-speed, frequent two-way service throughout the day...operating in rights-of-way that are protected from general-purpose traffic congestion. These services will be characterized by infrequent stops and stations that have customer amenities similar to rail systems.

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The Sound Transit board will be recommending a preferred mode choice as a part of the draft plan that is scheduled to be finalized later this summer. This will allow public comment on the technology choice.

Even though it is unlikely they will be built in Sound Transit's next phase, it is important that planning for high capacity transit connections to Totem Lake and in the SR 520 corridor begin in ST2.

June 21, 2006

DRAFT

John Ladenburg, Chair
Sound Transit Board of Directors
401 South Jackson Street
Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Mr. Ladenburg:

The Sound Transit Board is developing a package of regional transit investments for voter consideration in November 2007, with release of a draft package scheduled for July 2006. The City of Kirkland recommends the draft package include light rail transit across I-90 to the Eastside. Designation of light rail as the HCT technology of choice by the Board at this time indicates a preferred mode choice and allows for public comment on the decision.

Sound Transit's Long Range Plan calls for connection of the Urban Center at Totem Lake to the regional system with light rail and HCT extended across Lake Washington on the SR 520 corridor. To meet this objective, we recognize that light rail across Lake Washington via I-90 to Bellevue or Redmond is a logical first step.

The broader reasons for extending light rail service are both simple and important:

- Building light rail to start with avoids disruptions in service that would occur if a bus rapid transit system were constructed and then converted to light rail.
- With light rail in Seattle, light rail across I-90 does not require a transfer to a different mode to get to the eastside. A bus link across the bridge requires such a transfer.
- Passenger loads are expected to be high on the system and light rail can add additional capacity less expensively than can bus rapid transit.

The City's support of the proposed light rail service extension to Bellevue and Redmond is given with the understanding that this a step toward building a fully regional system, one that eventually will include light rail service to Totem Lake and across SR 520. In your planning work for light rail extension across I-90, we ask you to pay particular attention to connections that will make these future extensions possible.

We appreciate your support for extending light rail across I-90 – an action that will benefit the City of Kirkland, the Eastside, and the Central Puget Sound region.

Sincerely,
Kirkland City Council

James L. Lauinger
Mayor