

City of Kirkland

Eastside Rail Corridor Interest Statement

City of Kirkland Transportation Commission
DRAFT January 6, 2011

Introduction

In December 2009, the Port of Seattle purchased the Woodinville subdivision from the BNSF Railroad. The Eastside Rail Corridor, stretching between Snohomish and Renton via Kirkland, thereby became a publicly-owned corridor. The City of Kirkland has long been interested in the corridor as a potential facility for bicycle and pedestrian transportation; having identified the Cross Kirkland Trail¹ project more than 15 years ago.

With the corridor coming into public ownership, the City Council realized the importance of proactively identifying Kirkland's interests for corridor development. Both King County and Sound Transit have expressed interest in purchasing various rights in the corridor. The City Council directed the Transportation Commission to conduct public outreach, then identify and document the City's interests in the corridor. This Interest Statement is the product of that work.

During the summer and fall of 2010, the Commission gathered comments at the Wednesday Market, fielded an online survey, met with Boards and Commissions and walked the corridor. At their Commission meetings, Commissioners heard from individuals with interests, opinions and particular knowledge of the corridor. The 2009 Final Eastside Commuter Rail Feasibility Study² study prepared by Sound Transit and PSRC also served as a reference.

Using these information sources the Transportation Commission prepared this Interest Statement to guide evaluation of proposals for corridor development as the City of Kirkland works with regional partners. Proposals that satisfy more of the interests would rank more highly than proposals that satisfy fewer of the interests. The conclusions at the end of this document are the Commission's thoughts on the type of corridor development that is likely to be practical and meet the City's interests given current information.

Interests

Serve Transportation needs of Kirkland

Transportation on the corridor should be integrated with and support the City's transportation goals³ to provide travel options within Kirkland and to points outside Kirkland. This implies an interest in how and when the corridor is developed in other cities as well.

The Eastside Rail Corridor (black line) touches many neighborhoods and parks in Kirkland



A section of the right-of-way in the Highlands neighborhood



Source: City of Kirkland

Council Goal concerning Balanced Transportation:

Kirkland values an integrated multi-modal system of transportation choices.

Council Goal: To reduce reliance on single occupancy vehicles. (September 2009)

Keep the corridor in public ownership

The region has determined⁴ that the public interest is served by public ownership of the corridor and the City of Kirkland supports this position.

Develop a plan to actively use the corridor in the near future

Because the corridor is a valuable asset that could be used to transport people, allowing it to remain unused or undeveloped has a high opportunity cost. The longer it is not used, the more resistance may be encountered toward any particular use.

Maintain the corridor in good condition

The corridor should be maintained to protect its value and the value of adjacent properties. Proper operation of drainage facilities, prevention of encroachment, and the preservation of structures and crossings are examples of ongoing maintenance needs.

Contribute to economic sustainability

Development of the corridor should be done in a cost effective manner and should consider the short and long term costs of construction, maintenance, and operation. Development should link to and support current and future plans for economic and neighborhood development.

Connect Totem Lake

Because of the corridor's proximity to the Totem Lake Urban Center⁵, it has the potential to help connect Totem Lake to the rest of the city and the region.

Protect neighborhood feel and atmosphere

Development of the corridor should allow for access across and along the corridor and not create barriers within or between neighborhoods. Residential neighborhoods should be protected from any excessive noise and safety impacts caused by corridor uses. Development of any trailheads, transit stations and/or parking locations should consider and minimize impacts to neighborhoods.

Plan for a multi-use facility

In the long term, transit, pedestrians and cyclists should be able to simultaneously travel safely and efficiently in the corridor. Planning or implementing one transportation mode must not foreclose future corridor use by another mode. Additionally, underground utilities that currently use and will continue to use the corridor⁶ must be considered. Freight operations may be considered along the corridor, but there does not appear to be much commercial interest in freight rail service within Kirkland.

The existing corridor contains many drainage facilities that require regular maintenance.



Source: City of Kirkland

Objective under goal G1 from the Active Transportation Plan:

Objective G1.1: By 2015, open a section of the Cross-Kirkland Trail on the Eastside Rail Corridor.

Cross-Kirkland trail is the working name of a bicycle/pedestrian trail located on the right-of-way.

This area in the Houghton neighborhood contains wetlands.



Source: City of Kirkland

A shared rail and trail facility



Source: Marin County Bicycle Coalition

Serve the transportation needs of pedestrians and bicyclists

A bicycle and pedestrian transportation facility should allow all weather, day and night use. It should be sized to allow simultaneous safe passage for both pedestrians and bicyclists of all skill levels. Its development should include protection of existing connections and include new connections to the City's streets and trails. The Active Transportation Plan⁷ has a list of such connections.

Plan any transit use in close consultation with the City of Kirkland.

Locating transit stations and associated parking and feeder bus connections has major short- and long-term impacts on the surrounding neighborhoods and on the transportation network. A process to determine station locations should include extensive work with neighborhood groups, appropriate Boards and Commissions and the City Council.

Transit service must be designed to move people

To offer viable travel choices and attract a high level of ridership⁸, transit must have certain characteristics. Service should be frequent, available most of the day, operate between desirable destinations, be easily accessible by potential riders and offer reasonable travel speeds. It should be flexible and offer capacity appropriate for ridership. The best choice of transit technology may vary, with one system best in the shorter term and another better in the longer term.

Consider grade crossing delay and safety

Design of the corridor should consider the potential time delays and safety concerns for users of streets that cross the corridor. Crossings must provide a reasonable level of safety and convenience for both users of the corridor and for street traffic.

Disclose and mitigate environmental impacts

Prior to any development of the corridor, a complete environmental review should be conducted to identify and disclose impacts and to propose mitigations for those impacts. Noise, air quality, surface water and sensitive areas are topics that typically require analysis in an environmental review.

Conclusion

In developing the following conclusions, the Transportation Commission considered comments from the community, previous corridor studies, likely funding sources and the magnitude of costs for various types of projects. These conclusions are the Commission's opinions on how the corridor should be developed given this information.

Ultimately, the best use of the corridor is as the site of a welcoming, transportation-oriented facility for pedestrians and bicyclists and a high capacity transit system that connects Kirkland to the region. Ideally, trail and transit users could use the corridor simultaneously. The main focus for development of the corridor

Sample transit types

Heavy rail: Sound Transit Sounder



Source: Railpictures.net Image © PNWRailfan

Electric Light Rail: Sound Transit Link



Source: lisatown.com

Diesel multiple unit: DMU in service in Australia



Source: thetransportpolitic.com

Bus Rapid Transit: Community Transit Swift



Source: blogs.seattleweekly.com

in the short term should be on development of a trail. High capacity transit should be added when feasible, more likely in the medium to longer term. While freight operations may be part of a future rail corridor, there does not appear to be much current commercial interest in freight rail service within the city.

Due to its poor physical condition, the current infrastructure in the corridor is not capable of supporting rail traffic that would offer a viable transportation option. A safe, fully featured high-capacity rail system—similar to Link Light Rail—is perhaps the ideal rail option. However, a high capacity rail system is very expensive and would require a great deal of careful planning. For example, an extension of East Link to the north is currently contemplated in the Sound Transit master plan, but would likely not be considered for funding until late in the Sound Transit 2 construction plan. At the soonest, high capacity rail transit wouldn't be open for service until at least 2030. Moreover, the Eastside Rail Corridor may not be the best alignment for such a route. In the shorter term, there may be less expensive corridor transit options that could be developed, such as bus rapid transit linking the South Kirkland Park & Ride and Totem Lake.

A paved, accessible, bicycle and pedestrian trail that meets Kirkland's interests would be far less expensive than a high capacity rail or bus system and would require a less extensive planning process than would a transit option. However, it is important that trail planning be done with rail compatibility as the long term goal.

The Transportation Commission believes that the Eastside Rail Corridor is a transportation facility that represents enormous opportunity for the City of Kirkland and the region. We are fortunate to have such a facility in Kirkland and should strive to see that our interests are met during its development.

City of Kirkland Transportation Commission
The City of Kirkland Transportation Commission is made up of seven members appointed by the City Council to four year terms. The Commission meets every month to make recommendations on transportation policy to the City Council. Visit the Commission webpage where you can join the Transportation Commission List-Serve and automatically receive e-mail updates on the Commission's activities.

Commission members:
Donald Samdahl, Chair
Joel Pfundt, Vice Chair
Morgan Hopper
Tom Neir
Thomas Pendergrass
Sandeep Singhal
Michael Snow
Carl Wilson

Summary of interests

- *Serve transportation needs of Kirkland*
- *Keep the Corridor in public ownership*
- *Develop a plan to actively use the corridor in the near future*
- *Maintain the corridor in good condition*
- *Contribute to economic sustainability*
- *Connect Totem Lake*
- *Protect neighborhood feel and atmosphere*
- *Plan for a multi use facility*
- *Serve the transportation needs of pedestrians and bicyclists*
- *Plan any transit use in close consultation with the City of Kirkland*
- *Transit service must be designed to move people*
- *Consider grade crossing delay and safety*
- *Disclose and mitigate environmental impacts*

¹ The Cross Kirkland trail was originally envisioned as a trail that would operate beside what was at the time an active railroad corridor.

² 2009 Final PSRC and Sound Transit BNSF Eastside Commuter Rail Feasibility Study, 2009 Puget Sound Regional Council <http://www.psrc.org/transportation/bnsf>

³ City of Kirkland Council Goals. <http://www.ci.kirkland.wa.us/Assets/City+Council+Goals.pdf>

⁴ *BNSF Corridor Preservation Study, Final Report* May, 2007 Puget Sound Regional Council. Page 7. http://www.psrc.org/assets/3176/07-20_BNSFfinalreport.pdf

⁵ In cooperation with member cities, Puget Sound Regional Council has designated a number of Urban Centers where regional growth is to be targeted. Totem Lake is the only Urban Center in Kirkland. Downtown Bellevue, downtown Redmond and Overlake are examples of other nearby Urban Centers.

⁶ Puget Sound Energy and Cascade Water Alliance are examples of current and potential users respectively.

⁷ *More People, More Places, More Often, an Active Transportation Plan* City of Kirkland, March 2009. Page 100. http://www.ci.kirkland.wa.us/depart/Public_Works/Transportation_Streets/Active_Transportation_Plan.htm

⁸ Ridership on existing King County Metro routes could be a reasonable benchmark.