

City of Kirkland Eastside Rail Corridor Interest Statement

Adopted by the Kirkland City Council April 19, 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 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.

Outreach elements included gathering comments at the Wednesday Market, fielding three on-line surveys, meeting with Boards, Commissions and neighborhood groups, walking the corridor, and receiving testimony at Transportation Commission meetings. The 2009 Final Eastside Commuter Rail Feasibility Study² prepared by Sound Transit and PSRC also served as a reference.

This Interest Statement is not a proposal or a recommendation per se. Rather, it is intended to guide evaluation of proposals for corridor development. 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 describe 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.

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. Keeping the corridor in public ownership may require the City to purchase its portion of the right-of-way, and Kirkland's ownership may help the City meet other interests 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)

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 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. The corridor is adjacent to several parks, schools and other amenities. These facilities should be protected appropriately as the corridor is developed.

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

The Burke-Gilman trail in Seattle is on an abandoned railroad right-of-way.



Source: King County

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.

Design Transit to efficiently move people

Successful transit systems 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. The best choice of transit technology may vary, with one system best in the shorter term and another better in the longer term. The viability of transit in the corridor should be compared to other options.⁸

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.

Consider grade-crossing delay and safety

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

Disclose and mitigate environmental impacts

Develop the corridor in a way that meets the City’s goals for environmental sustainability. 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.

Conclusions

By its nature, an interest statement does not establish specific positions on issues. Instead it describes interests, which could be met in a variety of ways. The purpose of these conclusions is to demonstrate how the interests described above could be met, to varying degrees, by a range of development options.

Ultimately, the City’s interests would be met by implementing a welcoming, transportation-oriented facility for pedestrians and bicyclists, coupled with a high-capacity transit system that connects Kirkland to the region.

These photos illustrate different types of transit. How they might help meet Kirkland’s interests on the corridor would depend on a number of factors.

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

The main focus for development of the corridor in the short term should be on a trail. A paved, accessible, bicycle and pedestrian trail 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 --that would meet Kirkland's interests-- as the long-term goal.

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. If rail were to be located on the corridor, a safe, fully-featured, high-capacity rail system – similar to Link Light Rail—is perhaps the ideal option. A high-capacity rail system would require a great deal of careful planning to meet Kirkland's interests.

Because of its high cost and Sound Transit timing, it is not likely that regional rail transit would be in operation before 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.

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. It is difficult to conceive of freight rail operations that would meet many of Kirkland's interests.

The Eastside Rail Corridor is a transportation facility that represents enormous opportunity for the City of Kirkland and the region. Kirkland is fortunate to have such a facility within its boundaries and should strive to see that its interests are met during development of the corridor.

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*
- *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*
- *Design transit service to efficiently move people*
- *Plan any transit use in close consultation with the City of Kirkland*
- *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. The proposed Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) System on I-405 could also be compared.