



MEMORANDUM

To: Transportation Commission

From: David Godfrey, P.E., Transportation Engineering Manager

Date: March 23, 2012

Subject: Short term options for Cross Kirkland Corridor

This memo describes short term options for the Cross Kirkland Corridor in particular examining the value of removing rails from the corridor. The main question is:

Which is more valuable?

- existing rail available now and a trail available later. This implies keeping rail on the current rail bed, and a trail built off the rail bed.
- a rough trail available soon, but without the existing rail being available. This implies that a trail is developed on the rail bed.

Over the past few months the Commission has heard various reasons for removing or not removing the rails from the corridor. The following tables outline some of those reasons, with comments from staff.

At this time, staff recommends removing the rails. Any action would have to be approved by Council. Staff would like to understand the perspectives of the Transportation Commission before finalizing a recommendation.

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TABLE 1 Reasons for removing rails

REASON	COMMENTS
A rough trail is available after rail is removed.	After rail and ties are removed, ballast is graded smooth. This provides a rough path of about 8' in width. The ability to have a trail quickly is perhaps the most compelling reason for removing the rails. As the trail is developed further, more complete pedestrian crossing facilities will have to be developed.
Generates some revenue	Given the 5.75 mile length of the rail line, it is likely that there would be a net payment to the City for removal of the rail and ties. The size of this payment is dependent upon the quality of the rails and ties, a factor that would be evaluated by the companies prior to a bid submittal. We have met with representatives of one company on site and they felt the material was of medium quality. Removal of the street grade crossings, the signals at the crossings and other work would decrease the size of the payment to the city. A bidding process for rail removal would take several months in order to get the most favorable prices.
Maintenance is much easier	Removing the rails greatly increases the ease of maintaining the corridor because no special vehicles are necessary to provide access. If the rails are to remain for any period of time, the purchase of special vehicles will be necessary to safely and efficiently perform maintenance activities such as mowing, spraying, debris removal etc. Rail vehicle prices begin at around \$10,000.
There is no viable or attractive use of rail	<p>Freight service does not meet the interests developed in the interest statement. It is hard to imagine freight customers south of Kirkland given existing and proposed land use patterns. BNSF sold the corridor to the Port presumably, in part because a freight market was not viable.</p> <p>In the short term, transit on rail would have to be operated by private interests. This is because neither Metro, Sound Transit nor the City have any plans or funding to operate rail based trolleys. Operating rail transit profitably would appear to be difficult considering the operating costs, likely ridership and competition from Metro transit service between locations such as downtown Kirkland and downtown Bellevue. There are laws restricting private transit operations that compete with Metro, but this hurdle could likely be overcome. Vehicles operating on rails, their operators, signal systems etc, would have to meet appropriate federal requirements. Trolley stops in Kirkland would require, at a minimum, boarding platforms and could need more complex facilities.</p> <p>Excursion rail such as the dinner train or other tourism oriented operation is the most viable form of rail use. Considering the dinner train as an example, a train that passes through Kirkland has limited value in meeting Kirkland's interests. A train that stops in Kirkland adds the complication of parking, station locations etc. On the other hand, there may be economic value to Kirkland in having an excursion type train stopping in Kirkland.</p> <p>It appears that one of the biggest attractions of rail based uses is that they are rail based. In a practical sense, many of the functions proposed for rail based transportation could be accomplished through non-rail means.</p>

REASON	COMMENTS
Sound Transit rail is a long way off	Funding for Sound Transit's current construction program was approved in 2008. Construction is scheduled to be completed in the next 10 years or so. A connection between Bellevue and Totem Lake is in the long range plan. A Sound Transit 3 ballot measure might appear on a ballot in 8 years with an estimated 15 year design and build timing, placing use of the corridor by Sound Transit 20-25 years from now. There is no certainty that ST 3 would include the Bellevue to Totem Lake link or that if that link were included, the rail corridor would be the preferred routing.

Table 2 Reasons for leaving rail

REASON	COMMENT
It's cheaper and easier to build new rail if existing rails are in place	This may be true. It is unlikely that new rail would be built in the next 20 years, so this benefit has limited value. It is unclear whether or not any new rail would be constructed on the exact alignment of the existing rail.
If a freight operator reactivated the corridor the City would have to pay the cost of restoring the rails.	Asst. City Attorney believes this is not the case. In fact the restoring railroad would have to pay the city for the property.
Rails can be helpful in building a trail; getting materials to the site etc.	It would be easier to build a trail and bring materials to the site if the rails were not in place than to bring materials or build a trail from the rails.
The eastside rail corridor provides a redundant freight line for the BNSF mainline.	If BNSF saw value in this proposition, it's unclear why they sold the eastside line. The Wilburton tunnel has been removed from I-405. Without a connection across I-405, the corridor is not a redundant link. The existing rails are not adequate for handling anything but low speed rail service.
If the rails are there, the dinner train, trolleys etc could run on them	True, with the caveats given above about the suitability of the rails.
There may be legal complications due to Lane litigation	The Lane litigation contends that the Port could not purchase the portion of the corridor between Woodinville and Snohomish. BNSF donated the portion of the corridor south of Woodinville. The plaintiffs do not seek to rescind the Kirkland portion of the transaction.
It's hard to get rail back in the corridor if its removed.	Leaving the rail in place would be a good reminder that the ultimate vision for the corridor includes non-trail uses. At the same time, it seems unlikely that having rail in the corridor would be the key factor in getting new rail at some point.

The 13 interests in the statement approved by Council can be used to evaluate development options. In the table below, staff has attempted to evaluate the following short term plans across the interests:

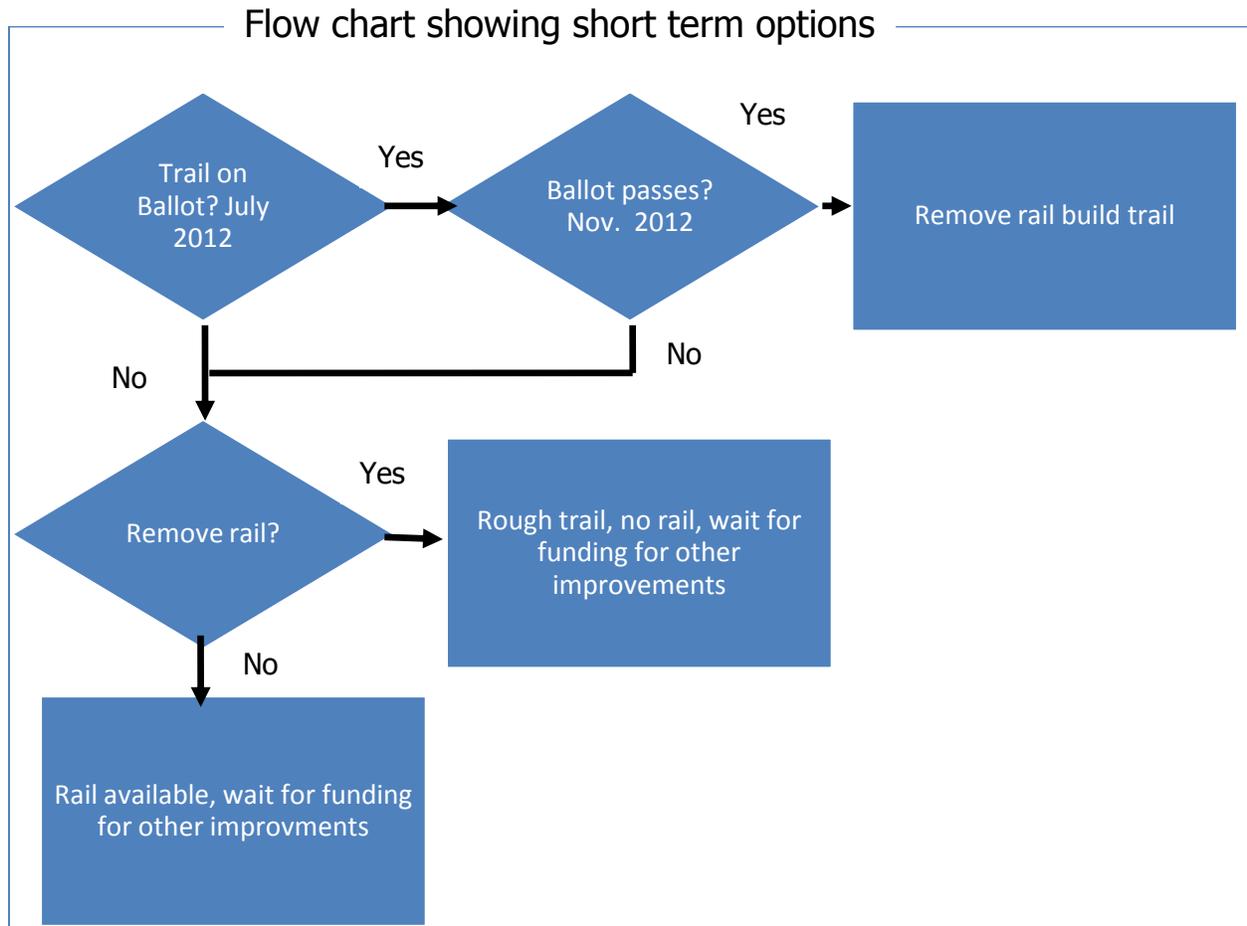
Plan number 1: Remove rail as soon as practical. Use as a rough trail until further improvements can be made.

Plan number 2 :Rail stays in place. Construct a final paved trail off the existing railbed. A paved trail because when placing the trail off the existing railbed the cost of paving would be small compared to the total cost of everything else. Rail remains available.

TABLE 3 Two short term plans compared to approved interests

INTEREST	Plan 1	Plan 2
Serve immediate transportation needs of Kirkland	Biking and walking on the corridor are immediate needs. Any rail based need would not be immediately served.	Not clear that we have an immediate need to be served by rail within the Kirkland corridor . bike walk needs would be delayed waiting for trail funding
Keep the corridor in public ownership	Not a consideration on the Kirkland segment	
Actively use the corridor in the near future	Corridor useable as soon as rails and ties are removed.	Assume it would take longer to use the corridor since there is no rail plan and the trail plan under this option would take longer to construct due to its higher cost.
Maintain the corridor in good condition	Removing the rails would make corridor maintenance easier and cheaper	Corridor maintenance more difficult, or requires obtaining different equipment
Contribute to economic sustainability	To the extent that an interim trail contributes to economic development	A
Connect Totem Lake	Totem Lake would be connected by a trail	Rail would be available to connect totem lake
Plan for a multi use facility	Plans are similar	
Serve the transportation needs of pedestrians and bicyclists	Does so sooner	Does so with a higher quality facility
Design transit service to efficiently move people	This plan does not include transit	Rail cannot be efficient in the short term and there is no operator for rail transit
Plan any transit use in close consultation with the City of Kirkland	Plans are similar	
Consider grade crossing delay and safety	Provide crossing safety for pedestrians and bikes	Provide crossing safety for pedestrians and bikes
Disclose and mitigate environmental impacts	Plans are similar	

The flow chart below shows the relationship of a potential ballot measure to rail removal



Another short term issue to consider is obtaining a more refined cost estimate for various development options. Such an estimate would likely price various trail options such as gravel trail, or paved trail both on and off the existing rail bed along with and without transit options such as rail and paved way. These options would be priced across various topological cross-sections found on the corridor.