Seattle
Design Commission

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To: Sound Transit Board Members

The Seattle Design Commission (Commission) has conducted reviews of select station and guideway options in Sound Transit's (ST) Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the West Seattle to Ballard Light Rail Extension (WSBLE). Our review of these stations supports our responsibility to advise the City of Seattle's Mayor, City Council, and City departments, on the design and environmental implications of publicly-funded projects that will be constructed within the City of Seattle.

Our reviews of select WSBLE investments included:

February 17, 2022	Westlake and Seattle Center Stations
March 3, 2022	Chinatown-International District Station
March 17, 2022	Ballard segment (Smith Cove and Ballard Stations, Salmon Bay Crossing)
April 7, 2022	West Seattle segment (Delridge Station, West Seattle elevated crossing)

ST staff, led by Sloan Dawson and Kate Lichtenstein, did exemplary work presenting and highlighting the various station and guideway options requested by the Commission. Their presentations provided the Commission and the public a comprehensive evaluation of complex architectural and engineering studies, communicated with clarity and focus. City partners at the Office of Planning and Community Development, Seattle Department of Transportation, and Department of Neighborhoods, also shared valuable contextual information concerning policy and planning efforts under consideration by the City and the implications of this work on ST investments. We appreciate the quality of their work and the partnerships that resulted in these presentations.

In its role as advisor to the Mayor, City Council, and City departments, the Commission has adopted six values that guide our work:

- **Inspired Design** - Inspired design unifies the public realm and inspires the community by embodying state-of-the-art practices.
- **Contextual Integration** - Integrated design responds to its context and enhances its neighborhood.
- **Innovative Sustainability** - Sustainable design minimizes environmental impact and provides long-term self-sufficiency.
- **Social Inclusion** - Inclusive design seeks to elevate the quality of life for all and responds fluently to its cultural context.
- **Exemplary Partnerships** - Design partnerships leverage public, community and private resources, integrating design efforts across multiple disciplines and agencies to achieve greater results with the same resources.
- **Effective Investments** - Effective design provides high value for the investment by thoughtfully considering flexibility, longevity, and total life-cycle costs.

Consistent with this mission statement, we offer the following comments in advance of your decision and direction in the selection and advancement of designs for preferred station and guideway alignments.

1. Alignment Observations

WSBLE program

- **Equitable outcomes** should be embedded in all aspects of selecting and implementing station and guideway options. Equitable outcomes should guide siting, design, construction, delivery, and operations. Each station in the alignment should use associated demographics of both residents and the employment base to guide solutions for station and guideway siting, location, and supportive infrastructure that reflect these communities and their expectations for station and guideway integration in neighborhoods. We will continue to use our October 2021 policy on equity in the design of public places and spaces to complement the considerable work undertaken by ST and its City partners.
- **Mitigation**, as required to address impacts of stations and guideways on the abutting public realm, should include steps to implement these obligations as early as possible. Early delivery of expanded sidewalks, improved lighting, related open spaces, and improved transit/multi-modal connections delivered outside the development process for station and guideways have significant potential to better integrate new ST investments into their respective neighborhoods.
- **Elevated crossings**, if selected as the preferred option for either Salmon Bay or the Duwamish, should be designed to reflect the context of the surrounding natural and built environments through massing, use of materials, bridge typology, location of structural features that avoid environmentally sensitive areas, and features that promote public use at or near the base of vertical structural components. We look forward to convening meetings to evaluate concept designs for these crossings that elevate urban design outcomes, mirroring those that occurred in our partnership with the Washington State Department of Transportation in the Seattle segment of the SR 520 corridor.
- **Anti-displacement policies** should be applied to WSBLE to substantially mitigate adverse impacts due to property acquisition, and those arising from market effects of WSBLE on residential and commercial properties. Work in this area should be a data-driven exercise using statistics from previous segments, as well as forecasting based on current station and guideway analysis.
- **Environmental review** should be expanded to evaluate impacts of site-specific development scenarios at underground stations or designated transit-oriented development (TOD) sites, using current or likely zoning as a guide. By analyzing site specific environmental impacts guided by the City's land use and zoning requirements, developers could use ST's environmental review document instead of expending time and the cost of developing new environmental documents. This will also provide the public with information on the implications of future TOD for their communities.
- **Sustainability goals and principles** for transportation infrastructure should be established early in the design process. Setting baseline expectations in the initial request for qualification/proposal process prior to beginning design will set the stage for sustainability as an embedded, as opposed to applied, outcome. The City of Seattle's own requirements on sustainability for city capital facilities provide a useful baseline.

Sound Transit Art Program

- WSBLE's Sound Transit Art program (STart) should be treated as a fundamental project element, of equal importance to architecture, engineering, and landscape architecture. STart staff and/or artists should be involved throughout community engagement and design team processes, to maximize opportunities for successful integration of art into the project as whole, to avoid outcomes that relegate art to mitigate or disguise issues or deficiencies in project engineering, landscape architecture or architecture.

2. Individual Station Observations

Chinatown - International District (CID)

- A 4th Avenue alignment appears to provide greater opportunity for a station that will better integrate into the CID and Pioneer Square neighborhoods, with the understanding that short-term implications on the transportation network during construction should be addressed with great sensitivity to the affected business and residential interests. Conversely, any solutions for 5th Avenue may be successful with careful planning and integration into the CID. Regardless of station location, significant collaboration with City partners and the public on refinement of the public realm to enhance transit connections will be crucial to the success of any CID station location.
- Public realm refinements for the CID station should include a significant investment that enhances and upgrades the right of way at and near 4th and Jackson. This should include upgrades that support transit connections, and options to re-purpose 2nd Avenue right of way extension to prioritize pedestrians over automobiles.
- Reuse of Union Station as a community asset for the CID and their Pioneer Square neighbors is imperative to restore its function as a transportation hub and as a cornerstone in the CID's cultural identity. Reuse options should continue to promote use of the station as a functional portion of station operations and as interior and exterior space that provides a meaningful asset to the CID, understanding any re-use strategies must elevate and protect its historic landmark designations.
- ST should partner with the City to expand the scope of environmental review to evaluate impacts of City planning efforts that support WSBLE. This would include evaluating environmental implications of planning efforts and development scenarios related to the 4th and Jackson/Jackson Hub planning proposals at CID and other similar efforts where City planning efforts align with WSBLE investments.

Seattle Center

- Any proposed station located on the Seattle Center campus should be designed with great sensitivity to the context of historic structures, unique landscapes, and the identity and function of cultural facilities. Structures designed where 'back of the house' station functions (vertical circulation, venting, auxiliary power, etc.) are visible to passersby would be detrimental to the campus, its cultural partners, and the identity and function of the campus.
- Seattle Center resident organizations expressed concern about construction impacts at our briefing and subsequently in a letter to the Mayor. We encourage Sound Transit to explore alternative means and methods and creative construction sequencing when planning station and guideway work in denser areas of Seattle, not just at Seattle Center. The success of WSBLE will be dependent on, and evaluated by, deep partnerships and collaboration in each unique neighborhood.

Westlake

- A 5th Avenue alignment in downtown Seattle provides a better foundation for locating a new station in conjunction with the existing Westlake Station. Station designs should leverage and expand the existing mezzanine as a gathering, busking, and meeting place that will advance transfers between lines and the overall rider experience. We also see an opportunity to design new station entrances, and redesign existing entrances, to provide improved station identity through enhanced visibility and access that reflects the number and frequency of users.

Segment to Ballard

- The Galer Street option for Smith Cove appears to provide the best opportunity to connect light rail to existing land uses, to potential transit-oriented development to the north and northwest, and to a complex transportation network that includes various transit lines, a truck and rail freight corridor, passive and active recreation linkages, commercial and tourist based marine traffic, and automobiles.

- The Galer Street option provides ST and the City with an opportunity to develop bicycle-supportive investments at an important multi-modal connection between ST, connecting transit, and nearby Elliott Bay Trail. Abutting parcels that may not have development potential, due to their size and orientation, may provide important multi-modal resources to leverage this unique connection.
- Further analysis of existing or future pedestrian connections to any Smith Cove station option from neighborhoods to the east could provide useful information in selecting a preferred alternative. Expanding physical connections at Smith Cove with housing to the east would expand station reach to these neighborhoods, in lieu of more complicated connections to stations at Interbay or Seattle Center.
- We are pleased to see cost comparisons that show a tunnel under Salmon Bay provides nearly equivalent costs to those estimated for an elevated crossing, in addition to reducing visual impacts and potential long-term environmental impacts on Salmon Bay. A 15th Avenue tunnel alignment may be the best option for successful neighborhood integration, based on the existing context, proximity to vibrant commercial areas and transit service, and the potential for future transit-oriented development.
- A 14th Avenue Salmon Bay tunnel and underground station option will offset problems with scale of an above ground station and guideway in relation to the surrounding development. However, its location in relationship to current and likely residential and commercial density to the east may reduce the potential for this option, as its location may pose significant impacts on a lower scale neighborhood marked with low density residential uses and transitions to maritime based industrial uses.

3. Guidance Based on Station/Guideway Typologies

Multi-modal stations and transfers

- Eliminate or significantly reduce the number and location of street level transfers between existing and future alignments at SODO, CID, and Westlake.
- Eliminate or significantly reduce barriers to transfers based on vertical and horizontal elevation changes between stations or guideway segments.
- Provide spaces to enhance rider and community experience that are not associated with movement in and out of trains. Include spaces that provide opportunities for wayfinding, transit-supportive and community-based commercial spaces, restrooms, or other activities that respond to the needs of transit users and communities.

Underground stations

- Design solutions to address negative implications of elevators as a transit supportive feature. The importance of how elevators are located, designed, oriented, and supported, should be a fundamental measure of selecting a preferred alternative. Best practices in other transit systems with elevator-only stations should be used to test and evaluate concepts applied to WSBLE, including how redundancy is provided in vertical circulation systems.
- Limit potential pedestrian congestion by providing public space that exceeds the minimum needed for transitions between the public realm and station entrances. These spaces provide important areas for program uses, meeting spots, and other activities that enhance the transit experience and connect transit respectfully and imaginatively with the surrounding community.
- Provide wayfinding between the platform and transfer points and street level to ensure users understand where they are while moving both horizontally and vertically within the station.
- Site and design underground stations to integrate successfully and sensitively with nearby neighborhood resources that include public spaces, business districts, transit facilities, cultural sites and centers. Contribute to neighborhood character and viability as well as planned or future transit oriented residential or commercial development through excellent and meaningful civic design.

Station access

- Locate station entrances to be directly accessible from abutting sidewalks. Station entrances that require access through separately owned public spaces, or privately owned publicly accessible spaces, provides challenges where there are conflicting standards for use and access
- Incorporate paratransit facilities into all facilities, including drop offs and access points at each station entrance. Provide equal station access to all ages and abilities. When assigning a location for these facilities, employ a comprehensive approach to access, rather than identifying individual accessible locations, to achieve equitable outcomes.
- Assume 'worst case' scenario in locating and designing station access. Supportive public realm investments that exceed regulatory requirements and obligations for mitigation will be of particular importance to both 'surge' and transfer stations in dense urban environments
- Develop a comprehensive curb management program, in consultation with City of Seattle, and concurrent with initial station designs, to refine the extent of space needed for mode activities (drop off, waiting, layover, transit connections, etc.). Secure these investments as early as possible in the design process when options for equitable, attractive, and effective outcomes are still available.
- Include traffic calming solutions (enhanced or widened sidewalks, signalized pedestrian crossing, curb bulbs, etc.) that enhance the pedestrian network, at those locations where the primary pedestrian route requires crossing an arterial to the station (e.g., Ballard, Smith Cove, CID stations).

Relationship between guideways and public realm

- Design vertical and horizontal guideway components to reduce mass, density, and bulk.
- Integrate design elements that refine guideway component early in the design process, to include:
  - modified size and shape of columns
  - reducing the size and extent of structures
  - strategic use of steel to increase transparency, reduce mass, and provide refinement to guideway segments
  - integrate lighting into guideway components
  - detail guideway elements to respect and enhance human-scale experience and to offset impacts of monolithic structure.

Relationship to public investments

- Design guideways and stations to enhance connections to nearby public investments, including but not limited to City parks, pedestrian/bicycle trails, natural and commercial amenities. Examples include:
  - Elliott Bay Trail/Helix Bridge (Smith Cove Station)
  - Kinnear Park and Greenway (Smith Cove)
  - Seattle Center (Seattle Center Station)
  - Longfellow Creek greenspaces and the Duwamish River (Delridge Station)
  - 14th Avenue NW boat ramp (Ballard Station)
  - Burke-Gilman trail (Ballard Station).
- Integrate wayfinding elements into station design, to clearly establish each station's relationship to its surrounding community and key public amenities.
- Elevate the role of abutting streets in collaboration with City of Seattle's Department of Transportation. Integrate dedicated or anticipated festival streets into station design, facilitate the conversion of streets to predominately pedestrian or bicycle functions, or partially converted to programmed open space, etc.

- Design stations to enhance the neighborhood context through scale, architecture, engineering, and landscape, in concert with meaningful integration of art with both transit and community.
- Integrate commercial and cultural activity near entrances for enhanced user experience, convenience, and community connections.
- Create safe spaces with seating, access to staff assistance, and legible orientation for users to move easily throughout the system.

We appreciate the time and consideration you will pay to the issues outlined in this letter and in the direction you provide ST staff on advancing design concepts for station and guideway alternatives.

We will continue these reviews through Fall 2022, prior to the issuance of the Final Environmental Impact Statement. In coordination with ST and City staff, upcoming reviews will focus on evaluating architectural options for select stations, as well as how designs for initial preferred options have been advanced following our initial reviews.

Sincerely,

Vinita Sidhu

Vinita Sidhu, Chair

CC: Mayor Bruce A Harrell
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