

Wallace Ltr

**DRAFT**

March 8, 2010

The Honorable Aaron Reardon, Chair  
Sound Transit Board of Directors  
401 South Jackson Street  
Seattle, WA 98104

Re: Updating Bellevue City Council's East Link Alignment Preference in Segment B  
from B3 Modified to B7

Dear Chair Reardon,

I am writing on behalf of the Bellevue Council to thank you and the Sound Transit Board for the February 11<sup>th</sup> joint workshop with the Bellevue Council and to provide additional follow-up on the Council's ongoing discussions of the B segment.

On February 25, 2009, the City of Bellevue submitted a letter (the "2009 Letter") requesting that Sound Transit adopt the B3 Modified alignment. This was not the "B3" from the DEIS, but rather an alignment similar to B3 along with a list of requested modifications. To date, Sound Transit has not agreed to perform those modifications. The City provided a list of issues with respect to the DEIS and we trust Sound Transit is working to respond, but to date these issues have not been resolved. For these reasons, and as further stated below, the Council believes it is now time to update its routing preference and advise Sound Transit of the problems with the Segment B alignment alternatives Sound Transit appears to be seeking. The City of Bellevue hereby adopts the B7 alignment as its preferred alternative.

Compared to B3, B7 has the following benefits:

- It avoids impacts to Bellevue Way;
- It avoids noise and visual impacts to Bellevue's neighborhoods;
- It avoids disturbing or impacting the F.W. Winters House;
- It appears that B7 will cost significantly less than the B3 option after all of the appropriate B3 mitigation is included; and
- It will provide faster travel times through the segment while increasing safety and reliability by avoiding conflicts with automobiles or pedestrians.
- It extends the light rail alignment to the BNSF corridor, setting the stage for future extensions of light rail service east to Issaquah and the Eastgate P&R, north to Kirkland, Woodinville and Snohomish and south to Renton and ultimately Sea-Tac airport.

The Council is concerned about the traffic impacts of light rail on South Bellevue Way and 112<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE, and from the expansion of the South Bellevue Park & Ride from 500 to 1,500 stalls. As stated in our 2009 Letter, "maintaining traffic capacity on Bellevue Way is imperative." It

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Letter to Chair Reardon

March 8, 2010

Page 2

also appears that it will be quite difficult to stage the construction of the alignment along Bellevue Way and next to the Slough without great costs and negative impact to the road and environment. As stated in our 2009 Letter, "construction impacts from the closure of South Bellevue Park & Ride would result in traffic detours, lane closures and signal capacity." Appropriate mitigation would need to be provided to address these traffic impacts. None of these impacts are present with the B7 alignment.

The Council believes there are greater opportunities with the B7 alignment for mitigating train noise impacts than with the B3 alignment. The B3 option places the train below the grade of a number of homes in the Surrey Downs and Enatai neighborhoods. After the Central Link train opened it became clear to the Council that the DEIS understated the noise impacts from light rail. The B7 option places the light rail train next to the freeway where the ambient noise is already greater, and there appears to be an opportunity to extend the noise wall between the train and the residences along 118<sup>th</sup> to mitigate the noise impacts.

From an environmental standpoint, while B7 crosses the Slough at its south end next to I-90, it appears to have less environmental impact than B3, which runs in a critical area buffer along a significant portion of its length, and crosses Sturtevant Slough and Sturtevant Creek.

The Council is also concerned about the impacts of the proposed B3 alignment on the F.W. Winters House, Bellevue's only property on the National Historic Register. The light rail alignment runs so close to the house that damage to the house from construction and train vibration may negatively alter the character and use of this historic structure. Since a viable alternative such as the B7 exists, it appears that federal law requires that such negative impacts on the F.W. Winters House must be avoided.

The Council believes the reduced impacts associated with B7 outweigh the marginal system-wide ridership benefits provided by the South Bellevue Park & Ride station – a station that has no existing transit oriented development or employment centers within ½ mile, and no potential for such development. The DEIS concludes that, system-wide, there is only a 1,500 boardings per day difference between B7 and B3. It is not reasonable to expect Bellevue to suffer the severe impacts to its traffic, environment, neighborhoods and historic properties for 1,500 boardings per day, an amount the DEIS deems insubstantial.

To further ameliorate the 1,500 boardings per day reduction, transit service along the B3 alignment's path can be accommodated by maintaining the ST 550 bus service. This would create a more robust transit system between Bellevue and Seattle when combined with light rail on B7. However, if South Bellevue Park & Ride is deemed integral to the light rail system, the Council encourages study of any other alternatives that would enable both the connection to South Bellevue Park & Ride and use of the B7 alignment.

Letter to Chair Reardon  
March 8, 2010  
Page 3

Finally, the Council maintains its position stated in the 2009 Letter with respect to the notion of running light rail along 112<sup>th</sup> Ave. SE from SE 8<sup>th</sup> Street to Main. This "Value Engineering" proposal (f/k/a the B2A) may reduce the costs of light rail but is inconsistent with the City's Comprehensive Plan, would result in significant traffic disruption during construction and require rebuilding of a substantial amount of Bellevue Way and 112<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE. The City depends on 112<sup>th</sup> Ave. SE for the continued function of its road network and would rather not sacrifice this important right of way.

In the 2009 Letter the City indicated certain concerns with the B7 route's impacts to 118<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE. We ask Sound Transit to study the relocation or modification of the 118<sup>th</sup> Street station in an attempt to alleviate the 118<sup>th</sup> Street impacts. Alternatively, we request that Sound Transit honor the City's request in the 2009 Letter to "assess traffic impacts for nearby intersections and along the entire length of 118<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE, review projected ridership, evaluate opportunities for regional transit connections, identify construction and community impacts, and evaluate the potential for future light rail extensions" for the B7 alignment **In other words, if relocation of the station is not feasible, at the very least a thorough study of the feasibility and impacts of the proposed station should be performed.**

I also want to express the City of Bellevue's appreciation for Sound Transit's continuing efforts to work cooperatively with Bellevue in making these vital decisions as the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) for the East Link Project is developed. The City reiterates its support for light rail in Bellevue and for continued cooperation between the City of Bellevue and Sound Transit. East Link has the potential to help the City and the region realize significant land use goals, and provide economic and community development benefits for generations to come. The Council looks forward to maintaining the positive and cooperative relationship between the City of Bellevue and Sound Transit as we collaborate on the design and construction of East Link through Bellevue. Working together we can construct quality light rail and train stations in Bellevue in a manner that is consistent with Bellevue's Comprehensive Plan and Light Rail Best Practices policies, and in a manner that mitigates significant adverse environmental impacts in order to protect Bellevue's homes, parks, businesses, private property and roads to the greatest extent possible.

Sincerely,

Don Davidson  
Mayor, City of Bellevue

cc: Sound Transit Board  
Bellevue City Council  
Steve Sarkozy, City Manager

**Letter to Chair Reardon**  
**March 8, 2010**  
**Page 4**

**Goran Sparrman, Transportation Director**  
**Matt Terry, Planning and Community Development Director**