



Link Connections

Public Engagement Report - Executive Summary

Prepared by

King County Department of Transportation Communications

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Executive Summary

After two decades of planning and construction, Link light rail service is coming to Capitol Hill and the University of Washington’s Husky Stadium in early 2016. This new service will give riders a reliable 8-minute trip—avoiding freeway and surface-street traffic—between the University District and downtown Seattle.

Over three phases of outreach, starting in November 2014, Metro Transit has worked in partnership with Sound Transit to engage the public in shaping a set of bus service changes that would take effect shortly after the new Link service begins. These changes are intended to address problems that riders experience with bus service today and to create better connections for riders in the future.

For Phase 1, Metro and Sound Transit started with a clean slate, asking members of the public to share how they were currently using transit, what was working for them, what wasn’t working, and what they would like to see improved.

We used the feedback gathered during this phase to create two alternative network concepts that showcased possibilities for the future. Alternative 1 emphasized a more frequent, consolidated, and grid-like system, while Alternative 2 focused on maintaining existing geographic coverage while providing connections to the new light rail service. Both alternatives featured opportunities to connect with Link light rail and reduced duplications of service between buses and light rail.

During Phase 2 of outreach in March 2015, we showed riders and community members the two concepts and asked what they liked and what raised concerns for them in each alternative. We used this feedback to create one proposed set of changes that we shared with the public in a final round of public outreach (Phase 3) in May.

Over the nine months of outreach for the project, **we received 16,000 comments** from the general public, a panel of vested transit riders, key institutions, and community groups. This feedback helped transit planners understand how people are using our service today, how they’d like to use it in the future, and what’s most important to riders as we work to balance how they use service today with the changes they want to see in the future.

Who helped shape the recommended service changes

- **Inter-agency team** – Metro convened an inter-agency working group that included representatives from Sound Transit, the Seattle Department of Transportation, the University of Washington, and Seattle Children’s Hospital. This group met throughout the engagement process to reflect on public feedback, participate in the design of service concepts and proposals, and collaborate to engage the public in providing feedback.

- **Sounding Board** – We recruited a community advisory group made up of 21 people who use transit in the project area. The board’s purpose was to advise Metro and Sound Transit service planners on bus change concepts and proposals and on the outreach process. This group met 10 times between January and July of 2015. They wrote a recommendation, included in this report, that reflects their consensus on the recommended service changes.
- **Eastside Community Advisory Group** – Once it became clear that changes to service along the State Route 520 corridor might be part of the process, we pulled together a selected group of transit riders and jurisdiction representatives who live and use transit along that corridor. They met two times, before and after the second phase of outreach, to advise Metro and Sound Transit service planners on the concepts they were considering and on the outreach process. Metro chose to not move forward with significant changes to SR-520 routes, so the group did not meet again before or after Phase 3.
- **General public** – We invited current riders of potentially affected Metro and Sound Transit service—residents, students, and employees who travel in the project area—to serve on the Link Connections Sounding Board and provide feedback via online surveys and at face-to-face outreach events during each phase of outreach.
- **Stakeholders** – We invited more than 80 businesses, institutions, business and community groups, and organizations serving underrepresented populations to provide representatives to serve on the Sounding Board. We also encouraged them to provide feedback and spread the word about opportunities to provide feedback during all three phases of outreach. We also briefed stakeholders—at their request or ours—throughout the project area.

Timeline

- **November 2014: Phase 1** of public outreach. We hold Community Conversations with the public and begin recruiting members for the Sounding Board.
- December 2014: Sounding Board member selection.
- January to July 2015: Sounding Board met 10 times.
- March and April 2015: Eastside Community Advisory Group met two times.
- **March 2015: Phase 2** of public outreach. We shared two alternative concepts with the public and gather feedback.
- April 2015: Service planners refined the concepts and developed a single proposed set of changes.

- **May 2015: Phase 3** of public outreach. We shared the proposed set of changes with the public and collected their feedback.
- June to July 2015: Metro prepared the service change ordinance, including this public engagement report.
- Late August to October 2015: the King County Council considers the service change ordinance.

How we notified people about opportunities to participate and helped them understand what was being considered

Unless otherwise noted below, Metro did the following at each phase of outreach to announce and promote participation,

- Joint news releases (Metro, Sound Transit, Seattle Department of Transportation)
- Joint social media (Metro, Sound Transit, Seattle Department of Transportation) – #Bus2Link on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook
- Project website: www.kingcounty.gov/metro/LinkConnections
- Information sheets and phone lines in 12 non-English languages
- “Talk with Ted” videos (Phase 3 only)
- Street teams and information tables
- Email notifications to route and project subscribers and stakeholders
- Echo notifications – e.g. U Pass holders, Commute Trip Reduction-affected employers, Seattle Department of Neighborhood’s News You Can Use
- Posters at high-use bus stops
- Posters and rack cards on buses and mailed to community centers, libraries, and schools

Summary of what we did, what we heard by phase

Phase 1 – November 2014

What’s working, what’s not, what could be improved

People reached

- Website views: 9,400+
- Social media: 28,000+
- Street teams, information tables: 2,000+
- Rack cards, posters: 7,500+
- E-notifications: 27,000+
- Stakeholders notified: 80+
- Mailing: 30+

Participants

- Online survey responses: 4,000+
- Community conversations: 80+
- Phone/email: 5+
- Sounding Board applicants: 140+

What we heard

Where people go, or where they would like to go

- Destinations in the project area mentioned more than 100 times include the University of Washington and University of Washington Medical Center, the University District, Ballard, Fremont, Green Lake, Northgate, First Hill, downtown Seattle, Capitol Hill, and South Lake Union.
- Requested east-west connection improvements reflected in the current recommendation include connections between Lake City and Northgate; Sand Point and Green Lake via 65th Avenue NE; northeast Seattle, Fremont, and Queen Anne; northeast Seattle and Ballard; and Capitol Hill, Ballard, and Fremont.

How transit options work now

- A majority of people told us their transit options work ok.
- Most use transit for work or school and said they would like to use transit more for other trip purposes if service were more reliable, frequent, and available at nights/on weekends.
- The top three complaints about current service were:
 1. It takes too long
 2. It's overcrowded
 3. It's unreliable

What's most important when choosing transit

- How long the trip takes
- Reliability of service
- The perception that the more transfers riders make, the less reliable the trip will be

Acceptable tradeoffs

The top three things people said would make transfers more acceptable were:

1. Buses/trains arriving on time
2. Only having to wait 5 minutes or less for the next bus or train
3. Good shelter from the weather at the transfer stop

More than 60 percent said they would be willing to spend 10-15 minutes getting to frequent transit service.

Phase 2 – March 2015

Likes and concerns about Alternatives 1 and 2

People reached

- Website views: 25,500+
- Social media: 32,000+
- Street teams, information tables: 2,000+
- Rack cards, posters: 25,000+
- E-notifications: 35,000+
- Stakeholders notified: 80+
- Mailing: 30+

Participants

- Online survey responses: 6,000+
- Public meetings, briefings: 200+
- Phone/email: 60+

What we heard

In north Seattle, our final recommendation reflects several things most liked about Alternative 1:

- The frequency of the network (ranked number 1).
- Frequent/all-day service from the new University of Washington station to University Village shopping center and Children’s Hospital.
- More reliable travel times between northeast Seattle and Capitol Hill.
- New east-west service connecting Sand Point, Windermere, View Ridge, Wedgwood, Ravenna, Roosevelt, Green Lake, Wallingford, and Fremont.

The box most frequently checked among concerns about Alternative 1 indicated that the respondent believed the benefits of the alternative would outweigh any concerns he or she had about it. The second most-frequent choice was concern about having to travel farther during the day and on weekends to reach consolidated service on 25th Avenue NE, 35th Avenue NE, Roosevelt Way NE, and Sand Point Way.

The top two concerns expressed about Alternative 2, which preserved more of the current network’s geographic coverage, were that it lacked frequent service and would mean longer wait times for people connecting between very-frequent light rail service and infrequent bus service.

Given that nearly half of survey respondents said they would use transit more if Alternative 1 were implemented, and Phase 1 survey results indicated that people are willing to walk 10-15 minutes to reach frequent transit service, the final recommendation for change in north Seattle is fairly consistent with what was proposed in Alternative 1, with some additions to address concerns we heard during our outreach.

In Capitol Hill and the Central Area, participants preferred Alternative 1 for frequency (ranked number one), a frequent/all-day connection between Madison Valley, Capitol Hill, South Lake Union, and the Seattle Center, and a new direct connection from Madison Park to the Capitol Hill light rail station. However, they were concerned about having less service along the Pike Street/Pine Street corridor; a loss of one-seat rides between the top of Capitol Hill and the University District; and a loss of one-seat rides to downtown Seattle or the Capitol Hill Station from Montlake.

Similarly, the top likes about Alternative 2 indicate that participants liked that this alternative kept more service on the Pike Street/Pine Street corridor and that it left things more like the way they are today, but their top concerns about it included its lack of service frequency and the lack of reliable service on Route 8.

Neither alternative promised much change in how people use transit service, so the final set of recommended changes keeps or includes some of the things people told us they wanted: more-reliable and frequent service; preserving much of the existing transit network; some new connections the public told us were most important to them; and making transfers as seamless as possible where changes are being made to better connect communities to light rail and provide more-reliable service.

Phase 3 – May 2015

One proposed network: can people accept it?

People reached

- Website views: 24,000+
- Social media: 35,500+
- Street teams, information tables: 4,500+
- Rack cards, posters: 20,000+
- E-notifications: 21,000+
- Stakeholders notified: 80+
- Mailing: 30+

Participants

- Online survey responses: 1,900+
- Public meetings, briefings: 100+
- Phone/email: 120+

During this phase of outreach, we heard from fewer people—mostly those who had the most concerns about what we were proposing. Our notifications reached fewer people because we had narrowed our set of changes to a smaller number of routes. In addition, Sound Transit did its own outreach to riders of routes 540, 542, and 545 for the changes it was considering.

While we had a similar number of website views to those in past rounds of outreach, participation in the online survey and at meetings was lower. On the other hand, we

received twice as many phone and email inquiries. Key concerns expressed in all channels of public input were:

- **DART Route 941 and deletion of Route 71** – Proposed Route 941 wouldn't operate long enough throughout the day or wouldn't operate frequently enough; the loss of connection to the University District, and confusion about how DART service works.
- **Deletion of Route 72 and revision of Route 73** – Concerns about transferring between buses and Link light rail at the Montlake Triangle, and about loss of weekend service on Route 73.
- **Revised Route 16 and associated changes to routes 31, 32, 26, and 26X** – Residents east of Wallingford Avenue N and south of N 40th Street expressed concerns about having to walk farther to reach service on Stone Way N for a slightly slower trip, or uphill to N 40th Street for a faster trip to reach direct bus service into downtown. Residents of Kirkwood Place N were concerned about an increase in bus frequency along their narrow street.
- **Combining and revising routes 28 and 28X** – Riders using this service to reach Fremont and South Lake Union would have a longer walk or a two-bus trip to make this connection.
- **Deletion of Route 43** – Those traveling to/from the Montlake neighborhood and destinations north of E Aloha Street, where 23rd Avenue E becomes 24th Avenue E, face a two-seat ride to downtown.
- **Revision of Route 12** – Residents who live near or on 19th Avenue E, including those who live at two large senior housing communities, expressed concerns about losing their direct bus connection to E Madison Street.
- **Route 11** – This proposal cuts Madison Park off from downtown Seattle and from easy access to light rail.

The following section summarizes results from our online survey on key features of the proposal.

- **On creating new all-day connections to the University of Washington Station** – 61 percent said they would use transit the same or more; 15 percent said they might not use this service, but could accept the changes; 24 percent said they wouldn't use the service and could not accept the changes.
- **On increasing all-day frequency** – 68 percent said they would use transit the same or more; 13 percent said they might not take advantage of the change, but could accept it; 19 percent said they wouldn't take advantage and could not accept the change.

- **On improving reliability by replacing all-day bus service with connections to light rail** – 51 percent said they would use transit the same or more; 26 percent said they might not take advantage of the new connections, but could accept the change; 23 percent said they would not take advantage of the new connections and could not accept the change.
- **On additional late night/weekend service** – 57 percent said they would use transit the same or more; 38 percent said they might not take advantage of the new service but could accept the change; 5 percent said they wouldn't take advantage of it and could not accept the change.
- **On changes to routes 16, 26, and 26X** – 52 percent said they would use transit the same or more; 32 percent said they might not take advantage of the changes but could accept them; 16 percent said they wouldn't take advantage of the changes and could not accept them.
- **On improving reliability by splitting Route 8** – 61 percent said they think this change should be made; 17 percent said they don't think it should be made, but could accept it; 23 percent said they don't think this change should be made and they could not accept it.
- **On improving reliability by splitting Route 48** – 57 percent said they think this change should be made; 15 percent said they don't think this change should be made, but could accept it; 27 percent said they don't think this change should be made and they could not accept it.
- **On providing frequent, all-day connections to the Capitol Hill Station** – 67 percent said they would use transit the same or more; 20 percent said they might not take advantage of it, but could accept the change; 12 percent said they wouldn't take advantage of it and could not accept the change.
- **On a water-to-water Route 11** – 44 percent said they would use transit the same or more; 39 percent said they might not take advantage of the change, but could accept it; 17 percent said they wouldn't take advantage of it and could not accept it.
- **On changing Route 12** – 65 percent said they would use transit the same or more; 20 percent said they might not take advantage of the change, but could accept it; 16 percent said they wouldn't take advantage of it and could not accept it.

Adjustments made to the recommendation

The final recommended set of changes forwarded to the King County Executive incorporates adjustments, detailed below, made in response to concerns heard during the last phase of outreach.

- **New Route 78** – This new route was designed in response to community concerns about the loss of Route 71 and its proposed replacement by DART Route 941 (Phase 3). The new route will provide a longer span of service (from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.), operate every 30 minutes (instead of hourly), and provide a direct connection into the University District.
- **Keeping Route 12 as-is** – Given the populations served by this historic route and the concerns expressed by its users, we are not proposing any changes to this route at this time.
- **Routes 8 and 11** – A water-to-water Route 11 received more negative than positive feedback. In order to address the desire for Madison Park and Madison Valley residents to have convenient access to the Capitol Hill Station, continue to have a direct connection to downtown Seattle, and provide former Route 43 riders with frequent connections for bus-to-bus and bus-to-Link service, we are recommending that both routes operate along Madison between 24th Avenue E and 19th Avenue E.
- **Splitting Route 8 at the Mount Baker Transit Center** – If these changes are adopted, Route 8 would be split at the Mount Baker Transit Center in response to community preference.

This report documents our outreach goals, approach, and activities; who we engaged, how many we reached, and how many participated; and summaries of what we heard during each phase of our Link Connections outreach.