

**SOUND TRANSIT
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

Public Response

LETTERS

TESTIMONY

DOCUMENTATION

PETITIONS

From over 300 citizens from King & Snohomish Counties

March 15, 2002

**Respectfully submitted by:
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The letters, petitions, resolutions and documents in this volume are comments by citizens and groups on the Central Link Light Rail Project of the Sound Transit special district government in the Seattle-Tacoma region of Washington State. These documents were prepared in response to an Environmental Assessment of this project ordered by Region 10 of the Federal Transit Administration and issued on February 5, 2002 for 30 days of public comment. I have assembled them here in a mood of deep concern mixed with hope for cooperation in achieving a change of direction.

We, the citizens speaking in this volume want resolution and consensus. But we also demand accountability. Many of us voted for a system that was supposed to carry over 100,000 people a day and be completed in ten years, by 2006. It was supposed to enhance the existing productive bus system. What we have offered to us in the Central Link Light Rail Initial Segment is vastly different. We believe this "first step" will continue to waste resources and preclude our ability to create more attractive and affordable modes of transit that really can improve mobility and access.

We are providing you with copies of our testimony and documentation because you are in a position to rectify a monumental error in transit and land use planning.

This is not about a group of disgruntled citizens who are fighting a project and by "giving in" the lead agency will show lack of courage to get things done. It is about a project that has gone very wrong because the proper analysis and procedures continue to not be followed.

We ask for your help to make sure that there is independent oversight and a thorough examination of all the documentation provided by Sound Transit and the public. We are confident that such a review would result in a major revision of Sound Transit's plans. If that doesn't happen, we predict continued taxpayer backlash, deteriorating transit service, growing traffic congestion, and risk of exodus by businesses that need improved mobility to support profitable operations. To date, our predictions have proven to be very accurate.

We represent a broad cross-section of King County residents. Most of us enthusiastically supported light rail in the 1996 Regional Express transit tax election. I personally campaigned for it. Those who did not vote "yes" in 1996 were just able to recognize the skewed analysis and missed opportunities earlier. Some are taking political or business risks by challenging an agency with a budget of billions. Collectively, enormous amounts of personal time and money have been spent compiling this information. If it weren't for the work and voice of those represented in these letters, first speaking out as a group in the September 2000 Call for Action, Sound Transit would be digging under Capitol Hill right now with no idea of how to pay for getting out the other side.

Despite repeated claims, Sound Transit is not a "changed" agency. A few administrators have changed, but the Board remains largely the same except for the purge of a thoughtful and accurate critic. Analysis coming out of the Agency continues to be inadequate and inaccurate.

One of the many examples of misinformation documented in this testimony is the continued claim that the maximum bus tunnel capacity for riders is three times greater for trains than for buses through downtown Seattle. More future capacity by trains than by buses is the major premise for building rail. Yet, even their original 1993 EIS page xviii, states that the maximum capacity for

buses is 13,400 people/hour/direction. A 1992 Parsons Brinkerhoff study done for Metro and two independent ones done by the King County Council in 2001 also found buses, configured to run like trains, could carry 13-15,000 passengers per hour through the bus tunnel, virtually the same as surface light rail.

However, in the Joint Operations study released by Sound Transit in August 2001 and incorporated as an Appendix in the February 2002 Environmental Assessment, they state that the maximum capacity for buses only is 5,700 people/hour/direction. When asked about the dramatic difference, staff states that,

Our 5,700 number assumed no improvement to the operating environment; no one said 'Assume you have billions to build a whole new bus system.' *Seattle Post Intelligencer* 10/11/01

Nowhere in their technical report does Sound Transit disclose that when measuring maximum capacity they assume \$2.5 Billion for trains and no new money for buses. They give a political answer to a technical question. How are elected officials and the public supposed to make good decisions with skewed information?

A fundamental problem is that the 1996 hybrid light rail project, (surface to the south and tunnel to north), never had a cost/benefit analysis performed against other technology. The last and only EIS that actually made a comparison between rail and bus (before the definition of bus rapid transit had fully evolved in professional literature) was the 1993 Regional Transit Plan EIS. That comparison was between a totally grade separated rail system with no surface light rail. Surface light rail was actually taken off the table and not studied as an alternative because, according to the 1993 EIS, pg. 2-50,

While surface LRT has been very successful in some systems due to low-cost right-of-way or a very dense urban setting, its operating performance relative to grade-separated systems is generally characterized by slower speeds, lower ridership, lower capacity, and lower reliability. These characteristics mean that surface LRT is unlikely to satisfy the demands of a three-county system.

Some rail proponents may believe that we need to build it for the future, but surface light rail capacity will always be constrained because the downtown tunnel platforms are not long enough to hold additional cars, and trains on the surface cannot block intersections. That's why grade-separated rail was the preferred alternative in the 1993 EIS. But they could not bring grade-separated rail within the budget. So they produced the hybrid and never went back and compared it to buses. Surface rail will not be able to carry significantly more passengers than state of the art buses. Ever.

Sound Transit and County Council surveys both show that public support plummets for light rail when people are given specific information about speed, alternatives, safety and reliability. Sound Transit is trying to counter that with slick ads and moving forward with purchasing property. They are desperate to drive a stake into the ground before fall.

The Region's transportation future is now in your hands and those of the Federal leaders who hold the keys to New Starts grant funding. The Federal leaders look to the local leaders for

recommendation and resolution. The local leaders look to the Federal officials to do proper oversight.

There is great possibility for resolution here without costly lawsuits and further erosion of public trust. There is much support for expanding our Bus Rapid Transit service throughout the Region. We have invested Billions in our 24/7 HOV lanes, Downtown Bus Tunnel and E-3 Busway. There is money to seriously examine Monorail. The GAO report provides new evidence about the significant benefits of BRT over surface light rail. Even the FTA states that we should "Think Rail but build Bus."

We all need to take responsibility for turning what has been revealed since September 2000 as a looming public works disaster into a major public transit victory through leadership, creativity and courage in our spheres of influence.

Within this testimony is the collective wisdom of 300 active and informed citizens, many who have used and enjoyed transit around the world. We identify the problems with Sound Transit, but more importantly, we offer equitable and constructive solutions. Additional information is available from us on all points raised in this volume. The recent GAO report which compares actual surface light rail to BRT systems in the U.S. can be obtained by calling (202) 512-6000.

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

1. Why doesn't the FTA require that an SEIS or Alternatives Analysis be done on this project? Present problems with costs and schedule could have been avoided if an SEIS had been required in 1996. The recent General Accounting Office report, Bus Rapid Transit Shows Promise, GAO-01-984 shows that BRT in all but a few cities does significantly better for speed, operating and capital cost than surface light rail.
2. What would an equal investment in Bus Rapid Transit and Monorail buy? We know that after investing 16% in more bus service, King County Metro Transit increased new trips by 63,000/day over the previous 360,000 trips/day. Metro, Sound Transit and our technical advisors have already done a lot of work on what an expanded BRT system would cost and look like. We would not have to start from scratch. We are only running half the number of buses possible in the downtown tunnel. Regional Express Buses are the most successful elements of ST. Furthermore; City of Seattle was forced by its residents since 1997 to commit money to studying Monorail, which will be placed on the ballot this fall.
3. According to the FTA Region 10, Sound Transit Environmental Assessment, by 2020 Link LR will carry only 42,000 total riders- not new riders. What alternatives will people, who are generating an additional 6 million trips a day by then, have to avoid getting in their SOV? Will there be more federal, state and local dollars for bus? Monorail?
4. Is the Initial Segment really a land development and community "revitalization" exercise in the Rainier Valley with costs to residents and community fabric that far exceed benefits? Why has the NAACP and the Center on Race, Poverty, and the Environment joined in supporting the Save Our Valley lawsuit against Sound Transit? After Sound Transit displaces hundreds of low and middle-income people will there be resources left for transit service to get former residents to work now that they are further from the CBD?

5. Are people attracted to trains because it is a train or because a vehicle comes every 6 minutes and they don't have to wait in the mud and rain? Are we clear about cause and effect? Wouldn't modern BRT work just as well, especially given our unique 24/7 HOV system? The GAO Report noted earlier states: While transit officials noted a public bias toward Light Rail, research has found that riders have no preference for rail over bus when service characteristics are equal. Pg. 30

6. How can Sound Transit possibly justify a significant reduction in benefits in the truncated surface rail configuration like 90,000 fewer trips per day, shorter route length, extended time till completion, reduced safety and connections, but still state that the major continued and new negative impacts from construction and safety issues are still worth it? At almost \$200 million/mile for the least costly segment, we are now way beyond the \$35 million/mile average for the country. The public is demanding better returns for their investment, not worse.

7. Can this Region wait twenty years and spend almost \$3 billion for a partial segment that runs on the surface replacing what we already have, but with more transfers and higher fares? ST's own Environmental Assessment states that in year 2020, they expect to take only 400 cars off the downtown streets over a No-Build alternative! Pg. 23

8. Where is the legal authority to proceed with a project that is so significantly different in scope and time frame than what voters approved? Are the ST Bond Counsels confident enough in ST's ability to sell bonds and therefore pay for the project, should a lawsuit be filed?

Respectfully submitted for the Coalition by,

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