

March 30, 2015

## CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION ITEM

### **SUBJECT:**

East Link Project Update

### **STAFF CONTACT:**

Dave Berg, Director, 452-6468

Nancy LaCombe, Regional Transportation Project Manager, 452-4382  
*Transportation Department*

Chris Salomone, Director, 452-6191  
*Planning and Community Development Department*

Mike Brennan, Director, 452-4113  
*Development Services Department*

Kate Berens, Deputy City Manager, 452-4616  
*City Manager's Office*

Monica Buck, Assistant City Attorney, 452-4082  
*City Attorney's Office*

### **POLICY CONSIDERATION:**

*The general policy guidance below informs the City's work on this final design phase of the East Link Project.*

#### **Comprehensive Plan Policies:**

The Comprehensive Plan contains a body of adopted policy, which emerged from the Light Rail Best Practices work, to frame the City's role in light rail project development, including advancing the City's land use and transportation objectives and minimizing neighborhood and environmental impacts.

#### **MOU with Sound Transit:**

The City and Sound Transit entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in November 2011 that defines City contributions to a downtown light rail tunnel. The MOU also provides the basis for a Collaborative Design Process (CDP) that was further defined and agreed to in January 2012. The CDP provides the mechanism for the City and Sound Transit to jointly advance the design of the East Link Project through the 60% design phase.

#### **Light Rail Overlay District:**

In addition to collaborating with Sound Transit within the framework of the MOU, the City is the permitting agency for East Link within Bellevue. The Council-adopted Land Use Code (LUC) Part 20.25M defining development standards and design guidelines, which shape staff's feedback on design issues. The LUC provisions also establish the permitting process for East Link utilizing the Light Rail Permitting Citizens' Advisory Committee (CAC).

**DIRECTION NEEDED FROM COUNCIL:**

- Action
- Discussion
- Information

Staff will provide in-depth background and information as foundational information for the Council to make an informed decision regarding a potential amendment to the MOU.

**BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS:**

The City has worked to create an integrated transportation system inclusive of high capacity transit since the early 2000s. Between 2005 and 2009 the City worked with businesses, residents and other stakeholders to determine a new role for Bel-Red in the City's overall plan for growth and economic development. In anticipation of light rail, the City established the Light Rail Best Practices Committee in 2007 to see how light rail works in other North American cities. The committee issued its final report in 2008, including comprehensive plan policies that were adopted in 2008. In 2009, Council adopted the nationally acclaimed Bel-Red plan, which created a vision for the management of growth through the creation of transit-oriented communities where jobs, housing and parks are connected through high capacity transit. Sound Transit's Link light rail system represents the opportunity to provide the high capacity transit system necessary to galvanize this plan.

Since the public voted in favor of Sound Transit 2 in 2008, Bellevue and Sound Transit have cooperated in efforts to bring light rail to the Eastside. This process has included consideration of multiple alignment configurations, in-depth environmental and engineering studies, and a robust public outreach program. As part of this work, the City and Sound Transit developed the concept of a tunnel alignment through downtown Bellevue.

Both agencies recognize the mutual benefits of a tunnel in downtown Bellevue, including that such an alignment maximizes the ability of Sound Transit's light rail system to meet long-term regional transportation needs, increases run-time predictability and light rail operational performance, and avoids additional congestion on downtown streets and impacts to the homes and businesses in downtown Bellevue.

In November 2011, Council signed an umbrella Memorandum of Understanding with Sound Transit detailing City financial contributions toward the costs of a downtown light rail tunnel, and design modifications to minimize impacts of the rail line on neighborhoods. The City and Sound Transit are now partners in a "collaborative design process" intended to reduce costs, comply with codes and regulations, and finish the project on time.

The East Link light rail project is completing final design, the process that advances design work from approximately 30% to 100% completion. The November 2011 MOU contemplated that the City and Sound Transit would confirm the MOU Baseline and make any adjustments to the City financial contingency in writing at the time of Sound Transit Project Baseline. We anticipate this decision will come before Council in April.

Key milestones of the East Link project are provided in Attachment A to help inform Council and the public of the steps taken to reach this decision point.

### Alignment through Bellevue

As the project design has proceeded, several of the segments have advanced. The tunnel, South Bellevue and Bel-Red segments have all reached the 90% design level. Staff from both agencies have continued to work through the Collaborative Design Process to refine the alignment, identify coordination concerns and address final design issues. Staff will walk through the alignment, discuss the current design and any modifications or changes since the MOU. Discussion will include areas around South Bellevue that have been of interest to residents and Council. Attachment B provides additional detail on the current design.

### Operations and Maintenance Satellite Facility

In July 2014, the Sound Transit Board identified a preferred site for a new light rail yard for storage and maintenance of a portion of the system's light rail fleet, called the Operations and Maintenance Satellite Facility (OMSF). The preferred site was one of three studied through the environmental review process, and is centered on the former International Paper site adjacent to the Eastside Rail Corridor in the City's Bel-Red area. According to Sound Transit, the facility is needed to support the expansion of the light rail system to the north, south and east through the Sound Transit 2 package of system expansions. Two of the three sites studied are in Bellevue's Bel-Red area. The City believes that comprehensive resolution of issues for both East Link and OMSF are intrinsically linked, and as such are viewed as one project that must be addressed together.

During the July 24, 2014 Sound Transit Board meeting that identified the International Paper site as the Preferred Alternative for the OMSF, the Board also directed staff to maximize transit oriented development on the site and in the vicinity, and to conduct a stakeholder engagement process during the Preliminary Engineering (PE) and Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) phases of the project. The stakeholder group met four times in September and October 2014, and provided a letter to the Sound Transit Board at their November 20, 2014 meeting with their recommendations. A copy of the letter is included as Attachment C.

The agencies have been discussing how to meet the goals of the stakeholder group, including meeting with King County. Additional information on the progress regarding the OMSF will be presented at a Council meeting in the near future.

### Amended MOU

Under the terms of the November 2011 MOU, at the time of Sound Transit's baseline budget for East Link, the parties will confirm the City's Contingent Contribution in the project. Sound Transit is reaching the project baseline milestone, and for several months the two agencies have been working toward identifying resolutions to issues related to the MOU, project coordination and the potential OMSF location in Bel-Red through amendments to the existing MOU.

A series of meetings is anticipated to provide details about the host of coordination issues between the two agencies related to East Link, the project baseline budget and the OMSF. The focus of Monday night will be on coordination of City and Sound Transit projects. The City and Sound Transit have a shared interest in identifying the most efficient delivery strategy for a select set of capital projects that overlap in time and vicinity (e.g. 120<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE and 124<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE); City projects that benefit from Sound Transit incorporating them in to their construction work (e.g. a portion of Spring Boulevard Zone 1); or Sound Transit-required project elements that benefit from the City implementing construction (e.g. blueberry farm retail structure, Surrey Downs Park entrance and parking area). Staff have identified suggestions for efficient ways to deliver these projects, with additional details included in Attachment D.

### Next Steps

It is anticipated that staff will return in the coming weeks to continue the detailed project discussion with review of noise mitigation, additional detail and review of terms surrounding the OMSF, the project baseline budget and City contribution.

### **ATTACHMENTS:**

A – Timeline

B – East Link Alignment

C – OMSF Stakeholder Letter to Sound Transit Board November 20, 2014

D – Project Coordination Exhibit