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From: William Hirt [wjhirt@yahoo.com]
Sent: Friday, February 20, 2009 10:17 AM
To: eastlink deis
Subject: DEIS deficiencies

EL 517

Dear Mr. Irish,

I believe the Sound Transit Draft Environment Impact Statement (DEIS) is deficient and that proceeding according to this plan will unnecessarily cause irreparable damage to large areas of Bellevue and to the vast majority of east side residents who commute into Seattle. Be forewarned that I intend to solicit support for a legal challenge the stop this environmental debacle.

The following letter is just the latest of my many failed attempts to convince Sound Transit of deficiencies in their light rail plan and to consider an alternate express bus idea.

The Environmental Case Against Sound Transit East Link Light Rail

The Bellevue City Council is in the process of responding to Sound Transit's "East Link Draft Environmental Impact Statement" (DEIS) by selecting their preferred light rail routes. I believe that light rail across Lake Washington and all of the Bellevue routes should be rejected because of the resulting environmental damage. A far more benign alternative exists that will better serve all eastside commuters both now and in the foreseeable future.

I along with several hundred other Bellevue residents attended the Feb 2nd City Council meeting on Sound Transit's East Link routing. I am quite certain that not a single attendee said "put light rail through my neighborhood". Everyone recognizes the devastating environmental effect construction and operation of light rail will have along whichever route is selected.

The reality is that East Link as currently configured simply does not provide sufficient benefit to justify any route. The underground tunnel in Seattle restricts the number of trains that Sound Transit can accommodate. There are also serious concerns about the ability of the Lake Washington bridge to support frequent train crossings. As a result, their current plans are to limit East Link train frequency to one every 9 or 10 minutes. Thus, East Link will be limited to between 3600 and 4000 riders per hour (assuming 2500 are willing to stand) in each direction.

Sound Transit could develop a far more environmentally benign system by re-directing East Link towards providing all eastside residents with access to effective public transit. A major part of this effort would be to insure all eastside residents could drive to a P&R lot and after a minimal wait, get on a bus that will take them non-stop into Seattle within 20-25 minutes during the morning peak commute and back to their P&R lot in the afternoon. Sound Transit would facilitate this bus service by moving the bridge HOV traffic to the outer structure and converting the center section into two-way bus only operation.

All east side P&R lots would have this service, although bus frequency would vary with demand. Mercer Island might require a bus every 15 minutes while South Bellevue, Eastgate, and Issaquah could need buses every 5 minutes. Initially, sixty 75-passenger buses assigned to these routes would be able to accommodate an additional 4500 riders per hour. (compared with 3600-4000 with light rail). Note

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that 60 buses per hour equates to one per minute allowing plenty of capability to accommodate existing bus routes, along with additional express bus and normal bus routing to meet future growth.

Express buses might also be used to connect the Issaquah and Highlands P&R's with the Bellevue Transit center and Overlake areas to further enhance service. P&R lots north of Bellevue might use the 1-90 express service particularly during the 520 rebuild. Seattle residents would use the "express bus reverse commute" routing along 1-90 bus-only lane

to reach Bellevue and Overlake. After peak commutes the express buses could be diverted to normal routes

The obvious problem with increased bus service is Seattle congestion. The best approach would be to limit 4th Avenue and 2nd Avenue to bus-only use during peak commute hours. (Light rail will probably force this action anyway by severely restricting bus use of underground tunnel.) Express buses could be assigned drop off points along 4th Avenue and pick up points along 2nd Avenue that were separate from other bus stops. With bus only service along these routes, the left hand lanes could probably be safely used to increase capacity in both directions.

The environmental advantages of the alternate express bus proposal could not be more striking. No adverse effects in South Bellevue from light rail construction and operation. The express bus service would only require transferring the HOV lanes to the outer structure leaving the center section for two-way bus only traffic. The revised center section would easily be able to accommodate the added express buses along with existing bus routes and still have ample capability for growth.

The express buses would attract a huge number of eastside residents who would be faced with environmentally damaging traffic gridlock with light rail on the center section. P&R facilities and buses could be added to match up to future growth patterns throughout the eastside. The biggest advantage is that this system could be in operation within 2 years, avoiding years of environmental harm.

In conclusion, this East Link proposal will provide all eastside residents with convenient access to environmentally friendly public transportation at a fraction of the cost of Sound Transit's current proposal. It also provides the capability to accommodate future growth, something sorely missing from the light rail proposal.

Bill Hirt

The DEIS failed to even consider this express bus service no-build alternative. Their alternate 1-90 studies never included converting the bridge center section to two-way bus only operation and moving the HOV traffic to the outer section. This would have dramatically increased bus capability in both directions.

The DEIS pronouncement that "the center roadway would have a peak hour capacity of 18,000-24,000 people per hour, equivalent to between 6-10 freeway lanes of traffic" seems "highly speculative" in view of Sound Transit plans to limit train frequency as described above. The statement "Although congestion would still occur on 1-90 with the East Link Project" is a gross understatement. It is followed by "it (congestion) would be shorter in duration and affect a smaller area as people shift to use of light rail". This is absurd since the majority of eastside commuters living east of 405 along the 1-90 and south 405 corridors will have very limited access to light rail; a fact making it unlikely the 18,000-24,000 capacity would ever be used even if it were available.

Surely no one believes that moving the HOV/bus lanes to the outer bridge section will make up for light

rail confiscation of the bridge center section. This cavalier attitude towards the concerns of vast numbers of east residents whose commute into Seattle will be forever be damaged by current East Link light rail must not be allowed to succeed.

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