

Light Rail in Downtown Bellevue: A Business Case for Tunneling

- **Building for Future Generations.** East Link is a long-term 50-100+ year project. It must be done right the first time, rather than constructing an option that will force compromises for future generations in terms of transportation operations, mobility choices, and/or reconstruction of the downtown Bellevue segment.
- **Optimizes Regional Light Rail Expansion and Performance.** East Link should be built to accommodate long term growth horizon with Bellevue as a Metropolitan Center. The City has committed to accommodating a substantial share of Eastside and regional growth. East Link must be built with an eye to the Regional Transit Long Range Plan (2005) that calls for future extensions to Kirkland/Totem Lake, Redmond, Issaquah, and Renton. These future extensions, and operations on the west side of Lake Washington, will ultimately result with four minute train frequencies each direction in downtown Bellevue. Bellevue remains committed to accommodating growth as a Metropolitan Center and focal point of eastside activity.
- **Tunneling Retains Existing Capacity.** Downtown Bellevue has significant right of way limitations: less than half the right of way of comparable metropolitan centers, such as Seattle or Portland. Other comparable western U.S. cities such as San Jose, San Diego, and others are now struggling with at-grade systems, wishing they had constructed a tunnel initially. East Link must supplement, rather than compete with downtown street operations for right of way or signal operations. East Link must also serve downtown developments (current or future) and help shape quality urban form and access.

Advantages of Tunnel Option CT2

Downtown Bellevue Alignment Option CT2 is Bellevue's preferred alignment through downtown Bellevue because it has the best chance of optimizing the benefits of tunneling as shown above.

1. **Quick and reliable travel times.** C2T provides fast service to the core of downtown Bellevue. Being on an entirely exclusive right of way that eliminates exposure to traffic conflicts, it will provide reliable service for the initial East Link line and future extensions.
2. **Minimizes business impacts.** The option will mean less business displacements in the hospital district and housing units downtown as compared to other tunnel options. Moreover, a mix of cut-and-cover and boring can be used—boring will reduce on-street commercial impacts on 106th.
3. **Retain parks.** CT2 does not harm to downtown parks—this is important, especially in the case of preserving McCormick park on the north end downtown that serves as a green buffer between single family home neighborhoods and downtown skyscrapers.
4. **Land use opportunities.** CT2 more readily activates land use densities in the Wilburton area and would better serve the expanding Hospital District.

