



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# Bellevue Light Rail Best Practices

Final Committee Report

Approved by Committee

June 17, 2008



## LIGHT RAIL BEST PRACTICES PROJECT TEAM

### **COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Jennifer Robertson, Co-chair; Planning Commission  
Joel Glass, Co-chair; Transportation Commission  
Douglas Mathews; Planning Commission  
Lise Northey; Transportation Commission  
John Rogers; Environmental Services Commission  
Francois Larrivee; Environmental Services Commission  
Faith Roland; Parks and Community Services Board  
David Karle; Parks and Community Services Board  
Claudia Balducci; City Council liaison; City Council member  
Dr. Don Davidson; alternate City Council liaison; City Council member

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## Executive Summary

### The Context

Sound Transit will begin service on the region’s first light rail line, Central Link, in 2009. East Link is a potential future extension of the light rail system through Bellevue that is currently under study by Sound Transit. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), including the analysis of several alternative alignments through portions of South Bellevue, Downtown, and the Bel-Red subarea, is due for release in fall 2008.

### The Project

The City Council initiated the Light Rail Best Practices Project to help the City Council clearly articulate the City’s standards and expectations for the design, construction, and operation of light rail within the city of Bellevue. This project helped Bellevue “get smart” about light rail by learning from the experiences of other cities and preparing for important decisions related to the integration of light rail in Bellevue.

### The Committee and Process

The Light Rail Best Practices Committee, composed of citizens representing four city Boards and Commissions and the City Council, was charged by the Council to engage the public in review of how other jurisdictions have implemented light rail, develop a “catalog” of best practices for implementing light rail in Bellevue, and develop policy recommendations for consideration by the City Council. The Committee was not charged to draw any conclusions about specific light rail routing or station locations. The Committee engaged in a process of identifying research issues, reviewing national practices, visiting case study cities, and considering public input to develop the findings, policy, and action recommendations contained in this report.



East Link would extend light rail from downtown Seattle, across I-90, to downtown Bellevue, Overlake, and Redmond. (Source: City of Bellevue)

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#### *Light Rail Best Practices Committee:*

**Jennifer Robertson**, Co-chair; Planning Commission

**Joel Glass**, Co-chair; Transportation Commission

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**Lise Northey**; Transportation Commission

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Effective community involvement efforts provide information and engage the public in the planning and design of the system. (Source: City of Bellevue)

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The open design of this elevated station in San Jose maximizes visibility while employing urban design techniques to minimize the bulk of the structure. Pedestrian infrastructure connects the station to the adjacent neighborhood, transit center, and shopping center. (Source: David Evans and Associates)

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## Public Involvement

The citizens of Bellevue played a major role in initiating, shaping, and informing the project. The project was initiated in response to community concerns about light rail. Public comments and concerns were used to frame the research into the project's eight topic areas:

- Community and Neighborhoods;
- Connecting People to Light Rail;
- Land Use;
- Street Design and Operations;
- Elevated, At-Grade, and Tunnel;
- Property Values;
- Station Security; and
- Construction Impacts and Mitigation.

Public input was sought during all phases of the project through open houses, email communications, comment periods during every Committee meeting, and the project website. The Committee received hundreds of comments throughout the project, and this input was carefully considered by the Committee as the recommendations were developed.

## The Report

The Light Rail Best Practices Report contains the following elements:

**Findings:** A summary of the Committee's findings based on a review of national research and case study tours.

**Best Practices:** Processes, methods, and activities that will be most effective at delivering the desired outcome for Bellevue.

**Actions:** Five categories of actions – Comprehensive Plan Policies, Codes and Standards, Other City Policies/Procedures, City Capital Investments, and Expectations of Sound Transit – for the City to pursue throughout the development of the East Link Project. Actions are assigned to categories based on the timing, intent, and level of specificity of each recommendation.



## Guiding Principles

The Committee identified five Guiding Principles from the Light Rail Best Practices Project:

### 1. Connect “somewhere to somewhere” by conveniently serving the places where people live, work, and play.

Light rail is about connecting places. These places should be destinations for the community, places where people live, work, and play. Connecting places is more than optimizing ridership and meeting regional transportation needs. It serves the community and advances the local and regional land use vision.

### 2. Light rail should be developed in a manner that complements, not diminishes, the character and quality of Bellevue.

Light rail systems should be planned, designed, and built to fit appropriately into the local context and provide community enhancements, without shifting the community character. East Link should be designed to improve the places in Bellevue through context-sensitive design, high quality materials, and innovative urban design approaches that can protect neighborhoods and property values and provide a safe and secure environment for transit riders and neighbors.

### 3. Anticipate impacts and advocate for exceptional mitigation.

Light rail will reinforce Bellevue’s role in the region as the population, economic, and cultural center of the Eastside. However, the benefits of the system cannot be achieved without some short-term disruption and inconvenience during construction and without making some long-term changes to the existing environment. Proven techniques to avoid, minimize, and mitigate these impacts can be employed to make the short-term impacts manageable. The City should expect and advocate for exceptional mitigation throughout the



The design of the Alum Rock station in San Jose utilizes an appropriately scaled shelter, landscaping, and art to create a pleasant environment that fits into the surrounding community. (Source: City of Bellevue)

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Pedestrian, bicycle, and transit connections support ridership and make the system accessible to many users. (Source: City of Bellevue)

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project phases and seek to leverage additional local investments through light rail development.

#### **4. Alignment profile should consider the unique qualities of each part of the community.**

There is not a one-size-fits-all solution for alignment profiles – at-grade, elevated, and tunnel – in Bellevue. There are trade-offs when selecting profiles for each of the three areas (south of downtown, downtown, and Bel-Red) in Bellevue. The profile should advance the land use vision for each of the areas it travels through, conveniently connect destinations, optimize ridership, and minimize impacts.

#### **5. An early, ongoing public involvement program is essential for success in Bellevue.**

An early, ongoing, and comprehensive program to engage stakeholders is absolutely essential to the success of light rail in Bellevue. Providing transparency about project information and decisions will increase public understanding of and comfort with the project. Engaging the community in the design of the system, particularly stations, will result in more sensitive designs and build the public's sense of ownership. Transparently sharing information and engaging the community in a meaningful two-way, ongoing planning process will increase the success of the system. As planning for East Link is currently underway, the City and Sound Transit should begin immediately to identify the next phase of the public involvement program for the East Link project.



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## Best Practices

The Committee identified a catalog of Best Practices for each of the nine topic areas in the report to guide implementation of light rail in Bellevue:

### Community & Neighborhoods

- A. Establish a clear vision and confirm the community goals for the light rail system.
- B. Design light rail facilities and stations to be an extension of the community.
- C. Use the investment in light rail as the foundation for other community enhancements.
- D. Be proactive in addressing potential operational impacts to adjacent neighborhoods.

### Community Involvement

- A. Create a sense of ownership by engaging the community in the planning, design, construction, and operation of the system.
- B. Form a citizen advisory committee for the East Link Project.

### Connecting People to Light Rail

- A. Provide connections to the station that are safe, secure, and convenient for pedestrians and bicycle riders.
- B. Provide transit feeder service to light rail.
- C. Design stations to be accessible and identifiable to all transit riders irrespective of their language, age, or ability.
- D. Park and ride facilities should be located where they can provide convenient access to light rail for Bellevue neighborhoods not directly served by light rail, and they should be integrated contextually with the surrounding environment.



Downtown Portland's at-grade light rail system combines landscaping, high quality finishes, convenient transit connections, stations at multiple downtown destinations, and a comfortable pedestrian environment to attract riders. (Source: David Evans and Associates)

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Appropriately scaled and well-integrated art can make light rail stations attractive and complement the surrounding community. (Source: City of Bellevue)

## Land Use

- A. Support the land use vision in Bellevue's Comprehensive Plan for each neighborhood adjacent to light rail.
- B. Where consistent with the City's land use vision, encourage the development of projects adjacent to light rail that exhibit the following characteristics:
  - An emphasis on being "a place, not a project";
  - Includes housing as well as other uses;
  - Higher urban scale densities;
  - Pedestrian oriented;
  - Density tapers down to adjacent lower density communities; and
  - Integrated into the station and/or the neighborhood.
- C. Invest in infrastructure to make stations and adjacent development successful.
- D. Develop station area plans once the locations are known and before design and development of the stations.

## Street Design and Operations

- A. Minimize confusion and maximize predictability for all street users.
- B. Increase visibility at transit stops, intersections, and railroad crossings.
- C. Employ design features at stations to enhance pedestrian and bicyclist safety.
- D. Design the light rail stations and line, and any street modifications, to avoid and minimize potential impacts.
- E. Apply principles of universal design in the design of streets and sidewalks adjacent to light rail stations.
- F. Employ transit signal priority to optimize transit operation, balanced with pedestrian, bicycle, and other vehicle movements.





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## Elevated, At-grade, and Tunnel

- A. Connect “somewhere to somewhere.”
- B. Build it right the first time.
- C. The alignment profile should support the land use plan for each of the areas it travels through.
- D. The alignment profile should minimize impacts on street operations.
- E. The alignment profile should optimize ridership.
- F. Employ urban design features to enhance safety and community integration.

## Property Values

- A. Design and maintain high quality stations that are an asset to the community.
- B. Develop a comprehensive strategy for limiting and mitigating negative impacts from light rail construction and operation.

## Station Security

- A. Employ design techniques that deter crime.
- B. Foster a sense of ownership by users and neighbors of stations.
- C. Establish a fare paid zone at stations and program an active presence of transit and law enforcement personnel on the train and on platforms.
- D. Employ effective technologies to protect the safety of station users and neighbors.

## Construction Impacts and Mitigation

- A. Develop a Construction Management Plan.
- B. Site and design construction staging areas to minimize disruption and inconvenience to adjacent land uses.
- C. Plan for and address the impacts of construction by providing adequate alternative access and mitigating



The presence of law enforcement or security personnel discourages loitering and vandalism at stations, increases the level of surveillance and security, and helps reduce fare evasion. (Source: David Evans and Associates)

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The San Diego State University tunnel serves the heart of the campus as well as the surrounding community. Multi-modal connections are facilitated with a pedestrian bridge and adjacent transit center. The tunnel station incorporates high-quality finishes, art, and natural light to create a comfortable waiting environment. (Source: David Evans and Associates)

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negative impacts such as noise and vibration.

- D. Engage the business community in developing plans to provide support to businesses before, during, and after construction.
- E. Engage the residential community in developing approaches to minimize impacts and provide support during construction.
- F. Develop a broad public engagement program and provide regular communications to the public about construction project activities and impacts.



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## Next Steps

The Light Rail Best Practices Committee will sunset in June 2008 and transmit the Final Report to the City Council in July for their consideration. The Planning Commission will review the Comprehensive Plan policy recommendations in July and forward their recommendations to the Council in late July. It is the hope of the Committee that the findings and recommendations of the report will be supported by the Council, that the proposed Comprehensive Plan policies will be adopted into the Comprehensive Plan, and that the other action recommendations of the report will be pursued over the course of the East Link Project. In particular, the Committee hopes that Council will pursue the formation of a citizen advisory committee prior to the release of the East Link DEIS in the fall. This action is of particular importance to the Committee, which views the formation of a citizen advisory committee as a critical first step to implementing the recommendations of this report.

As specified in the Committee charge, the Committee hopes that the findings and recommendations of the report complement the information provided through Sound Transit's East Link environmental review and assist the community and Council in evaluating and determining Bellevue's light rail routing preferences. Ultimately, the Committee hopes the report is useful in communicating community expectations for Sound Transit's development of light rail in Bellevue and that the City Council will pursue the actions recommended within the report to leverage this historic investment for the best outcome for Bellevue.



Bike lanes help create comfortable connections to light rail stations for bicyclists. (Source: David Evans and Associates)



This image shows a bike lane parallel to a light rail station, providing a direct connection to and from the station. (Source: Valley Metro)

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