



# West Seattle and Ballard

Link Extensions

## Meeting Summary

### Community Advisory Group: Interbay/Ballard

**Subject:** Meeting #6 – Consolidating Feedback

**Date, time:** Wednesday, May 4, 2022; 5pm to 7pm

**Meeting recording:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p\\_LeJ8rvBsc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p_LeJ8rvBsc)

#### Participants

<b>CAG members:</b> Warren Aakervik Jason Bennett Lorenzo Canales Erick Cruz Jennifer Chen Nathan Dickey Mike Stewart Hannah Tang Janis Traven	<b>Facilitator / presenters:</b>	Ariel Davis, Facilitator Leda Chahim, Sound Transit Cathal Ridge, Executive Corridor Director, Sound Transit
	<b>Agency Partners:</b>	Nicole Kistler, City of Seattle
	<b>Sound Transit / Consultant Team:</b>	Emily Yasukochi, Sound Transit Daniel Turner, Sound Transit Sloan Dawson, Sound Transit

#### Meeting Summary

##### Overview of Presentation Topics

Cathal Ridge provided an update on community engagement and collaboration and next steps in the project process.

##### Consolidated Feedback from CAG Members

The following abbreviations are used in this summary:

Q: Question

A: Answer

C: Comment

##### Draft EIS Alternative Feedback

CAG members shared their feedback to the following questions:

- What are your thoughts on issues and tradeoffs between the alternatives?
- What are your thoughts on confirming or modifying the preferred alternative?

##### Ballard/InterbaySegment

**C:** (Warren Aakervik) Anything that impacts the major truck street of 15th Ave W is a problem. The majority of people I talk to say it should be a tunnel. A lot of interest in the community in moving [the station] to 17th or even 20th. If it has to be on 15th or 14th, then it should be a tunnel that goes to 14th. I keep reminding myself



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that the people we're trying to serve need to be fed into the light rail somehow. There will be congestion around that station, so don't want to impact the major thoroughfares while trying to get people to the same place at the same time. We need to look at the equity position; jobs and where people live is the primary objective for where we're trying to make a connection. That's what I'm hearing: tunnel and not on 15th. Consolidate the stations as much as you can; having them too close together requires people to not get as expeditiously to where they need to go; need to be effective with those.

**C:** (Jason Bennett) I agree with Warren on the tunnel. There's been some discussion about 14th vs 15th; I'm not sure I follow all of the arguments for and against them because I missed the last couple meetings, but I do agree with Warren on the tunnel aspect. The thing I'm most passionate about is keeping both the Smith Cove and Interbay stations. I'm concerned about Magnolia residents being able to access this area. If at some point we redo the Magnolia Bridge, I get concerned about Magnolia residents' access to transit. I'm most vocal about making sure those two stations stay.

**C:** (Lorenzo Canales) My preference is the tunnel on 15th (Preferred Alternative Third Party Funding). That increases rideability and usability of the rail and also minimizes environmental impacts. The most important thing is making a train that will be used the most and will do the most good for the most amount of people. I don't know Interbay as well, but I don't see anything wrong with either the Preferred Alternative or the Preferred Alternative Third Party Funding.

**C:** (Erick Cruz) My preference is the tunnel option for the Ballard station. One discussion was the placement; I do think Ballard is growing eastward. The station is 15 years out, there's a lot of construction on Market pushing eastward. The discussion of wanting it close to downtown [Ballard] may not be the same when the station opens. For Interbay, my preference is keeping it closer to the Magnolia side of things versus 15th. I know the tradeoffs are usually cost-related items, which goes into the next question, which is how do we save cost to find that funding to make it happen.

**C:** (Nathan Dickey) I think The Urbanist report about the high bridge option said it would need to be 200 feet high which is a fair bit higher than the EIS studied, so I'm leaning toward the tunnel option as the most feasible and constructible and successful option for the Ballard Station. I think the 14th Ave station has less impacts and if the City of Seattle could make use of that to grow Ballard eastward toward 15th/14th, then that could work. For the Interbay station, assuming a tunnel idea, it seems the more western station is more practical too and could serve Magnolia, so the Preferred Alternative is still my preferred. But I think there's more work that could be done on the tunnel stations that were discarded early on. Because tunnels seem to be more feasible now, it opens up more opportunities to put the station in more central locations than trying to grow toward the station in the future.

**C:** (Hannah Tang) I'm still struck by the walkshed differences, the size and the population of the folks who could benefit from the station the further west we go. Even if the City plans on major upzoning on the east side of Ballard, I don't see the big employers like Swedish or Ballard Commons shifting substantially to the east in 30 or 50 years. When you combine as far west as possible with the fact that Ballard will be the major station on the line—its projected ridership will dwarf everything else, I feel like we need to get that location right. What I've heard from people, my friends who work at Swedish, everything else is in service of shifting that station west. If it has to be a tunnel, be a tunnel. If we have to save money from other parts of the line, we had talked briefly about the cost efficiencies from the Galer St station, do what it takes to shift the Ballard station as far west as we can. Maybe even reopening discussions of 17th or 20th, but get that west, tunnel, whatever it takes.



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**C:** (Mike Stewart) I appreciate all the work that Sound Transit has done on this process and the process itself has confirmed for me our original position of at or west of 15th in a tunneled location. We had multiple options to study and now several of those are off the table due to the US Coast Guard, so we're left with the tunnel approach and two options. In all I've seen, heard, and looked at, there doesn't appear to be a constituency for the 14th Ave NW tunnel location. Clearly there are several things at play that make 15th or west of 15th the desirable route. First is pedestrian safety: the crossing at 15th poses risk for safety—length of crossing and length of the block from 15th to 14th makes it even more difficult for people in the dense hub urban core to get to that station. I have a specific request for staff: as you move these conversations forward with the Sound Transit Board, I encourage you to do as much as possible to educate Sound Transit Board members about what we're talking about in Ballard because if I were a Board member in a city like Everett or somewhere else that is not as familiar, I might look at it and say one block isn't too significant. But on the ground, I think we all know it is absolutely significant. We are seeing significant development in the hub urban village; a combination of parcels that were just purchased between 24th and 22nd on 56th Ave NW that will be 400 new apartment homes. That's on top of Carmel Partners, Ballard Yard building, the Selig project, another potential project at 24th and Market, a project at St Luke's Episcopal Church, which will be not just market rate but affordable family housing. It's clear how much density there is currently in the core of Ballard and how much density is coming; that's a really important consideration. The 14th Ave location is right in the middle of an industrial zone, which doesn't permit, and hopefully won't permit, dense TOD. It provides significant impact to Ballard Food Bank and the blossoming brewery district. All of these things point to tunnel approach at 15th or west would be desirable. I've heard discussion about a potential Supplemental EIS—I'd pose that as a question to ST. What sort of timeframe would that be and if that's under consideration given the fact that these routes have dropped off because of the Coast Guard implications, it makes sense to take a little extra time to study station locations to the west—20th, 17th or even 22nd. At this point, we're really just looking at two options from the DEIS process.

**C:** (Janis Traven) I want to take a moment to tell fellow CAG members how much I appreciate you for saying what I would say, but more coherently and intelligently. I also agree that we ought to do a tunnel to Ballard and I support it being farther west than 15th. What I'm hearing in Magnolia and with Queen Anne Community Council is a lot of questions about how we'll actually use it, where we'll go when we take light rail, which supports putting something in Ballard farther west of 15th. I agree with Mike that as long as we're going to have to study something new more intensively, it makes sense to put in extra time to get it right. We also have been hearing a lot in Magnolia about how we're going to get there—which makes an Interbay Station that's proximate to Magnolia mandatory. If we have to take a long trip to get there, it probably won't accomplish the goal of getting people out of cars. I'm also hearing that when people hear what is entailed to build stations, when they hear about closure times, it's pretty daunting. Doing more tunneling would be ideal. There's a pretty strong feeling from the Magnolia community and the Queen Anne community not to drop any stations. We've heard a lot about the voter-approved package or route and we've already shot the mark in terms of timeline. Seattle needs more transit rather than less. Mike's comment at the end where he said that he hopes that the Sound Transit group and City of Seattle, make it clear what the needs of the City of Seattle and this segment and the freight route, how important that is to everything that happens in Seattle. We really need to get that right. I had sent out a copy of the letter that Magnolia Community Council had sent in as a comment, it's a little more specific about the 17th retained cut station, how you should have drop-off without having to cross a major roadway. Those details are already in the comments that have been shared; we do have thoughts on that also.

**C:** (Jennifer Chen) Instead of 14th Ave, I prefer it to be modified to 15th Ave, for similar reasons to what was already discussed so I won't repeat. One thing that I've noticed is that a tunnel doesn't work as well because there are so many escalators. At the UW Stadium, oftentimes escalators are broken and there are no stairs outside of it. Just two elevators and it's troublesome to get up so I would prefer elevated because it's easier; and [I would like] a safer crosswalk as well.



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### South Interbay Segment

**C:** (Warren Aakervik) On this one, I'll reiterate my same concern about anything that touches, looks at or seems anywhere near 15th; it will impact the MIC. The Preferred Alternative being off of 15th is a godsend to us and to the freight corridor. The Galer St station which has more access on the west side of 15th does a great job of serving Pier 91 and the Magnolia area and Expedia. I'm more inclined to say that's the preferred station as compared to the Prospect St station. How it gets up the railroad tracks – could be elevated, could be tunneled - whatever is most efficient.

**C:** (Jason Bennett) I'd like to overemphasize perhaps that I'd like to keep both the Dravus and the Galer stations, not move further south toward Expedia. The growth in the area will be closer toward the Armory. I strongly advise keeping both of the stations – Dravus and Galer on the Preferred Alternative. I endorse what Warren said about keeping it off 15th. The Preferred Alternative two stations at Dravus and Galer St for Smith Cove make it more likely that people who live in Magnolia will use Sound Transit.

**C:** (Lorenzo Canales) My preferences are also the Preferred Alternative that avoids 15th, the pink on the diagram. I'm reiterating what everyone else said—the ridership would hit all of the major things like Expedia, breweries, and would probably have the most impact for the people using it.

**C:** (Erick Cruz) I agree that Galer St station is more preferable of the two over at Smith Cove. It provides another access point to folks in Magnolia considering that they're constrained. I also like the accessibility for bikers. I used to bike from Ballard to Downtown; the bike path swings closer to that area along the water so seems more accessible if they bike from different locations to get to train itself. As it goes toward downtown, I'm having a hard time recalling, but think I was interested in a hybrid because of the amount of displacement of residents south of Smith Cove; so I thought perhaps a hybrid of the two options would be a better option here.

**C:** (Nathan Dickey) For Smith Cove, I prefer the Galer St station location. I think it will serve more potential riders than just Expedia and the general commercial corridor around there. I think it's a bit more opportunity for connectivity to the future Armory development, however that shakes out in the next couple decades. I think that has more potential for integration with the lower Interbay neighborhood. My only personal concern is with the current alignment as designed and the displacement of a number of businesses along Elliott Ave W, a few of which I frequent. I would be sad to see impacts on those businesses, but either way assuming the train will be elevated alongside Elliott Ave, it's kind of a necessary taking to improve transit in the area.

**C:** (Mike Stewart) On this route, I'll concur with what's said. Getting out of 15th right-of-way makes the most sense. I'm assuming that the Galer St route allows you to move into the tunnel approach for Ballard tunnel options, correct? (*Leda confirmed*) Then yes, getting that out of the 15th Ave right-of-way is important.

**C:** (Hannah Tang) I don't have much to add to this part of the conversation. The mom groups, the folks that I know at Swedish, had no major objections to the 15th Galer option and layering my read on top of that is that whatever we choose there should enable shifting the Ballard station as far west as possible.

**C:** (Janis Traven) With what is in the current DEIS, I and also the Magnolia community agree that the Galer location is preferable because it does serve the Port and Expedia and also makes access from Magnolia on the southbound commute somewhat convenient if you're making a change from transit. We are concerned and I think Mike has stated this more clearly than I have and I'm sure you've heard from the freight



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community that what is currently planned on the pink line south of the Galer station with the guideway being on Elliott is problematic. It's going to be a world of hurt while that construction is going on and if it's the elevated line, it will be a world of hurt afterwards. If there is a hybrid solution continuing to tunnel under Elliott and on the west side of 15th, that would be a fantastic way to solve displacements and the eyesore of having a massive structure there hovering above the Magnolia Bridge. It's hard for people who live on the west side of Queen Anne to get their heads around how they're going to see this thing, how it will block a lot of views, it's not evident at this point unless you're paying attention. If we can do something about that now, either make the station smaller or underground, that would be fantastic.

**C:** (Jennifer Chen) I think it would make sense to keep the same pink Preferred Alternative.

### **Cost Savings and Refinement Concepts Feedback**

CAG members shared their feedback to the following question:

- What are your thoughts on the cost saving and refinement ideas?

**C:** (Warren Aakervik) Shifting the tunnel needs to happen for the cost savings, but you should take 14th out and put 17th in. It shouldn't be on 15th and 14th doesn't seem to work for the density of Ballard that you're putting into the major hub. By the time this gets built, it'll probably be up to Phinney Ridge with 5-story buildings, but for the center of Ballard itself, 17th or 20th makes more sense. I don't know what the cost savings is, but no matter what, it has to be a tunnel.

**C:** (Jason Bennett) I oppose studying the refinement concept to consolidate stations. I'm not in favor of shifting the portal further south away from access for Magnolia residents. The development and the Port access at Galer makes the most sense. I agree that the tunnel should shift more west if we can and support the tunnel.

**C:** (Lorenzo Canales) I'm not super interested in studying these alternatives. I think that 15th is important location for the tunnel to be. However, that's the one that if there's any studying I'd like to see data (#5 on the diagram). It doesn't seem like a great thing to consolidate the Smith Cove and Interbay stations – seems like a large area where we're not allowing riders to get into the system to have to walk through that gap. The Interbay area is not super walkable. None of these seem like great motivators to me.

**C:** (Jennifer Chen) With the cost savings, if we saved this money, what else would it be used on?

**A:** (Cathal Ridge) We have a \$2B affordability gap on the project and unless we are able to close that affordability gap then we can't open the portion of the project from Smith Cove to Ballard until 2039—a couple years of delay. That came up last year in the context of the realignment process and we've been asked to look at ways to save costs in addition to looking at funding opportunities. So, if we were able to save costs by implementing some of these ideas, it would help solve the affordability gap.

**C:** (Jennifer Chen) The ones that stands out is number 3 (*Cathal clarifies this would consolidate Denny & SLU stations onto Dexter Ave*) as the biggest savings. I think given the limited information, I don't have strong feelings, but Dexter could be interesting to explore further. For Number 5, I agree we should be closer to central Ballard.

**C:** (Erick Cruz) Shifting of the tunnel – I'm for a tunnel regardless of if it's 14th or 15th. I hear the discussion about the [Ballard] downtown core, but I think there's growth going towards the east. The one block difference to save \$140M—I'm indifferent to that as long as it stays a tunnel. I don't know that consolidating the Smith



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Cove and Interbay stations is the best option for that side of town, that idea is not worth pursuing. In terms of the Mercer portal—I'm indifferent to that.

**C:** (Nathan Dickey) For the cost savings concepts, I'm not sure if 5% of the affordability gap is worth making the tunnel alignment even slightly more difficult to get to unless Sound Transit can promise that the surface streets won't be similarly hard to cross as they are today to get to the station. If I remember correctly, the savings was involving eliminating the station entrance on the west side of 14th Ave in the footprint of the current Safeway. Even if it's only 100 feet, it's still another 100 feet that people have to walk to get to their train. I'm not sure that's worth it; there are more interesting ways to save money that should be studied such as finding an alternative station location closer to Ballard making use of underground tunneling to a more affordable location. I think that if it comes down to saving a lot of money to get this done in 2037 or 2039, one option could be to study not building one of the stations, similar to how 130th was delayed and then later funded. I think shifting the tunnel portal south is definitely worth studying, seems like a minute refinement.

**C:** (Mike Stewart) I appreciate these initial numbers that Sound Transit has put together. I just don't think there's any constituency that supports the 14th Ave alignment for the reasons I suggested before. If there are cost savings or refinements in this section, you've got to look west of 15th. I'd encourage Sound Transit to look at other means of doing stations, that would be looking at a mined station instead of cut and cover. The cost of mining a station may be elevated, but there are savings with property acquisition and the disruption that would happen as part of cut and cover. If you're doing these exercises, I would look at something that can deliver a project that the community deserves. This is a 100-year project, there's one chance to get this right and we need to do good by the voters that voted for this package and do good by the residents of the City of Seattle. This is a dense urban environment and if the projections were off because costs have escalated, there have to be other solutions to look at and other ways of financing. This system needs to serve voters who adopted this and are paying their assessment charges on vehicles and rider fares and all of those things. We've got to do better than this. You probably have one of the toughest jobs, one of the most difficult engineering jobs in the US right now. Siting a 100-year project in the middle of an industrial zone with very little residential makes no sense. Finding \$140M in savings there doesn't cut it for a project of this size and scale.

**C:** (Hannah Tang) Can I copy and paste everything Mike said? I appreciate looking at cost savings, but I don't think looking at 14th is the place to do it. We should be looking farther west and therefore we should not be investing your time on the 14th St station. On the refinements, I take the less popular option of saying that consolidating Smith Cove and Interbay is not necessarily something that I object to. I'm looking at harvesting savings wherever we can to shift Ballard station west. We talk a lot about the areas that are opened up and made available by having two separate stations. At the end of the day, it's 2,000 daily boardings. It's a drop in the bucket compared to other stations we're discussing—Ballard, Chinatown. I don't object to pursuing that refinement. Mercer seems like a worthy refinement to study, so I would say thumbs up to that one as well.

**C:** (Janis Traven) I'd like to thank Mike and also cut and paste a lot of what he had to say especially that this is a 100-year project and it is worth it to study this deeply and take the time to do it. I can explain to Hannah and others why consolidating Smith Cove and Interbay is a really bad idea for the 25,000 people who live in Magnolia and I don't know how many people work at Expedia and the Port. That area in Interbay, you can't get there from Magnolia or Expedia or the Port. Adding transit to get there just gums up 15th. If Sound Transit were to additionally study an overhead tram down the hill from Queen Anne and down from Magnolia to get to that station, that might work. Otherwise, nobody is going to use it there. From what I understand about the City and industrial lands, they're not looking at putting in 10,000 residences in the Armory site, they're trying to keep it more industrial. A Smith Cove station south of the Magnolia Bridge and another station close to Magnolia on Dravus really makes sense and will ensure that the people of Magnolia get out of their cars. It's hard to have a discussion about cost savings when because of escalating prices we don't know what the



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baseline is. We learned through this DEIS process that what they were imagining would cost a whole lot more—the tunnel to Ballard— actually is on par now that the Coast Guard is requiring a 205 ft clearance, is going to be much less than the original Preferred Alternative was or a bridge over the ship canal. It's hard to know what the cost is and what the savings are when this segment is only engineered to 10% and property acquisition costs have changed so much. What I would propose as a cost savings, so you don't have to acquire a whole lot of property is to tunnel all the way from Seattle Center through to Ballard and make the stations much more modest. We don't need massive entrances. I sent the group the station entrances they have in Washington DC. They all look the same, so they are easily recognizable, but they don't take up a block and a half. They don't have a huge mezzanine, you just go down the stairs, pay your fare, and get to the platform. I think it would be worthwhile for Sound Transit to look at adopting more modest Seattle-centric entrances that don't take up so much space.

### Materials shared:

- Presentation: [https://oohwsblink.blob.core.windows.net/media/Default/images/AE\\_0036-17\\_InterbayBallard\\_Community\\_Advisory\\_Group\\_Meeting\\_20220504.pdf](https://oohwsblink.blob.core.windows.net/media/Default/images/AE_0036-17_InterbayBallard_Community_Advisory_Group_Meeting_20220504.pdf)

### Action items/next steps:

- Sound Transit to consolidate CAG member feedback to share with the Sound Transit Board.