



**Project Advisory Committee Meeting #1
Summary
September 11, 2008**

**City of Tacoma, Room 708
4:00 PM to 7:00 PM**

Project Overview

The D-to-M Streets Track & Signal Project is a 1.2 mile section of new track to be constructed by Sound Transit on acquired right-of-way connecting Tacoma Dome Station with Sound Transit's Lakeview Subdivision. The rail line will cross a lowered Pacific Avenue on a grade-separated bridge, giving traffic on this major arterial unimpeded access to points north and south of the line.

The existing project budget provides sufficient funding to complete final design and right-of-way acquisition for the project. Because funding for construction is not yet secured, ongoing risk analysis and reporting will be conducted during final design, until such time as full funding is secured.

If all this effort is put into full conceptualization of this project despite of lack of funds guarantee, here is the question: Is complete execution of full conceptualization assured or questionable?

Meeting Purpose

Sound Transit met with the City of Tacoma's Project Advisory Committee (PAC) for the first of two design charettes to discuss technical issues, design options, construction phasing, and redevelopment as it relates to the D-to-M Streets Track & Signal Project in Tacoma, and to receive PAC-members' input on these issues.

Introduction

Chris Larson, City of Tacoma Public Works, welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the project. He explained that the City of Tacoma and Sound Transit agreed to a Term Sheet for this project in January 2008 that resulted in the creation of the PAC. He reviewed the agenda and emphasized the desire to talk about urban planning issues, noise mitigation, and redevelopment.

Mark Johnson, Project Lead for Sound Transit, further explained the project. He noted that the grade-separated crossing was decided on in December, 2007, based on studies of at-grade crossing safety and requirements for trains to climb the hill from Pacific Avenue to S. M Street. The current alignment has been approved by Sound Transit's Board of Directors and endorsed by the Tacoma City Council. However, there are a number of design decisions yet to be made for which Sound Transit would like input from the PAC. Additionally, the PAC is expected to provide insight on local issues to Sound Transit and the design team during the year-long design process. The PAC will participate in two design charettes and then meet monthly to offer input on the design as it develops.



It is not realistic to have design charettes completed in just 2 public meetings unless we are trying to just meet the minimum public input requirements.

Mark reviewed the project history, explaining that the project is funded through 1996's voter-approved Sound Move. The budget for the project is \$125 million, a \$75 million increase since the project started, and Sounder service to South Tacoma and Lakewood is expected to begin in January 2012.

What does the budget include? What does \$125 million buy? Where is the detail so we can better understand.

Mark explained that results from Sound Transit's recently completed operations simulation study indicated the need to close South C Street between South Tacoma Way and 25th Street. A crossing at South C Street has been deemed unsafe because of limited sight distance at this location and longer stopping distance on the steep down-grade. Mark added that this section of track will be one of the steepest commuter rail grades in the United States.

It does not make sense to close south C Street. In an urban setting sightlines are compromised in many crossings. Several examples of limited or no sightlines exist in Tacoma alone and they include: S Chandler, S Alaska and Wilkeson Streets of which these streets are not to be closed.

Therefore sightlines should not be a determining factor in closing any street. In light of the heavy usage of C street for pedestrian, bicycle

Mark reviewed the meeting agenda and began a group discussion.

Discussion

The following are comments and questions from Project Advisory Committee members and members of the public present at the meeting. *Answers are indicated in italics.*

If this is a truly open public meeting then why are we asked repeatedly to limit our public attendance to two (2) while there are over fifteen (15) city staff and consultants included in these meetings. If this is to be considered a "public" process the by law ALL interested stakeholders should be welcome to ALL meetings.

- The Dome District Development Group meets on a regular basis and developed some guidelines to frame today's discussion. These are important guiding principals that should start the discussion.
- Darrel Bowman presented the guiding principals from the Dome District Development Group. He asked the planning team to look at this emerging urban area and respect the need for the long-term plan. He requested attention be paid to aesthetics and that any surplus property after the project is completed be given



(**recommendation was to SELL property not give property to interested investors and not the city**) to the city. Jori Adkins used a drawing to show walls built around the train to ~~protect~~ **integrate the city the train with the City from the train** and encourage future development.

- Need to insert the actual guidelines we presented. Where are the actual documents presented to the group. This is a public record and we would like it included.
- GENERAL GUIDING PRINCIPLES:
 1. RESPECT THE FACT THAT THE TRAIN IS MOVING THROUGH AN **URBAN AREA**.
 2. MAINTAIN THE COMPLETE **URBAN GRID** OF ARTERIALS AND CROSS STREETS THROUGH THE DISTRICT (NO STREET CLOSURES).
 3. **STRUCTURES OR RETAINING WALLS** WILL NOT BE BUILT PARALLEL TO THE STREET RIGHT OF WAYS AND PROPERTY LINES (ALL STRUCTURES AND RETAINING WALLS WILL BE BUILT PARALLEL TO THE TRACKS).
 4. THE FULL **AIR RIGHTS** OVER THE TRACK WILL BE DEEDED TO THE CITY TO BE USED BY THE CITY OR ADJACENT PROPERTY OWNERS.
 5. THE **AESTHETICS** OF ANY STRUCTURES (BRIDGES, WALLS, ETC.) WILL BE RESPECTED WITH COMMUNITY DESIGN REVIEW AND INCORPORATED IN THE PROJECT.
 6. ANY **SURPLUS PROPERTY** WILL BE SOLD FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT (MINIMIZE UNDEFINED SPACES TO ASCERTAIN THAT PEDESTRIAN SPACES WILL DOMINATE THE URBAN AREA).
- There is interconnectivity between this project and the future development opportunities. We need to look at the pedestrian connections. The heights of the retaining walls are not clear in the documents. We need to understand the vehicle and pedestrian experience.
- How many lanes of traffic on Pacific Avenue are you planning for? *Two lanes in each direction and a center turn lane.*

Put pedestrian paths ON the bridge



- We need the ability for Nob Hill residents to cross the tracks to downtown and cross Pacific Avenue to the Dome District. Is there a pedestrian trail included in your plans?
 - **The PAC did not receive an answer.**
- Given that South C Street will be closed, **(we are not convinced this is a given as previously stated there are many crossings in Tacoma which have limited sightlines and stopping distances and those streets are not closed)** where do you think congestion will form on Pacific Avenue? There is already congestion at UW Tacoma with the diagonal parking on Pacific. South C Street was the way to get around this congestion but we will lose that if you close it. Could you look at two lanes of traffic with adequate parking on Pacific [in the UW Tacoma area]? (Question addressed to City of Tacoma staff.)
 - **The closure of C Street is not a given. If ALL federal guidelines for rail construction are being adhered to as we are led to believe, then safety should not be a concern. Therefore, C Street need NOT be closed.**
- I would like to see what Pacific Avenue will look like when I'm driving on it. It would be helpful to see the scale from a pedestrian point of view, from a driver's point of view and from the point of view of businesses along Pacific.
- Where does the retaining wall for the lowering of Pacific Avenue start? Could we see it in 3-D?
- We need to realize that the relationship between land use and transportation is important. Developers do not always build next to heavy rail so I'm not sure that placing the train on a narrow embankment [the parallel retaining wall solution] will work. Maybe you should create a minimum 40-foot green buffer, or park, that would frame the train so that we avoid that problem. We need to be careful about proximity [of rails to buildings].
 - **This was a statement made by Allen Hart of Via which he is not listed as an attendee but made several comments which are included in these minutes. The PAC does not agree with this statement.**
- The Dome District Development Group seems to be looking at a South Bank London Rail type of example where the train is literally part of the infrastructure.
- The Dome District is trying to keep opportunities open for future development, no matter how far in the future it happens. We want to make sure the construction basis is there. You can put some green in there in the mean time but make sure the building blocks are there for an urban neighborhood.
 - **Where are our air rights considerations.**

- **This answers the questions from 2 paragraphs above**

Bridge Design

Tom Wilson, Sound Transit design team, explained the drawings and the nine different bridge types. The bridges were designed to be prominent, gateway structures that are feasible, affordable and attractive. In addition to the bridge designs, the team did a cost analysis which was presented to the group.

The following are comments and questions from PAC members and members of the public present at the meeting. *Answers are indicated in italics.*

- We need to see the concepts in 3-D so we can understand how we can integrate our city around these concepts.
- We don't necessarily want the "gateway" bridge type at Pacific Avenue. We have to understand the entire corridor. If we knew that the pedestrian connectivity is part of this design we may not need the fancy bridge. *What we are hearing is that the city needs to consider these design decisions. These ideas should be reflected in the city comprehensive plan so that our design team can design this in accordance with that plan.*
 - **These ARE reflected in the city comprehensive plan and Sound Transit needs to adhere to them.**
- The fundamental issue is the context. Sound Transit can design the bridge but we want to talk about the edges. Your team is not urban-design-focused. *The term sheet says is that we're going to design a transportation project and work with the city and the PAC to make the project work in the community.*
 - **This is not a correct statement. We want to talk about the edges THEN talk about the design. There needs to be a community transit oriented development focus for this project.**

Mark asked the group what type of media Sound Transit should use to present the potential designs.

- We would like to see 3-D models if possible and cross-sections along the track at different points. If we can see the specific spatial representations, then we can make judgments based on the actual impacts. You can use a Sketch-up Model on a Google map.
- These drawings are from an aerial perspective and we need them from a walking or driving perspective.



- Who is working to ensure that Sound Transit knows our comprehensive plan? Who is working with you from the City? *Chris Larson, City of Tacoma Public Works, and Lihuang Wang and Donna Stenger, City of Tacoma Economic Development and Julia Walton, Sound Transit Design Team, are all here to provide input on the urban design and work with Tacoma's comprehensive plan.*
- I think the simple design may be the best. Let's work through this and let it resonate before we jump to a conclusion.
- Is there more topographical survey work being done? I heard that it wasn't done correctly the first time. *Yes, more survey work is being done. It was done from the air the first time which isn't very specific. Now, we are getting down on the ground and getting the details.*

Scott Danielson, Sound Transit design team, drew the crossing with details in an effort to explain some of the reasons the bridge designs were chosen. He illustrated the perpendicular retaining walls for future development but explained that excavating for those retaining walls is very expensive.

The PAC is not promoting retaining walls , but instead suggests the 'BOX' design, which is less expensive and more conducive to future development opportunities.

- We're not asking Sound Transit to do the excavating, we just want to leave it open for someone to do it in the future.
 - **We suggest that Sound Transit IS building a 100+ year project which needs to consider its impact on future development. Any construction efforts which Sound Transit or others undertake now MUST accommodate the ability to use the open space for commercial, residential or other development immediately adjacent to the tracks. It is a false savings to build cheaply in the beginning without consideration of these needs for the future. We need the space available NOW.**

Julia Walton, Sound Transit design team, reviewed urban design drawings and described the retaining walls in the baseline bridge. The drawings show the grade changes along the parcels. She explained that doing the least to parcels seemed to make the most sense and provide the most options for future development. Julia asked what the group felt should be done to the surrounding area.

- If you are going to create an earth berm around retaining walls in this area, you're going to have a huge area that you can't redevelop. *These decisions have not been made, that's why we're here. We have not decided that the retaining walls will go straight down. But we don't know if excavating is the best use for future development.*

- **Our position is immediately adjacent access with immediately usable space is best for our community.**
- What about the 25th Street ravine as an example? Isn't that all filled in with dirt?
- We shouldn't think about east-west traffic, we should think north-south.
- If you have a very simple structure on both sides of the rail line, keep the retaining walls parallel to the tracks, what are the costs of the properties? It would be good to have that analysis.

Technical Review / A Street pedestrian crossing

Keith Nakano, Sound Transit design team, displayed a profile showing grade elevations through the project corridor and described the criteria used to create the current design. He described the vertical standards necessary both under the track and at the curve.

The following are comments and questions from PAC members and members of the public present at the meeting. *Answers are indicated in italics.*

- How many tracks are we building and how wide a space do the tracks need? *We are planning for two tracks but will build only one set of tracks for the Sounder train. The two track centerlines are 15 feet apart and we need an additional 20 feet on either side, so a total of 55 feet minimum.*
 - **Why is there a need for anything greater than 45 feet when access behind Freighthouse Square is ample at 45 feet?**
- I noticed there are two columns under SR 705. They seem to be right in the way of the future track. Also, how low is that overpass? Will the train fit under it or will we have to tear that down too? *We have taken the columns into consideration and we will be able to go under the existing SR 705 with adequate clearance for passenger operations.*
- What about flooding through the lowered Pacific Avenue section? *Our geotechnical work has shown us that the water table drops off so we're ok in that area.*
- How fast will the train be traveling at the Pacific Avenue crossing? *We think that the trains will begin the decent from South M Street at 30 mph and be able to hold that speed part way down the hill, slowing to a stop at Tacoma Dome Station.*
- Why do we have to close A Street? We really want our connectivity in the Dome District and we've never been told specifically why it needs to be closed. *The street crossing at-grade would be too steep for cars and trucks to get over the tracks.*



- **There is no reason to close 'A' St. The future grade is not too steep to accommodate automobile access. The grade on the recently completed 'D' Street overpass is a similar functional example.**
- We want to know the exact slope of A Street from 25th to 26th Streets. *We will find out for you and we'll bring back a drawing. But just so you know, even if the grades are acceptable for vehicles, there might be a sight-distance problem for the train. This is a safety issue.*
 - **This was not brought in to the meeting as agreed.**
- Is there a way to build a bike path into the pedestrian underpass at A Street? We should think about how these things connect with different parts of town. *There is a straight alignment under the tracks (a 25-foot path) that could be used for bikes and pedestrians.*
 - **No need for this when it is an on grade crossing.**
- What is the extent of the lowered Pacific Avenue reconstruction? *From 25th to 27th Streets.*
- Will the road grade change at the Foremost Dairy building? *No, not in that area.*

Meeting Wrap-Up

Sound Transit agreed to bring the following material to the October meeting:

1. 3-D views of the project from the pedestrian level
2. Profile views of the project
3. Profile of A Street vehicle crossing with grade changes
4. South C Street pedestrian connection options
5. Right-of-way acquisition map
6. Map of the proposed non-motorized vehicle crossings for the entire area
7. Construction staging information

Mark asked that someone from the city or the PAC provide him with the current pedestrian and bike movement in the area.

Chris Larson reminded the group that the next meeting is Oct. 2, 2008 and that he will contact PAC meetings by e-mail. Mark thanked those who attended for their time and said that he will be sending an e-mail to ask PAC members when their preferred times are for monthly meetings. One PAC member said thank you and that a lot of good things happened in the meeting and that he felt like the PAC was heard.

Please ensure any future comments are attributed to a specific person. After the meeting we cannot ascertain who made this statement. All PAC members agree they feel we were making progress but a lot of work needs to occur before we feel confident our concerns are heard. The errors in this document are an indicator of the work to be completed before we can reach consensus.



Meeting Attendees

Sound Transit Team

Mark Johnson
Melissa Saxe
Eric Beckman
Roger Iwata
Angie Thomson
Kristina Walker
Julia Walton

Jeanine Viscount
Scott Danielson
Keith Nakano
Tom Wilson
Jon Elwell
Bruce Jamieson
Steve Shanafelt

City of Tacoma Staff

Chris Larson
Donna Slinger

Lihuang Wung
Connie Corpez

PAC Members

Forrest German
David Boe
Jim Merritt

Jonathan Shadel
Darrel Bowman

Public Attendees

Jerry Lechner
John Lewis
Whitney Rhodes

Jori Adkins
Grace Pleasants
Rick Semple