

Airport Link

Seattle, Washington

(November 2002)

Description

Sound Transit (Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority) is planning a 24-mile Central *Link* light rail transit (LRT) line running north to south from Northgate, through downtown Seattle and Southeast Seattle to the cities of Tukwila and SeaTac, Washington. The proposed Seattle *Link* project includes 21 (including two deferred) stations and four (one deferred) park-and-ride lots (approximately 2,100 new spaces). The system would operate on existing and new right-of-way (ROW), including the existing 1.3-mile Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel (DSTT).

Sound Transit plans to phase construction of the entire system. The first phase, designated as the Initial Segment, constitutes 14 miles of the 24-mile LRT and will extend from Convention Place to South 154th Station. Two additional phases, known as Airport Link and North Link, will complete the 24-mile LRT line.

The approximately three-mile Airport Link will run from the South 154th Station in the City of Tukwila south to the South 200th Station in the City of SeaTac. It will link Sound Transit's 14-mile initial segment of Link light rail (MOS-1) serving downtown Seattle, the south downtown industrial area and sports stadiums, the south Seattle communities of Beacon Hill and Rainier Valley, and the city of Tukwila with Sea-Tac International Airport and the City of SeaTac. Sound Transit is evaluating several alternative alignments for completing Airport Link. This will complete the southern-most piece of an approximately 24-mile light rail system. This project is being coordinated in partnership with the Port of Seattle and City of SeaTac.

The *Link* LRT system is one element of Sound Transit's voter-approved ten year \$3.9 billion (\$1995) Sound Move regional transit plan, which also includes the implementation of a 1.6-mile LRT line in downtown Tacoma; an 82-mile Sounder commuter rail system operating between Lakewood and Everett; 19 new regional express bus routes; and 45 major capital projects including 14 High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) direct access ramps (providing access to over 100 miles of existing HOV lanes), 14 new park-and-ride facilities, nine transit centers, and other service improvements.

This project has not been rated because the grantee did not submit project information for the New Starts criteria. Sound Transit is evaluating several alternatives for extending the Central Link light rail Initial Segment north from downtown to Northgate.

Status

The Sound Transit Board adopted the Sound Move regional transit plan in May 1996. Voters approved \$3.9 billion in local funding for implementation of the plan in November 1996. A Major Investment Study of *Sound Move's* services was completed in March 1997. *Sound Move* is included in the Puget Sound Regional Council's (the area's MPO) Transportation Plan and Regional Transportation Improvement Program.

FTA approved the initiation of Preliminary Engineering on the *Link* LRT in July 1997. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was published in December 1998. The Final EIS was completed in November 1999. FTA issued a Record of Decision in January 2000. The Sound Transit Board formally adopted a 7.2-mile initial MOS for Federal participation in November 1999. The MOS extended from NE 45th Street at the University of Washington to the maintenance base at South Lander Street in the industrial area south of downtown Seattle. Approximately 4.5 miles of this was new tunnel under Capitol Hill, Portage Bay, and the University of Washington. FTA has approved the Airport Link segment for Preliminary Engineering and portions of the segment for Final Design. Sound Transit is preparing a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement.

After Congress and the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT), Office of Inspector General (OIG) raised significant questions about project costs, the Sound Transit Board directed staff to re-examine the entire project. Staff had to determine if a portion of the 20-mile LPA could be identified as a new initial segment, or if MOS-1 could be redefined to reduce risks and better to meet budget limitations. During this re-examination, the Board maintained its commitment to build the entire alignment. In November 2001, the Sound Transit Board formally adopted the current Initial Segment from Convention Place to South 154th Station as the new MOS.

TEA-21 Section 3030(a)(85) authorizes the Seattle Sound Move Corridor (Link and Sounder), of which *Link* is one element, for Final Design and construction. Through FY 2002, Congress has appropriated \$90.97 million for the *Link* LRT. This amount includes the FY 2002 appropriation of \$49.53 million, which FTA has suspended based on recommendations from the USDOT Office of Inspector General. These funds will not be awarded until satisfactory resolution of the issues raised by the OIG and Congress.

Airport Link

Seattle, Washington



