



May 5, 2021

Kent Keel  
Chair, Board of Directors  
Sound Transit  
401 S. Jackson St.  
Seattle, WA 98104

Re: ST3 West Seattle and Ballard Link Realignment Process

Dear Chair Keel and the Sound Transit Board of Directors:

Sound Transit 3 (ST3) is the region's single biggest transportation investment and a once-in-a-generation opportunity to build a more inclusive, sustainable, and economically vibrant Puget Sound. As organizations, businesses, property owners, and community members along the West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions alignment; we write you to request the additional time, analysis, and stakeholder engagement that is necessary to carry out a thoughtful realignment process.

In 2016, voters overwhelmingly approved nearly 12 miles of new light rail and 13 new stations connecting West Seattle and Ballard to downtown Seattle as part of a greater plan to improve regional mobility. The representative alignment and station locations were deliberately selected to support sustainable growth and equitable development. The Mercer Corridor Stakeholders, business improvement areas, and partnering organizations played a fundamental role in engaging the community to shape and support the passage of ST3. Now, in the face of COVID-19, rising project costs, and an evolving economic recovery, these voices

should again be engaged to ensure the thoughtful delivery of the West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions.

The work ahead of the Board is to chart a path to program affordability, but while initial estimates predicted catastrophic revenue declines, recent staff projections indicate a far more positive revenue trajectory. Meanwhile large employers are announcing return-to-office plans, doubling down on their commitments to downtown and signaling a return to mass transit. Recent data shows the demand for Seattle office space is out-pacing pre-pandemic levels and recovering faster than any other market in the country<sup>1</sup>. This resurgence is rooted in the belief that Seattle and the region will remain an attractive and accessible place to live and work, in part, because of the investments we make in our transit infrastructure.

As the Board shepherds a path forward, we urge you to consider a realignment process that delivers the following elements:

1. **Meaningful and Transparent Stakeholder Engagement.** The Board currently plans to review a realignment package in June 2021 to be adopted the subsequent month. One month is not enough time for the meaningful discussions with neighborhood organizations, businesses, property owners, and residents necessary to solve the scale of this challenge. While early realignment discussions began nearly one year ago, conversations to date have focused on process logistics. We ask that Sound Transit delay this vote by one year in order to thoughtfully engage stakeholders in the substance of possible realignment scenarios. Sound Transit staff should use this time to engage in station-specific stakeholder conversations that inform priorities and spur creative problem-solving.
2. **An Informed and Deliberate Realignment Process.** Time is of the essence, but the magnitude of impending decisions should not be underestimated. More information is needed to understand the true affordability gap. Already, the staff-projected revenue shortfall, once an estimated \$12.1B, has fallen to only \$1.5B or 2.6% below pre-pandemic projections. Meanwhile, continually increasing project costs and flawed land acquisition estimates demand that we refresh the methodology and carefully consider efficiencies in the alignment without shortchanging voters. We echo calls for additional analysis to better understand the changing economic landscape, project cost volatility, and various realignment alternatives.
3. **Commitment to Maximizing Financial Capacity.** While rising project costs and COVID-19 impacts on project affordability are currently top of mind, Sound Transit's projections show the program does not become unaffordable for several more years. Any realignment plan must take full advantage of the time allotted and preserve maximum flexibility as circumstances evolve in the coming months and years. Board and staff must diligently evaluate financing alternatives, federal funding opportunities including the American Jobs Plan, and timing and phasing options that increase financial capacity to its fullest. Decisions made this year must not prematurely preclude opportunities to deliver the full system to the voters that approved it.
4. **Thoughtful Execution and Station Design.** The decisions made today will impact the capacity and quality of our region's mobility for generations to come. Members of the Board have honorably accepted fiscal stewardship for delivery of ST3. Successful system expansion will similarly require continued attention to the quality of station

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/data/downtown-seattle-dying-not-so-fast-demand-for-office-roars-back-to-pre-pandemic-levels/>

design, station accessibility, rider experience, and flexibility for future ridership growth, as well as thoughtful planning around each individual station area. Station design and the ultimate configuration of the alignment should be evaluated and developed to reflect the long-term nature of this investment.

The benefits of ST3 to our city and region cannot be overstated. We appreciate your commitment and look forward to working together as we deliver the ST3 program and West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions that meet our regional goals to become an even more inclusive, sustainable, and economically vibrant region.

Sincerely,

**Zahoor Ahmed**  
CFO  
R.C. Hedreen Co.

**Amy H. Fulford**  
President, SIFF Board of Directors  
SIFF

**Ada Healey**  
Chief Real Estate Officer  
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**Jeffrey Herrmann**  
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**Tom Mara**  
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**Martin Henry Kaplan, AIA**  
Former Land Use Chair Queen Anne Community  
Council, Founding Member of Uptown Urban  
Design Framework Committee

**Rick Hooper**  
Chair  
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**Lisa Howard**  
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**Eugene Wasserman**  
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Cc:

King County Council Chair Balducci, Board member, System Expansion Committee Chair

King County Executive Constantine, Board Vice Chair

City of Seattle Mayor Durkan, Board member

Seattle Councilmember Juarez, Board member

Roger Millar, Secretary of Transportation, Washington State Department of Transportation

Peter Rogoff, CEO, Sound Transit

Terry White, General Manager, King County Metro

Sam Zimbabwe, Director, Seattle Department of Transportation