

February 22, 2023

Sound Transit Board of Directors & Sound Transit CEO Julie Timm
401 S. Jackson St.
Seattle, WA 98104

Submitted via email to emailtheboard@soundtransit.org, meetingcomments@soundtransit.org, and Julie.Timm@soundtransit.org

Re: Approve the Denny Station on Terry Avenue North, Oppose Westlake Avenue Closure

To the Sound Transit Board and CEO,

Members of the Denny Triangle and the South Lake Union neighborhoods, together with the Mercer Corridor Stakeholders Group, thank you for your work on the South Lake Union Mix-and-Match. In the spring of 2022, many of us wrote you to express our support for a Denny Station on Terry Avenue North as part of the Mix-and-Match plan, which would provide a superior ridership experience for the next 100 years and avoid the deeply harmful closure of Westlake Avenue for 4+ years of station construction. We write you today to reaffirm our support for the Denny Station on Terry Avenue North and reject the need for a multi-year closure of Westlake Avenue.

The 4+ year closure of Westlake Avenue will cause irreparable harm to downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods.

Sound Transit's "Preferred" location for the Denny Station on Westlake would close Westlake for years of construction. In Denny Triangle and South Lake Union, Westlake is the most important street for pedestrians, transit, and civic life. The importance of Westlake cannot be overstated:

- Westlake is at the heart of the neighborhood business district and connects parks and civic spaces, like Lake Union Park, Denny Park, Urban Triangle Park, MOHAI, The Center for Wooden Boats, and the soon-to-be-built Northwest Native Canoe Center. Closing it creates unnecessary impacts, particularly to small and pedestrian-oriented businesses.
- Westlake is one of the most accessible transportation routes between downtown, South Lake Union, and the I-5 on-ramps at Mercer. There is no comparable detour due to the unique geometry of the street grid in this area. Any Westlake closure would exacerbate congestion and create a chain reaction across the downtown transportation grid.
- Closure of Westlake would halt the operations of the South Lake Union Streetcar, which connects Lake Union to downtown and soon further to Pioneer Square and First Hill. Pre-pandemic, the South Lake Union Streetcar carried more than 500,000 passengers per year. An operational streetcar would provide a critical transit route during ST3 construction, mitigating potential economic damage. The closure would also preclude plans to build the Center City Connector ("the Cultural Connector"), connecting the existing South Lake Union Streetcar to the First Hill Streetcar.

- Westlake is a finished street with improved pedestrian space and transit-only lanes. If Westlake were closed, the Seattle streetcar service would be suspended for several years and high-frequency bus lines like Rapid Ride C, 40, and 320 would be redirected to less-desirable routes. These impacts are detrimental to a neighborhood that depends on transit more than almost any other neighborhood in the city.

Terry Avenue North is the preferred station location for the future Denny Station and provides many long-term benefits to riders.

The Terry station location will provide a better experience for transit riders in a number of ways:

- The Terry station location provides access to more neighborhoods, across more arterials. Unlike the Westlake location, the Terry location would have station entrances both north and south of Denny, and the north entrance would connect to the Cascade neighborhood. A Cascade connection expands station access to 10,000 additional residents and 15,000 employees in East South Lake Union, as well as access to over 400 hotel rooms, 370,000 sf of retail, and 3.85M sf of office space.
- The Terry station option mitigates a 50 ft grade change between Terry and Boren by providing vertical conveyance through the station and ADA access to the Cascade neighborhood.
- Low traffic counts and lack of through traffic on Terry provide for ample pedestrian spill-out space and an enjoyable and safe pedestrian environment for the station's 15,000 daily riders. These two blocks of Terry are the only unimproved blocks of the Terry pedestrian woonerf. Once complete, Terry will provide a shared street connection from Denny to Valley, steps from Lake Union.
- In addition, construction on Terry would be materially less impactful to the health and vitality of Denny Triangle, South Lake Union, and surrounding neighborhoods relative to the Westlake station option. Transit service, and the transportation network, would remain operational and unencumbered during construction.

The current Sound Transit analysis does not accurately reflect the cost, time, and risks associated with a Denny Station on Westlake Avenue.

To date, Sound Transit staff have communicated that the closure of Westlake and the corresponding harm to the neighborhood is necessary due to utilities located under Terry and have disclosed very little about the challenges regarding construction of a station on Westlake. The information presented to the Sound Transit Board fails to include the following considerations:

- Westlake is the location of critical Seattle Public Utilities' combined storm/sewer main lines which serve 150 acres of residents and businesses in downtown Seattle. Sound Transit will need to relocate these lines, as well as other utilities that prevent access to the sewer lines, prior to construction of the station box. As such, the Westlake closure is certain to take more than four years.
- Terry is the location of critical fiber which, as Sound Transit staff have indicated, must be treated with care. However, Sound Transit has failed to consider the practical option of keeping the fiber lines in place during construction to avoid unnecessary cost and delay. The critical fiber lines are located such that lines can be secured and

protected in place, and construction activities can occur around them. Doing so would eliminate at least some of the time delay and additional costs associated with the Terry alternative.

For the South Lake Union Station, Sound Transit must work with the City of Seattle to adequately evaluate utilities under Harrison Street and disclose associated construction costs and timeframes.

In addition to concerns about utilities associated with the Denny Station, we urge Sound Transit staff to evaluate and disclose the true nature of the upfront work that will be required for the South Lake Union Station at Harrison. The current information shared by Sound Transit does not include a realistic assessment of the time and costs associated with relocating Seattle City Light infrastructure. Sound Transit should consult the City of Seattle in a meaningful way to ensure that costs and schedule risks are understood and disclosed to the impacted public.

As members of the Denny Triangle and South Lake Union community, and as people who care about the future of our region and of downtown Seattle, we urge you to advance the Denny Station at Terry and oppose the closure of Westlake.

Sincerely,

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