

Project Overview

- 1 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.
- 2 The existing project budget provides sufficient funding to complete final design and right-of-way acquisition for the project. Funding for construction is not yet secured, but Sound Transit staff continue to seek funding partners for the project. Sound Transit and the design team are conducting an ongoing risk analysis and reporting effort during final design, and the funding shortfall is part of that analysis and reporting.

Meeting Purpose

- 3 The City of Tacoma gathered the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) for the first of two design charettes with Sound Transit to discuss technical issues, design options, construction phasing, and redevelopment as it relates to the D-to-M Streets Track & Signal Project in Tacoma.

Introduction

- 4 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 signed a Term Sheet for the project in January 2008 that included formation of the PAC. He reviewed today's agenda and emphasized the desire to talk about urban planning issues, noise mitigation, and redevelopment opportunities for the area.
- 5 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 alongside South Tacoma Way. The current alignment has been approved by Sound Transit Board and endorsed by the Tacoma City Council but there are a number of design issues to resolve that would benefit from input from the PAC. The overall goal of PAC involvement is to get input on local issues throughout the design. Sound Transit and the City will conduct two design charettes and then meet monthly with the PAC.
- 6 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 is expected to begin in January 2012.

- 7 To bring PAC members up-to-date on information developed since December 2007, Mark explained that results from an operations simulation study completed in early 2008 indicated that an at-grade crossing at South C Street would compromise safety for both trains and crossing vehicles. An at-grade crossing at S. C Street would be unsafe because trains would have difficulty stopping in time to avoid hitting an obstructing vehicle when descending the steep down-grade. Mark added that this train will be running on one of the steeper grades in the United States for commuter rail operations.
- 8 Mark reviewed the meeting agenda and began a group discussion.

Discussion

- 9 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.*
- 10 [Darrel Bowman] The Dome District Development Group meets on a regular basis and developed some guidelines to frame today's discussion. These are important guiding principles that should start the discussion.
- 11 Darrel Bowman presented the guiding principles from the Dome District Development Group (appendix A). He asked the planning team to look at this emerging urban area and respect the need for a long-term plan. He requested attention be paid to aesthetics and that any surplus property after the project is completed be sold to the city. Jori Adkins used a drawing that she developed to show walls built around the rail line to integrate the city with the train and encourage future development.
- 12 [Alan Hart] There is interconnectivity between this project and future development opportunities for the area. 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.
- 13 [Jon Lewis] How many lanes of traffic are you planning for on Pacific Avenue? *Two lanes in each direction and a center turn lane.*
- 14 [Jon Lewis] 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?
- 15 [Forrest German] If C Street will be closed, where will congestion form on Pacific Avenue? There is already congestion at UW Tacoma with the diagonal parking on Pacific. 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?

- 16 [Whitney Rhodes] I would like to see what Pacific Avenue will look like when I'm driving. It would be helpful to see the scale from a pedestrian point of view, from a driver's point of view and from the businesses point of view.
- 17 [David Boe] Where does the potential retaining wall start? Could we see it in 3-D?
- 18 [Alan Hart] 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 the 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.
- 19 [David Boe] 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.
- 20 [Jim Merritt] 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.

Bridge Design

- 21 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.
- 22 The following are comments and questions from the PAC and members of the public present at the meeting. *Answers are indicated in italics.*
- 23 [Forrest German] We need to see the concepts in 3-D so we can understand how we can integrate our city around these concepts.
- 24 [David Boe] We don't necessarily want the "gateway." 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.*
- 25 [Jim Merritt] The fundamental issue is the context. Sound Transit can design the bridge but we want to talk about the edges and the potential for transit-oriented development. Your team is not urban design focused. *The term sheet says is that Sound Transit is going to design a transportation project and work with the city and the PAC to make the project an asset for the community.*

- 26 Mark asked the group what type of media Sound Transit should use to present the potential designs.
- 27 [Whitney Rhodes] 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.
- 28 [Jori Atkins] These drawings are from an aerial perspective and we need them from a walking or driving perspective.
- 29 [Darrel Bowman] 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 Slenger, 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.*
- 30 [Jim Merritt] I think the simple design may be the best. Let's work through this and let it resonate before we jump to a conclusion.
- 31 [Jori Atkins] 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 produces an approximate topography. Now, we are getting down on the ground and getting more accurate information.*
- 32 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.
- 33 [Jim Merritt] 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.
- 34 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.
- 35 [unknown] 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 these areas creates the best opportunities for future development.*

- 36 [unknown] What about the 25th Street ravine as an example? Isn't that all filled in with dirt?
- 37 [Jori Atkins] We shouldn't think about east-west traffic, we should think north-south.
- 38 [unknown] If you keep in form to have a very simple structure on both sides, keep the retaining walls parallel, what are the costs of the properties? It would be good to have that analysis.

Technical Review / East A Street pedestrian crossing

- 39 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.
- 40 The following are comments and questions from the PAC and members of the public present at the meeting. *Answers are indicated in italics.*
- 41 [Rick Semple] How many tracks are we building and how wide a space do the tracks need? *The two tracks' centerlines are 15 feet apart and they need an additional 20 feet or so on either side, so a total of approximately 55 feet. We are planning space for two tracks but right now we will just build one set of tracks for the Sounder train.*
- 42 [unknown] 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.*
- 43 [unknown] What about flooding through the lowered Pacific Avenue section? *Our geotechnical work has shown us that the watertable drops off so we're ok in that area.*
- 44 [unknown] How fast will the train be traveling at the Pacific Avenue crossing? *The trains will be traveling at approximately 30 mph.*
- 45 [Jori Atkins] 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 to get over the tracks. Budget, safety and schedule are big issues.*
- 46 [Jori Atkins] 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 illustrating this. But just so you know, even if the grade is acceptable, there might be a sight distance problem for the train. This would be a safety issue.*

- 47 [Whitney Rhodes] Is there a way to build a bike path into the pedestrian trail? 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.*
- 48 [unknown] What is the extent of the grade change on Pacific Avenue? *From 25th to 27th Streets.*
- 49 [unknown] Will the road grade change at the Foremost Dairy building? *No, not in that area.*

Meeting Wrap-Up

- 50 Sound Transit agreed to bring the following material to the October meeting:
- 3-D views of the project from the pedestrian level
 - Profile views of the project
 - Profile of A Street vehicle crossing with grade changes
 - South C Street pedestrian connection options
 - Right-of-way acquisition map
 - Map of the proposed non-motorized vehicle crossings for the entire area
 - Construction staging information
- 51 Mark asked that someone from the city or the PAC provide him with the current pedestrian and bike movement in the area.
- 52 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 people 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.

Meeting Attendees

Sound Transit Team

Mark Johnson	Jeanine Viscount
Melissa Saxe	Scott Danielson
Eric Beckman	Keith Nakano
Roger Iwata	Tom Wilson
Angie Thomson	John Elwell
Kristina Walker	Bruce Jamieson
Julia Walton	Steve Shanafelt

City of Tacoma Staff

Chris Larson	Lihuang Wung
Donna Slinger	Connie Corpez

PAC Members

Forrest German
David Boe
Jim Merritt

Jonathan Shadel
Darrel Bowman

Public Attendees

Jerry Lechner

Jori Adkins
Grace Pleasants

Whitney Rhodes

John Lewis

Rick Semple

Appendix A

Dome District Guiding Principals