



July 31, 2023

Ms. Julie Timm  
Chief Executive Officer  
Sound Transit  
401 S. Jackson St.  
Seattle, WA 98101

Dear Ms. Timm:

With decisions ahead for the Sound Transit Board on whether to open an eastside starter line and setting new opening dates for Lynnwood, Federal Way, and the full 2-Line, we are writing to request Sound Transit's commitment and intensified focus on ensuring that Lynnwood Link is well positioned for a successful launch as envisioned under the ST2 Plan. We are concerned the region may not be on track for such an outcome. With these projects nearing completion, now is the time to focus on whether the agency is in a state of readiness to deliver on the promise of an improved customer experience for our riders. We see multiple upcoming challenges that pose major short- and long-term threats to the mobility of thousands of residents across both Snohomish County and King County, as well as to our economic prosperity and environmental sustainability.

When we launch Lynnwood Link service next year, it is critical that we do so in a way that will promote and enhance ridership on Sound Transit, Community Transit and Everett Transit services. However, current plans for opening Lynnwood Link with only half or less than planned capacity threaten to impose inconvenience on travelers to and from Snohomish County, and associate light rail with negative riding experiences threatening the fulfillment of our core mission and commitment to voters.

A central responsibility of Sound Transit under our enabling legislation is to provide high-capacity transit service for our region that seamlessly integrates with local transit services. Community Transit has demonstrated a full commitment to this vision by preparing to truncate the roughly 30% of its services that have historically carried riders to and from King County at Lynnwood City Center Station, giving residents access to their billions of dollars of investment in congestion-free light rail. Next year Community Transit will also expand its Swift bus rapid transit network by adding the new Orange Line serving Lynnwood. These integrated transit investments are particularly critical as the Washington State Department of Transportation prepares for the 2025 launch of Revive I-5 construction activities, which will profoundly impact the movement of buses, cars and freight.

Our inquiries and information sharing with Community Transit and Sound Transit staff reflect that Sound Transit is currently planning to launch the Lynnwood Link Extension with 8 or 10-minute peak hour service frequencies rather than every 4 minutes, due to the construction problems that will delay access to the new Operations and Maintenance Facility—East, reducing fleet availability.

At the same time, the Board is considering the 2024 opening of a potential East Link Starter Line, duplicating existing bus transit services in that corridor. Our current information, which we request that you confirm or update, reflects that this doubling-up of transit service in that corridor would require the allocation of approximately 23 Link vehicles and approximately 30 operators.



We look forward to robust engagement with you and our Sound Transit Board colleagues to ensure our plans for launching Lynnwood Link and the potential East Link Starter Line achieve four critical priorities:

**1. Do not compromise the opening of the Lynnwood Link Extension in Q3 2024**

In light of industry-wide staffing challenges, ensure that LLE has the necessary resources to open in September fully staffed to provide the maximum possible capacity during peak commute times.

**2. Implement a Sound Transit temporary bus shuttle until East Link connects across I-90**

Provide Lynnwood City Center Station customers with increased service capacity and flexibility to address overcrowding.

**3. Prioritize added 1-Line rail capacity by January 2025**

Ahead of the full opening of East Link across Lake Washington, it is critical that Sound Transit focus its construction efforts on enabling non-revenue train movements across the lake so we can supplement peak-period 1-Line service ahead of the significant impacts Revive I-5 will have on commuter bus services. Guaranteeing the ability to add this critical capacity requires conclusive confirmation that a potential East Link Starter Line does not in any way constrain the availability of operators or train vehicles.

**4. Re-visit vehicle availability and storage capacity with a goal of increasing peak hour service**

While full service depends on access to OMF—East, look outside the box in the near term for creative ideas to store, maintain and deploy more vehicles from the west side to improve Link capacity on the 1-Line.

**Problem summary**

We requested a briefing from Community Transit on their service integration plans. We were disturbed to hear their concerns that 1-Line capacity risks falling significantly short of meeting projected demand. While Community Transit did not yet have access to Sound Transit projections that they understood to be fully vetted, their understanding is that projections for northbound peak hour loads would approach, and in most cases exceed, the light rail vehicle “crush load” of 200 per car at stations between Capitol Hill and Northgate. In contrast, Sound Transit’s established practice is to run enough service to keep passenger volumes at 150 per vehicle. Running with peak-hour crush loads that cause discomfort, impact boarding/deboarding times, and prevent some passengers from boarding altogether, would profoundly disincentivize transit ridership during a critical period. We request that you expedite confirming and sharing projections for both the afternoon and morning peak periods. These projections are critical for the Board’s upcoming decisions.

It is important to point out that these capacity problems affect riders who live in both in Snohomish County and King County in both the evening and morning peaks. Especially in the morning, it will be important for our King County colleagues to note that King County riders would be impacted most severely, since southbound trains from Lynnwood would be packed by the time King County riders attempted to board.

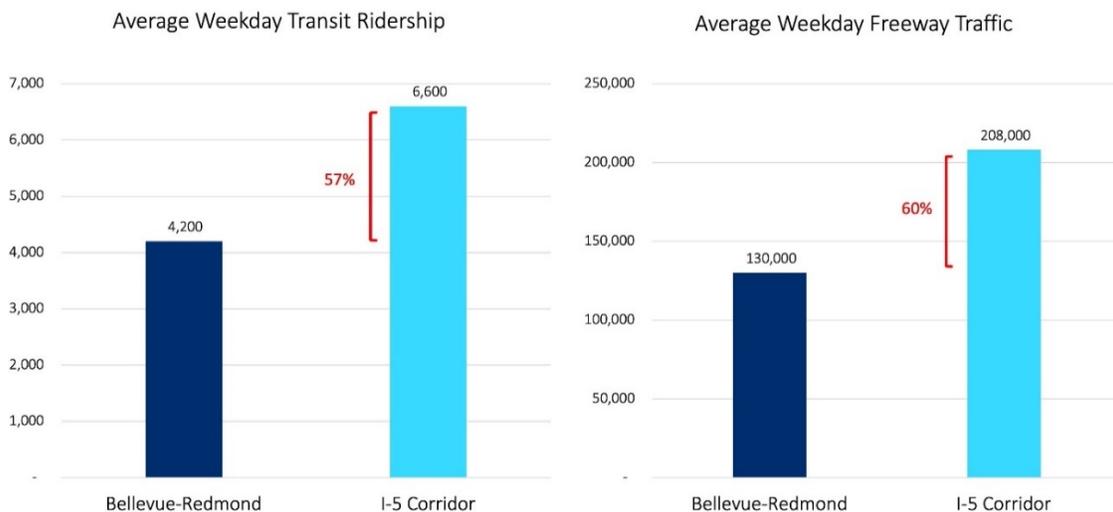


If we allow such conditions to come about it will represent tragic compromises to both Sound Transit’s and Community Transit’s missions and years-long efforts. In the short term, I-5 conditions would be worse due to our offering a greatly compromised transit alternative. Longer term, the public’s negative first impressions of Lynnwood Link and Community Transit network changes could undercut transit ridership for an unknown period into the future. People’s experiences would not align with their billions of dollars invested in a corridor that for many years has ranked as one of the most congested in the nation.

The solution is to increase peak-period 1-Line capacity as rapidly as possible, and before I-5 construction starts. To do this, we need to ensure both sufficient operators and vehicles to run additional morning and evening peak hour trains on the busiest stretch between the Northgate and Stadium stations.

**Appropriate prioritization of Sound Transit resources**

We are mystified by Sound Transit’s consideration of opening a potential East Link Starter Line outside of having offered firm commitments that it would not compromise the above-described interests of travelers from across the region, and particularly Snohomish County. The construction challenges that are delaying a full opening of East Link are frustrating for East King County residents, and if a starter line can be opened there without compromising critical 1-Line service, we are open to considering it. But it is critical for the Sound Transit staff and Board to recognize that the below projections reflect that a temporary service which doesn’t cross Lake Washington would see significantly lower ridership. Equally critically, I-5 faces much more dire traffic conditions than the corridor between Bellevue and Redmond, even before I-5 conditions greatly deteriorate during upcoming construction.



We again note that the starter line would supplement rather than replace current bus routes serving the same corridor. It would not represent the type of regional transit integration that is part of our mission and mandate under state law.



The overlay of expanded 1-Line service that we urgently request by the first quarter of 2025 would, by our current understanding, require moving from 80 to approximately 90 full-time 1-Line operators and approximately 16 additional vehicles. Our understanding is that opening the East Link Starter Line would require approximately 30 operators and 23 vehicles. We are interested in whether you concur with these assumptions, and seek your assurances that there is no possibility that implementing both the overlay and starter line could in any way come into conflict.

Snohomish County is in a state of readiness for Link light rail to reach our communities. We've engaged our communities and adopted plans to re-allocate local buses services with increased frequency and robust connections to Lynnwood, Mountlake Terrace, and Shoreline/185th stations. We've done this work enthusiastically as a willing partner to help implement the long-standing regional transit vision. We request that Sound Transit review this situation more deeply and provide a response to this letter laying out what strategies you are prepared to implement to ensure that Lynnwood Link opens successfully, adequately staffed and with sufficient capacity to meet expected demand.

Thank you for all the efforts you are undertaking to deliver the voter-approved program. We look forward to your response prior to the next board meeting.

Sincerely,

A blue ink signature of Dave Somers, consisting of a stylized 'D' and 'S' followed by a horizontal line.

Dave Somers  
Snohomish County Executive

A blue ink signature of Christine Frizzell, appearing as a cursive 'C' followed by several loops.

Christine Frizzell  
Mayor of Lynnwood

A blue ink signature of Cassie Franklin, appearing as a cursive 'C' followed by several loops.

Cassie Franklin  
Mayor of Everett