West Seattle/Ballard Link Light Rail Extension
Alternative Recommendations

Feet First, Washington state's only pedestrian advocacy organization, has been the established leader in working to ensure all communities across Washington State are walkable. A major program effort for Feet First has been our Sound Access for All Campaign, which aims to ensure safe and convenient walking access to the Sound Transit Link light rail system currently under development throughout the Puget Sound region. In addition, the campaign seeks to foster the development of vibrant walkable communities in the areas surrounding these stations.

As part of this campaign, Feet First has been heavily involved in planning activities for the West Seattle/Ballard light rail extensions over the past year. We have attended Sound Transit-hosted public events, including many of their station-area design charrettes. We also sponsored a well-attended Walk & Talk tour of future stations sites in West Seattle. This event provided an opportunity for walk attendees – including elected officials, agency personnel, and local residents – to discuss issues related to ensuring good pedestrian access to the light rail system and promoting pedestrian-oriented development.

Below are Feet First’s recommendations for the West Seattle and Ballard Link light rail extensions. In formulating these recommendations, Feet First considered how each station site alternative performs in regards to pedestrian access, ease of transfer between modes, and the potential for fostering the development of vibrant walkable urban communities in the area around each station.

Additionally, our comments include thoughts on possible opportunities to promote the development of vibrant and walkable communities in the vicinity of these future stations. We also include suggestions for physical improvements to enhance walking access to the light rail system.
Alaska Junction Station

Recommendations: 42nd Avenue Station (tunnel) or north-south oriented station on 41st Avenue (elevated)

At Alaska Junction, Feet First provides two alternative recommendations depending on whether local decisionmakers decide on a tunnel or elevated station (this is the only station site where two alternatives are recommended). Setting costs aside, a tunnel would be far better for fostering a walkable urban center. Elevated structures through urban centers block views and cast shadows that degrade the walking environment for those walking on the street below. On the other hand, $700 million is a lot of money, and a tunnel would do little to improve transit speed, reliability, or experience for those actually using the system. Regional decisionmakers must consider the opportunity costs in spending so much money on a tunnel. Furthermore, funding for the tunnel must not come at the expense of dedicated funding for active transportation. Specifically, none of the money in Sound Transit’s System Access Fund should be diverted to build a tunnel here or anywhere else.

Sound Transit has proposed three possible north/south alignments for a tunnel station, along SW 41st, 42nd, and 44th Avenues. The SW 42nd Avenue station is the preferred choice for a tunnel station. While SW 44th Avenue is closest to the existing Alaska Junction transit hub, it is at the far western fringe of the entire urban village. Among the remaining two locations, SW 42nd Avenue is the slight favorite, as it is closer to north-south transit service along California Avenue one block away. A tunnel station should include at least one entrance north of Alaska Street connected to the station via a pedestrian tunnel.

For an elevated station, Feet First sees serious problems with the representative alternative which would run an east-west aligned station directly above SW Alaska Street, dramatically degrading the pedestrian environment along the principal east-west walking corridor for the urban village. Furthermore, the east-west alignment hinders possible future extension of the light rail line to the south.

The north/south-oriented elevated station alternative along 41st Avenue reduces the impacts to Alaska Street, although a tail section of track would still cross the arterial. Moreover, a north/south orientation would better facilitate possible extension of light rail to the south. However, this alignment cuts through the neighborhood around Oregon Street at an angle which requires the line to impact the most existing housing of all the proposed alignments.

Although Feet First recommends the north-south alignment along 41st Avenue as relatively superior to the east-west Alaska Street station, we still encourage Sound Transit consider other
potentially less impactful elevated options, perhaps following along Fauntleroy as in the representative alignment and but turning south to a north/south-oriented station.

Feet First also supports several good placemaking ideas developed at the Sound Transit-sponsored station area design charrettes held last year. To facilitate access to a tunnel station (and pedestrian circulation within the urban village in general), Seattle should foster the development of an east/west off-street walking path running parallel to and just south of Alaska Street SW. Portions of this walking corridor already exist between California Avenue SW and SW 42nd Avenue. Another worthy idea was to redevelop Jefferson Square to include a park oriented towards the station either on 41st or 42nd.

**Avalon & Delridge Stations**

**Recommendations: Fauntleroy Span Station and West Side Delridge, South of Andover Station**

We prefer the option for Avalon Station spanning Fauntleroy Way. This option, which could be built as either an elevated or tunnel station, would provide pedestrian access to either side of busy Fauntleroy Way.
There are currently three proposed Delridge station alternatives. The representative location along Delridge north of Andover is clearly the weakest of the three in terms of distance from most important destinations and poor integration with transit service. It should be eliminated from serious consideration, except as a baseline against which other options are measured. Of the remaining two options, Feet First recommends the West Side Delridge option because of the closer connection with transit service along Delridge Way, including the new Rapid Ride H line which will begin service within the next few years. The 25th Avenue elevated station option is positioned just off of Delridge and would be less convenient and intuitive for those transferring between light rail and the bus.

There is great potential for transit-oriented development within the walkshed of the Avalon and Delridge stations. To better accommodate this development potential, Feet First recommends extending the boundaries of the current West Seattle Junction Urban Village as far east as Delridge. The Longfellow Creek riparian area should be maintained as undeveloped watershed, which would split the Delridge part of the expanded urban village from the rest.

The SW Nevada Street bridge across Longfellow Creek should eventually be closed to motorized traffic and turned into a pedestrian/bike-only bridge to connect these two halves of the
expanded urban village (similar to the 20th Avenue NE bridge through Ravenna Park). This bridge is currently one-lane only with a narrow sidewalk along one side; it is not particularly useful for auto circulation. Pedestrian-scale lighting should be added to the bridge to improve safety while minimizing the impact on the watershed.

The nearby West Seattle Golf Course should be considered as a potential site for affordable housing and other transit-oriented development. As a sport that motivates people to walk several miles per round well into old age, there is a lot to be said for golf. Unfortunately, the sport’s popularity has been in decline in recent years. According to the research firm Golf Tech, the number of regular golfers nationwide has declined from 30 million in 2008 to only 25 million a decade later. The number of rounds played specifically at West Seattle Golf Course has declined by 15% between 2013 and 2017. The only Seattle municipal course to experience a slight increase (3%) over this same period was the Interbay nine-hole course, indicating that time-strapped golfers increasingly prefer a nine-hole round that can be played within a couple of hours. None of the city-owned golf courses are financially sustainable without ongoing subsidies.1 If these trends continue, it becomes increasingly difficult to justify dedicating such a large portion of Seattle land to the sport.

Feet First’s proposal is to convert West Seattle Golf Course to a nine-hole course, with the northern half of the course converted to public park land around the Longfellow Creek watershed and affordable housing along Genesee Street. However, city policy prohibits any net loss of park land, the definition of which includes golf courses. Unless this policy is changed, replacement open space would need to be found elsewhere for this conversion to take effect.

SOHO Station

Recommendation: Shift the SOHO Station South to Connect Directly to Lander Street.

The current proposal would keep the SODO station north of S Lander Street, but perhaps shift the station south by about 300 feet to connect directly to a proposed new Lander Street overpass and the east-west sidewalk along the roadway. Feet First strongly supports shifting the station south, making the station considerably easier to access by foot via S Lander Street. The creation of a welcoming plaza at the Lander Street entrance would further enhance the pedestrian experience for transit users.

Feet First supports the development of a dense jobs center within a quarter mile of the SODO station. This center could improve conditions for light industrial and trade-related businesses

elsewhere in SODO by providing complementary retail and professional services. We also encourage the creation of an east-west off-street walkway along S Stacey Street, perhaps developed over time as adjacent parcels are developed.

International District/Chinatown Station

Recommendation: 5th Avenue Cut-and-Cover Station

The International District Station will be a critical transfer point between the various light rail lines radiating out to the rest of the region. Thousands of people per day will be transferring between the two Link light rail lines as well as Sounder commuter rail at this emerging transit hub. Taken together, this will be the largest transit hub north of San Francisco and west of Chicago. It is crucial that it be done right.
In terms of facilitating these transfers, the 5th Avenue cut-and-cover station option is the clear choice. According to Sound Transit’s own estimates, the estimated transfer times between the existing CID station and the new one is about one minute, while the transfer time with the other three station options all require an estimated 4-5 minutes. Additionally, a deep station here would necessitate deep stations further north through Downtown Seattle, which would be less accessible to street level. The 5th Avenue cut-and-cover option is also the least expensive, with a price tag $200 million lower than the baseline representative project.

**CID Station Transfer Times, 5th Avenue Options:**

![5th Avenue Options Diagram](image)

**CID Station Transfer Times, 4th Avenue Options:**

![4th Avenue Options Diagram](image)
It’s understandable that many International District business owners and residents are reluctant to bear the construction impacts associated with a cut-and-cover station, particularly after the many disruptions they endured during construction of the First Hill Streetcar. However, the clear benefits to transit system users takes precedence here. Generous mitigation and compensation should be provided to residents and business owners in the area as necessary to fully recompense them for any negative impacts.

Sound Transit should consider constructing the International District Station with a Spanish Solution (also known as a “Barcelona Solution”). This refers to a station layout with two railway platforms, one on each side of the track. This platform arrangement allows the separation of passenger streams by using one platform only for boarding and the other one only for alighting. The concept of separate platforms for boarding and alighting has been proven effective at stations with high passenger numbers such as is anticipated for the International District station. Doors for the alighting platform would open first by a few seconds, giving passengers a chance to exit the train before the doors on the boarding side open to allow riders to enter.

South Jackson Street is an important pedestrian corridor connecting the International District light rail stations with the surrounding area including Pioneer Square, the Sounder commuter rail station, and the First Hill Streetcar. Unfortunately, the section of Jackson Street west of Union Station is not a friendly environment for people on foot. Pedestrians are greeted by a sea of intersecting streets, narrow sidewalks, rushing cars, poor lighting, and a general lack of wayfinding and pedestrian amenities. In particular, it is difficult for pedestrians walking along the south side of Jackson Street to cross the closely-spaced crosswalks at 4th Avenue and 2nd Avenue in one walk cycle without running. Feet First supports the eventual reconstruction of this area to build a lid over the railway tracks below, widen the sidewalks, and provide easier crossings of all arterials.

**Midtown & Westlake Stations**

**Recommendation: 5th Avenue Alignment**

In theory, a 6th Avenue alignment through Downtown would provide a larger walkshed for the entire light rail system than the alternative alignment along 5th Avenue. However, the potential walkshed for the Midtown Station is impinged by I-5 and the steep grades rising towards First Hill. So, the expanded walkshed benefits of the 6th Avenue alignment are not so great as might be expected just looking at the map. A 5th Avenue alignment would allow for more direct transfers with the existing Westlake Station and the Monorail. Therefore, Feet First considers the 5th Avenue alignment as the superior choice through Downtown.
If a deep bored/mined station is selected for the new International District Station, the Downtown stations will also need to be very deep. If so, Sound Transit must install sufficient vertical passenger circulation capacity to adequately serve users, probably including a bank of elevators to whisk users to and from street level.

The Westlake Station will become an essential transfer point between the existing line in the Downtown Seattle Transit tunnel and the new tunnel. Therefore, there must be ample pedestrian circulation capacity between all permutations of transfers between the four platforms so that people can easily transfer.

Sound Transit should consider constructing the Westlake Station with a Spanish Solution, with platforms on both sides of the train to speed alighting and boarding (as also proposed for the International District Station above).

**Denny Way Station**

**Recommendation: Westlake Avenue Station**

Westlake Avenue is the best location, primarily due to the ease of transit integration with street-level transit service, including the South Lake Union Streetcar which has a daily ridership of around 1900 trips. It is also well-positioned to serve Amazon’s corporate headquarters and the Denny Triangle development.

The proposed Terry Avenue Station has intriguing placemaking potential. A light rail station here could foster the development of a vibrant street-level activity hub. The Terry Avenue site is also considerably easier to access from the Cascade neighborhood up the hill to the east, perhaps enhanced by eastbound escalators from the station to street level entrances up the hill. It’s a close call, but we feel that the transit integration benefits of the Westlake Avenue site take precedence here.

Whichever alternative is chosen, station entrances on both sides of Denny Way are recommended due to the expected high levels of foot traffic.

**South Lake Union Station**

**Recommendation: Harrison Street Station**

The SR-99 Tunnel’s North Portal severely impinges on east-west pedestrian movement within the South Lake Union area, presenting an impenetrable barrier between Mercer Street to the north and Harrison Street to the south. The siting of the South Lake Union Station should avoid these problems as much as possible. By this criterion, the Harrison Street Station is by far the best choice, providing a decent walking corridor to the Experience Music Project and the Gates
Foundation headquarters. Harrison Street is also best for transit integration with bus service on Aurora Avenue.

In contrast, Republican Street dead ends at the North Portal. Although Mercer Street is continuous, passing under Aurora Avenue, it is a poor pedestrian street—noisy, wide, and heavily-used by auto traffic. The poor walking environment is exacerbated by the use of adaptive traffic signals currently configured to heavily favor vehicular movement over people walking. This configuration results in long waits for people waiting to cross at intersections.

As a key east-west walking connection to light rail, all efforts should be made to foster development of Harrison Street as a vibrant and comfortable walking street. WSDOT has made a good start by incorporating edge landscaping along the north side sidewalk above the Aurora portal to buffer noise from below.

Feet First also supports the development of nearby Thomas Street as a neighborhood-oriented street as called for in the City of Seattle’s Thomas Street Concept Plan. Under this plan, all motorized vehicle traffic on the reconnected Thomas Street will be required to turn right at the future intersection with Aurora Avenue coming from either direction, while bikes and pedestrians will be able to travel straight across.

**Uptown/Seattle Center Station**

**Recommendation: Republican Street Station.**

A station at Republican Street has several advantages over the alternative on Mercer Street. The former location aligns with August Wilson Way, an existing walking corridor that may eventually extend all the way east to 5th Avenue N, providing an east-west walking connection spanning Seattle Center and extending west to the Uptown business district and the north/south transit lines running through Uptown. Mercer Street, by contrast, is not a favorable street for walking, particularly with the current programming of adaptive signals along the corridor that result in long waits for people waiting to cross the street.

There should be a minimum of three entrances to this station: one easterly-oriented entrance aligned with August Wilson Way, and two entrances to the west on either side of 1st Avenue N. The westernmost entrance on the far side 1st Avenue N would be the main point of entry to and from the Uptown business district and southbound buses operating along Queen Anne Avenue N. A half-block section of Republican Street between 1st Avenue N and the north-south alleyway to the west could be closed off to create a pedestrian plaza surrounding the westernmost station entrance.

The construction of this light rail station opens up the possibility of remaking Republican Street/Warren Avenue N into a Woonerf similar to Bell Street, an idea that found support at
last year’s design charrette. This street needs to remain open to provide access to the nearby KEXP studios and retail establishments along the southern face of the Expo Apartment complex. Feet First suggests converting Republican/Warren to a one-way street running clockwise around the block with an on-street parking lane along the north side of Republican.

High-volume passenger surges are anticipated at this station in conjunction with sporting events at nearby Seattle Center Arena. To facilitate these surges, Sound Transit should consider constructing this station with a Spanish Solution, with platforms on both sides of the train to speed alighting and boarding (as also proposed for the International District Station and Westlake Station above).

**Smith Cove Station**

**Recommendation: Prospect Street Station**

There are three alternatives currently under evaluation here, two at W Prospect Street and one at W Galer Street. The Prospect Street alternatives are preferred as they have easier access to the Expedia campus and Elliot Bay Trail via the Helix Bridge.
Ballard & Interbay Stations

Recommendation: Investigate Better Options Closer to Old Ballard (west of 15th Avenue NW)

There are two alternative locations currently under consideration in Ballard: on 15th Avenue NW or 14th Avenue NW near Market Street. These are both poor station locations too far away from the center of the existing Ballard Urban Village. Feet First encourages Sound Transit to revisit locating the station several blocks further west.

The Interbay Station will likely be located along 17th Avenue NW. Planning for this station should consider how to connect it to the existing Elliot Bay Trail and the South Ship Canal Trail, ideally plugging the existing gap between these two facilities. Planning and design for the light rail line should consider cost-effective means of incorporating trail extensions into project design (similar to what the City of Shoreline is doing with their “rail along the trail” concept).