

WOW Transportation Focus Group

Volume 1, Issue 5

Dec. 1, 2015

So who is this White Elephant soaking up all of our money?

Sound Transit is the non-elected government agency in the Puget Sound region that is focused on providing light rail at enormous cost to carry a tiny fraction of our daily and peak period person trips at some date in the distant future using regressive taxes to support the elite employees that work in downtown Seattle. **Light Rail does too little, costs too much, takes too long.**

Sound Transit is a creation of the Washington State Legislature. It is officially the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority, authorized by RCW 81.112.010 in 1992

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sound_Transit,

<http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=81.112.040>). The agency was put to the voters first in 1995. The first ballot issued failed; it was revised and re-submitted to the voters in 1996 with voter approval. The County Councils of King, Pierce and Snohomish Counties formed the agency in 1996 to provide high capacity transit for the region.

The 1996 ballot issue provided for the first phase of the system called Sound Move. Sound Move included three operating systems; Sound Transit Express Bus (REX), Sounder Commuter Rail and Link Light Rail. Sound Move promised light rail from the University of Washington at NE 45th St. through Downtown Seattle to SeaTac Airport in 10 years, or 2006. Commuter Rail was to run from Tacoma to Seattle and Everett to Seattle using the private freight rail tracks. The REX buses were to connect the suburban cities.

The tax rates approved in 1996 were 0.4 % sales tax and 0.3 % motor vehicle excise tax (<https://www.washingtonpolicy.org/sites/default/files/SoundMove.pdf>) which would raise about \$2 billion, allow bonding against the taxes for over \$1 billion, attract three quarters of a billion in federal grants and add some fares for a total program of \$3,914,000,000. This 1996 ballot issue promised 'sub-area equity', which means that revenues raised within a subarea is required to be allocated and spent within the subarea.

Sound Transit has its own taxing district that includes the urban areas of the three counties (http://www.soundtransit.org/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/about/stdistrictmap07_10.pdf). This includes the Cities and unincorporated urban areas within the Urban Growth Boundary.

Sound Transit is governed by an 18 member Board of Directors that are elected officials of the three counties and the cities within the district, appointed by the County Executives of the three Counties in a population proportional way, plus the Washington State Secretary of Transportation. The Board has 10 King County members, four from Pierce County and three from Snohomish County plus the WSDOT Secretary. Thus, it is a federated board of politicians elected for a local office (County Executive, Mayor or Councilmember of a county or city) and appointed to manage this multi-billion dollar agency to provide high capacity transit for the region. RCW 81.112.040(1) requires that at least half of the members from each county also serve on the governing body of a public transportation system. That is, at

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least 9 of the 18 members must be on a bus transit system board. King County Executive Dow Constantine is the current Chair of the Board; he appoints the 10 King County members.

High Capacity Transit is defined in our region as Bus Rapid Transit or Light Rail. The Sound Transit Board has chosen Light Rail as the appropriate high capacity mode for the core system.

Sound Transit soon discovered that the cost to tunnel under Capital Hill to serve the University of Washington was at least double their ballot issue estimates and that it would take much longer to construct. The plan was revised without a vote of the people and an Initial Segment of Sound Move was devised to serve Downtown Seattle to Tukwila with Central Link. The Initial Segment opened to service three years late in 2009, and was soon extended to the airport.

Sound Transit estimated ridership on Sound Move's light rail at approximately 107,000 daily riders after a startup period. Ridership estimates for the current 2015 Central Link light rail operation from Downtown Seattle to SeaTac Airport is approximately 40,000 daily boardings, about 1/4 of 1% of the nearly 15,000,000 daily person trips in the region. Extensions of the light rail line to S. 200th St. south of the airport and to Husky Stadium at the University are promised in 2016.

In 2007 Sound Transit went back to the voters to add more taxes for the second phase of light rail, called ST 2. This would extend the light rail transit line south to Redondo Beach, north to Lynnwood and east to Redmond through Bellevue using the I-90 Center Roadway to cross Lake Washington. The package was tied to a road improvement package called the Regional Transportation Investment District (RTID) in a single ballot issue. This issue failed at the ballot box in 2007.

Sound Transit returned to the ballot in 2008 with a ST 2 plan for transit only for an additional 0.5% sales tax increase to raise \$7.7 billion plus extending the original Sound Move taxes, bonding, federal grants and fares for an additional \$17.8 billion program. The measure was approved by the voters in 2008 and is now under construction, for an expected opening date of 2023 to Northgate and through Bellevue to the Microsoft Campus in Redmond http://www.soundtransit.org/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/st2/transitexpansion/st2_plan_web.pdf. Lynnwood, Redondo Beach and Downtown Redmond will come later.

Sound Transit now receives over \$2 million per day of your taxpayer dollars to plan, design, build and operate this light rail system to serve the businesses and employees of Downtown Seattle.

The 2015 Legislature authorized Sound Transit to go back to the voters in November 2016 to request an additional \$15 billion of your taxes to extend the light rail to Tacoma, Everett, Redmond and to add a new line in Seattle from Ballard to West Seattle through a new tunnel through Downtown Seattle (the existing tunnel will be at capacity with ST 2 trains in 2023) -

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the final project list is expected to be approved by the ST Board in the spring of 2016. The local agency wish list can be found at http://www.soundtransit.org/sites/default/files/project-documents/2015_0827_ST3_CandidateProjectsList_web.pdf.

We find ourselves with a mega-agency governed by local politicians appointed by central city elected County Executives planning and building a light rail system to serve the 9% of the region's jobs in Downtown Seattle at enormous cost to the region-wide taxpayers with legislative authority to ask voters for a massive expansion of their tax revenue.

In issue 2 we identified that Sound Transit is planned to get 19% of the entire region's transportation tax revenue and, by 2040, might carry 0.5% of the region's person trips (about 0.25% today). Meanwhile, the vast majority of taxpayers commuting to the other 91% of the region's jobs (spread out all over the place in a scatter diagram) and doing their daily routines are stuck in massive traffic jams. Who is in charge here?