



Seattle Light Rail Review Panel

David Cutler
Planning Commission, Co-Chair

Osama Quotah
Design Commission, Chair

Bernie Alonzo
Design Commission

Brodie Bain
Design Commission

Catherine Benotto
Planning Commission

Lee Copeland
Design Commission

Jay Deguchi
Public Art Advisory Committee

Thaddeus Egging
Design Commission

Shannon Loew
Design Commission, Vice Chair

Jerry Garcia
Arts Commission

Megan Groth
Design Commission

Brad Khouri
Planning Commission

Kevin McDonald
Planning Commission

Martin Regge
Design Commission

Ellen Sollod
Design Commission

Ross Tilghman
Design Commission

Michael Jenkins
Design Commission Director

Valerie Kinast
Coordinator

Nick Welch
Planner

Joan Nieman
Administrative Staff

APPROVED MINUTES OF THE MEETING

August 7, 2014

Convened 8:00 am

Adjourned 12:00 pm

Project Reviewed

Rainier Light Rail Station

Panel Members Present

David Cutler, Chair

Bernie Alonzo

Brodie Bain

Lee Copeland

Thaddeus Egging

Megan Groth

Shannon Loew

Kevin McDonald

Martin Regge

Ellen Sollod (excused at 11:45 am)

Panel Members Excused

Osama Quotah

Catherine Benotto

Jay Deguchi

Jerry Garcia

Brad Khouri

Ross Tilghman

Staff Present

Valerie Kinast

Nick Welch

Joan Nieman

August 7, 2014
8:30 am – 12:00 pm

Project: Rainier Light Rail Station
Phase: Schematic Design
Previous reviews: 12/5/2013

Presenters:

Cynthia Padilla	Sound Transit
Debora Ashland	Sound Transit
David Hewitt	Hewitt Architects
Audrey West	Nakano Associates
Barbara Luecke	Sound Transit
Paul Bennett	Sound Transit

Attendees:

Leah Ephrem	Hewitt Architects
Ayelet Ezran	SDOT
Tammy Frederick	SDOT
Jay Johnson	Hewitt Architects
Linda Mallin	Hewitt Architects
Tia Raamot	Sound Transit
Steven Shain	DPD
Chris Ward	Sound Transit

Recusals and Disclosures

Osama Quotah was recused. David Cutler and Megan Groth disclosed that they are employed by GGLO, which does work for Sound Transit; that work does not include this station.

Purpose of Review

The purpose of this meeting was to review the schematic design of the Rainier Light Rail Station. The Light Rail Review Panel (LRRP) approved the concept design in December 2013 with a vote of 6 to 3.

Summary of Proposal

Sound Transit (ST) is proposing to build the Rainier Light Rail Station as part of the 14-mile East Link alignment. East Link will run from Downtown Seattle through Mercer Island and Bellevue to Redmond. The Seattle segment is located in the Interstate 90 right-of-way. Rainier Station is located between Rainier Ave S and 23rd Ave S. The station consists of a long central platform, entry buildings at Rainier Ave S and 23rd Ave S, and ancillary buildings that support the station and the alignment.

Entry plazas at Rainier Ave S and 23rd Ave S lead passengers into the station. To reach the platform from Rainier Ave S, passengers will use a stair, escalator, or elevator to reach the west entry building and then cross the tracks at the platform level. From 23rd Ave S, passengers will move through the east entry building and down a stair or elevator to the central platform. Escalators are provided at both entries in the up direction only.

Summary of Presentation

Cynthia Padilla introduced the project, gave an update on the project since the previous LRRP review, and began the [August 7, 2014 presentation](#). Ms. Padilla stated that the permitting process for this station has been somewhat different because the station is entirely in the WSDOT right-of-way.¹ She oriented the Panel to the site and its surrounding context and described previous LRRP reviews of Rainier Station.

Debra Ashland elaborated on the permitting process for the station given its location in WSDOT right-of-way. Sound Transit is not seeking a land use permit from the City of Seattle. Instead, Sound Transit will apply for special permit from the City of Seattle called a Project Construction Permit (PCP), which would include electrical, structural, and other reviews. She stated that Sound Transit will consider all LRRP comments and feedback.

David Hewitt introduced the updated station design. The presentation began with the overarching observation that the design reflects the very different character of the two ends of the station. An aerial view showed how people will access the two entrances. Mr. Hewitt noted that a roughly 40' wide bus flyover lane will be removed.

The presentation then moved through the various elements of the station beginning with a plan of the east entry. Mr. Hewitt identified how the team has extended the covered area on the platform and used an overhang on an ancillary building to provide additional overhead weather protection. Curb bulbs proposed at 23rd Ave S will shorten the crosswalk and reflect SDOT's plans to narrow this roadway. Elevations showed glazed areas on the east entry, the area of which is limited somewhat by fire safety requirements.

At the platform level, Mr. Hewitt described changes in the canopy design. The canopy roof will hold solar photovoltaic cells. He noted that the eastbound and westbound train waiting areas are intentionally different. The sound walls surrounding the central platform step back in the current design, allowing for more landscaped area and increased visibility at the pedestrian track crossing.

A plan showed the Rainier Ave S entry, where a roughly 6" high concrete median was added to discourage pedestrians from crossing mid-block to the station entry. Mr. Hewitt identified a proposed new crosswalk just north of the eastbound I-90 off-ramp at Rainier Ave S at an existing signalized intersection.

Mr. Hewitt identified landscaped areas both north and south of the station platform. Sound Transit generally presumes that areas on the freeway side of the sound walls will be maintained by WSDOT and areas on the station/platform side of the sound walls by Sound Transit. However, the Sound Transit project area is not limited to areas within the sound walls. Audrey West provided an overview of the landscaping approach for the station. A plant palette showed plantings chosen for their drought tolerance and tolerance of freeway condition. At 23rd Ave S, the plant palette reflects existing

¹ While the City has limited permit authority over the project, the City expects that ST will implement the LRRP's direction. In those areas where WSDOT will not allow a particular project element, or WSDOT requires significant changes, ST shall report back to the LRRP about the change and the proposed solution.

landscape, including existing evergreen trees on the overpass. Along the east and west walkways, stormwater planters act as bioswales collecting rainwater from the rooftops of the western adjacent building and the eastern headhouse.

Turning to the art program, Barbara Luecke described projects at five locations:

1. The west entry zone, where a call has gone out for an artist who can look at significance of that area and the long west walkway to the platform.
2. A two-dimensional mosaic on the elevator tower at Rainier Ave S.
3. A small art project aimed at the nearby Lighthouse for the Blind and the blind and deaf community.
4. Focalized art at the platform.
5. Art at the traction power substation (TPSS) support structures located at S Norman St and in Mt. Baker under the I-90 overpass.

Mr. Hewitt added that, if it isn't removed, the column supporting the bus flyover ramp could be used by an artist.

Summary of Discussion

The discussion centered on a variety of aspects of the station design and its immediate context. The LRRP agreed that the east entry is one of the most successful parts of the design. However, the LRRP expressed that pedestrian and bicycle access to the east entrance needs additional work, as it is fundamental to the success of the station. Specifically, the Panel recommended widening the sidewalk on the west side of 23rd Ave S, not only given the bus shelter there but also to accommodate the heavy pedestrians and bicycle traffic on this section of the Mountains to Sound Greenway.

The LRRP did not have the same level of consensus on the question of a midblock crossing at the Rainier Ave S entry. For some, the proposed median and additional crosswalk south of the station at the I-90 off-ramp intersection was an insufficient response to the deeper underlying problem of poor pedestrian access at the west entry, particularly for pedestrians coming from the north, who must walk past the station entrance to the proposed new crosswalk. Others remarked that locating a midblock crossing where it isn't warranted can create safety issues; motorists often do not expect pedestrians crossing at midblock location. The design team also noted that WSDOT has several concerns about a midblock crossing in this location. While there was agreement that the proposed median was more likely to encourage than deter crossing midblock, some panel members warned that an even more prominent physical divider would only increase vehicle speeds on Rainier and make this an increasingly unpleasant environment for pedestrians. Given how the station is changing the urban context in this area, the LRRP felt the team has a responsibility to resolve these issues in the name of both safety and ridership.

The LRRP again expressed concerns about the safety of the east entry elevator at the platform level. In fact, the sole condition from the February 2014 administrative review of Rainier Station was to find a new solution to how the elevator connects to the platform level, since the current configuration left passengers far from where trains stop in a narrow, dead-end corridor. LRRP members felt that, if anything, the schematic design exacerbated this problem compared to the concept design by recessing the elevator and further obscuring sightlines to it from the platform. That said, a discussion of possible remedies promptly showed that each solution resulted in creating new problems for circulation. Recognizing the complexity of altering the vertical circulation, the LRRP reiterated that this remains an important safety concern.

There were several comments about the architecture of the east entry, the platform canopy, and its relationship to other station structures. Although most LRRP members found the entry at 23rd Ave S strong and resolved, some believed the geometry and roofline of the east entry was overcomplicated as it transitions to the platform level, specifically because of the juxtaposition of the entry's angled roof structure and windows with the vertical and diagonal beams. The LRRP suggested the canopy be more united with the architecture of the entries. There was also a recommendation either to study moving the signal house or, alternatively, to make it a bolder, more playful feature of the station in its current location.

For materiality and art, there were two primary points of discussion. First, the LRRP appreciated the choice of tile but was concerned it was overused, particularly at the west entry. They encouraged the team to use more variation in color and/or materials to provide visual interest for these long façades given their prominence and size. They also suggested using colors that are more vibrant as a way to brighten the area under the overpass. Second, the LRRP was concerned about the team's selection of artists after schematic design. They worried that the art would be fragmented and not thoroughly incorporated into and throughout the station design. The LRRP expressed concern that selecting the artists so late in design prevents artists from being meaningfully integrated in the design process.

Finally, there was interest in discussing opportunities for programming at the station. Some LRRP members expressed that it was a mistake not to explore in more depth opportunities for retail, specifically in the west ancillary building, either as a potential source of revenue or simply an amenity for passengers. There was a request for a follow-up conversation with the project team about the challenges and constraints around programming.

Agency Comments

none

Public Comments

none

Action

The Light Rail Review Panel thanked the team for the schematic design presentation of Rainier Station. The LRRP appreciated the design team assembling such a thorough presentation of the many challenging components of this large, difficult station.

The LRRP appreciated several refinements since they last reviewed the station. They found the landscape, views, and transparency at the east entry building to be quite strong. At the platform level, the gabion walls, sound walls, and landscaping are an effective and elegant way to break up an otherwise very long façade. Challenging large wall expanses notwithstanding, the LRRP appreciated the choice of tile, which they found a timeless material.

With a **vote of 5 to 4**, the Light Rail Review Panel approves the schematic design of Rainier Station subject to the following conditions:

1. Expand the width of the multipurpose path on the west side of 23rd Ave S from the plaza south at least to the junction of the Mountains to Sound Greenway to accommodate the bus shelter and the anticipated number of pedestrians and bicyclists.

2. Coordinate SDOT, WSDOT, and any other required agencies to relocate the 23rd Ave S signal pole out of the pedestrian and cyclist line of travel, recognizing that waiting cyclists should not have to cross the mixing zone to activate the pedestrian-actuated signal.
3. Improve east–west and northbound connectivity on Rainier Ave S. This requires addressing two issues:
 - a. Explore redesigning the median to be an effective physical deterrent. As currently designed, the median could be 1) perceived as an island of refuge for pedestrians and 2) a hazard to drivers.
 - b. Coordinate with SDOT and WSDOT to resolve the issue of the midblock crossing.
 - c. Make a final decision on whether the pedestrian flyover will remain.
4. Prior to scheduling a 90% design review, provide a presentation on 1) selected artist team, 2) the concept for each of the five art projects, 3) and the approach to art integration at this station. More broadly, the LRRP is very concerned about the inappropriateness of selecting an artist after schematic design since it precludes the opportunity for art to be a proactive and integrative part of the design process at an earlier phase.

The LRRP also made the following recommendations:

East entry

- Better organize the relationship of the windows to the procession at the east entry. Provide interior renderings of the experience entering and exiting the building.
- Continue to explore solutions to the safety and legibility of the east entry elevator and vertical circulation pattern, which remains a significant and unresolved safety concern.

Platform

- Explore differentiating between major and minor elements of the canopy to clarify and strengthen the intent to develop a delicate structure.
- Consider relocating the signal house to the north but not on axis with where pedestrians cross the tracks. If relocation is infeasible, make the signal house either a feature or an authentic part of the station design.
- Take care in choosing plant species for landscaped areas given Sound Transit’s policy to keep plantings under 36” and limbs above 8’ for safety and visibility.
- Explore adjusting the meander of the west walkway so it is perceived to be more direct, recognizing the goal of breaking down the long distance of the walkway.

West entry

- Continue to evaluate the height of the walls and landscaping to develop a strategy for humanizing this entrance, recognizing the challenges of locating an entrance under a freeway. At the next review, provide views of the approach to the west entry from the north and south.
- Consider how the columns supporting the vehicle bridges above might be treated, designed, and/or integrated in the context of the entrance.
- Explore color selection, boldness, and/or variation to enrich the articulation of the large expanses of wall.

The reasons for the votes against were as follows:

Panel Member Cutler: At schematic design there should be more information about the west entry and resolution of important urban design conditions. I recognize it’s a very difficult station, large in scale, and expansive in length. There wasn’t enough here for a schematic design review to go forward.

Panel Member Loew: I'm voting no due to lack of art integration, significant issues at the west entry, and lack of resolution of the canopy. I acknowledge that this is an enormous and challenging station, and there are many successes, particularly the 23rd Ave S entrance, which is quite strong.

Panel Member Alonzo: Paving an area under a freeway doesn't create a plaza. I appreciate the addition of the crosswalk to south, but overall urban connectivity is not adequately solved. If the response to that symptom is an inhospitable median, you might consider preventing people from stepping off the sidewalk in the first place.

Panel Member Groth: I'm very impressed with how it's been developed but am voting no because the conditions that we have identified regarding urban connectivity and the art plan are too numerous and too important for me to approve the project at this time.