



Seattle Light Rail Review Panel

Julie Bassuk
Design Commission, LRRP Co-Chair

David Cutler
Planning Commission, LRRP Co-Chair

Catherine Benotto
Planning Commission

Shannon Loew
Design Commission

Kurt Kiefer
Public Art Advisory Committee

Brad Khouri
Planning Commission

Laurel Kunkler
Design Commission

Perri Lynch
Public Art Advisory Committee

Kevin McDonald
Planning Commission

Tom Nelson
Design Commission

Julie Parrett
Design Commission/
Public Art Advisory Committee

Osama Quotah
Design Commission

Norie Sato
Design Commission/
Public Art Advisory Committee

Debbie Harris
Design Commission

Valerie Kinast
Coordinator

November 1, 2012

Convened 8:00 am
Adjourned 12:30 pm

Project Reviewed

Northgate Light Rail Station

Panel Members Present

Julie Bassuk, Chair
David Cutler (excused from 8:00-10:00am and 12:00-12:30pm)
Julie Parrett
Shannon Loew (excused from 8:00-8:15am)
Tom Nelson
Catherine Benotto (excused from 11:45am-12:30pm)
Kurt Kiefer
Norie Sato (excused from 8:00-8:15am)
Debbie Harris (excused from 8:00-8:45am)
Brad Khouri
Kevin McDonald (excused from 10:30am-12:30pm)
Perri Lynch (excused from 8:00-8:15)

Incoming Panel Members

Ellen Sollod (excused from 8:00-9:30)
Seth Geiser

Excused Panel Members

Osama Quotah
Laurel Kunkler

Staff Present

Valerie Kinast
Tom Iurino

November 1, 2012

Project: Northgate Light Rail Station

Phase: 60% Design

Last Reviewed: Nov 3, 2011

Presenters: Ron Endlich, Sound Transit
David Hewitt, Hewitt
Barbara Swift, Swift Company
Barbara Luecke, Sound Transit
Gordon Clowers, Department of Planning and Development
Gary Prince, King County Metro

Attendees: Debora Ashland, Sound Transit
Andy Engel, Hewitt
Fred Wilhelm, Sound Transit
Cris Bruch, project artist

Time: 8:30am – 12:30pm

Disclosures

Panel member Parrett works for the University of Washington.

Panel member Sato coordinated and completed artwork for Sound Transit's Central Link.

Panel member Kiefer's firm is working on a small database application for the Sound Transit Art Program. His firm has presented the appropriate disclosure forms to the Ethics Commission.

Panel member Benotto is working with King County on a TOD project.

Panel member McDonald is working with Sound Transit on its east link alignment and station planning.

Presentation

STATION CONTEXT

Gordon Clowers of DPD, Gary Prince of KCM, and Ron Endlich of Sound transit presented information on area around the station. The City of Seattle is developing an urban design framework for Northgate based on five urban design principles: human scale places; fill in the gaps; neighborhood connections; establish a neighborhood Main Street; and to buffer the freeway. The urban design framework will also include health and equity planning, and study both the entire urban center and the detail at the station and its immediate surroundings. The concepts for the urban design framework will be developed by early next year.

King County Metro is developing a plan for transit-oriented development adjacent to the Northgate Light Rail Station. Metro is working to insure there will be good connections to transit during and after construction of both the light rail station and the TOD. The TOD will include a new north-south street and bus layover on 1st Ave and south of Thornton Place. The first phase is being studied for the SE corner of the site, assuming a building height of 85 feet and 414 units. The remaining phases have not yet been fully studied, but Metro will be exploring concepts for buildings to fit within the zoning envelope of 125 feet. Transit service will be restructured for the light rail station when it comes online in 2021, and planning for that will start in 2019.

Sound Transit's elevated Northgate Light Rail Station is the last stop on a 4.3 mile extension of light rail, and will be the northern interim terminus until light rail is extended further north. The Northgate Station will open in 2021; Link light rail service will be extended to Lynnwood by 2023. Managers from Sound Transit, King County Metro and the City of Seattle intend to fully integrate the inter-modal transit facilities, develop TOD, and achieve ridership goals during and after station construction. Sound Transit is negotiating to build a shared-use parking garage on the southwest corner of the Northgate Mall site, west of the existing shared-use garage, before station construction begins. Also, Sound Transit is studying and prioritizing opportunities to improve pedestrian and bicycle access in the immediate station area. Sound Transit has adjusted the design of the guideway and station to accommodate SDOT's proposed cycle track on 1st Ave NE and is contributing \$10 million, to be matched by the City, toward the construction of a pedestrian bridge over I-5 and other ped and bike improvements in the station area. How the bridge connects to the station is yet to be determined and, in part, depends upon the bridge placement. At this point the station is being designed under the assumption the pedestrian bridge will connect at the mezzanine level at the south end of the station. The City (SDOT) is the lead on designing the I-5 bridge and finding the remaining funding to complete the construction of the bridge.

STATION, PORTAL and GUIDEWAYS

The design team presented the 60% design for the Northgate Light Rail Station and its associated portal and guideway. The station will be the end of the line until light rail is extended to Lynnwood, and includes track to store trains north of the station.

Portal and Guideways

The portal is at NE 94th Street, where the track emerges out of the ground and onto a guideway. The guideway runs at-grade within the WSDOT right-of-way until it rises and veers east toward the elevated station, crossing 1st Ave NE south of NE 100th St. The design of the guideway and station accommodates a cycle track along 1st Ave NE. The cycle track is being designed by SDOT and is planned to run along the west side of 1st Ave NE from NE 92nd St to NE 103rd St., then cross to the east side and continue as a multi-use track toward the north. The design of the portal and at grade guideway section screens the operations facility, and includes sound walls and an acoustical barrier along both sides of the track. There is a sequence of various wall solutions visible from 1st Ave NE, where the cycle track runs directly adjacent to the wall. The landscape is designed to appear as a cohesive whole despite the numerous property owners and the progression through a full spectrum of hydrological conditions.

Station

The station is oriented north-south along the east edge of 1st Ave NE, with the track floor cantilevering over the sidewalk. It spans NE 103rd St approx. 35 ft above grade. Since the last review a proposed parking garage has been added north east of the north end of the station, at the south-west corner of the Northgate Mall property. There is a series of open spaces along the east side of the station and south of it under the elevated guideway.

Since the last review, a mezzanine was added to the south end of the station, which can be accessed by stairs, escalators or elevators from the ground plane. The mezzanine now includes the ticketing machines and ancillary spaces and is 25 ft above grade. The ground plane consists of: a system of diagonal paths to splay the circulation through a rain garden and underneath the guideway at the southern end of the site; a rain garden which is defined by gabion walls and includes storm water detention; low vegetation and columnar trees, allowing good site lines; and a pair of angled escalator and stair structures connect the mezzanine with the ground plane and frame an outdoor room. The program under the station includes bicycle cages, lockers, racks, as well as an elevator, ancillary spaces, and a passage to the street. At the north entry, across NE 103rd Street, the entrance is at grade and connects to the proposed new parking garage through a small pedestrian zone that has not been fully defined. The north entry building holds the corner at NE 103rd and has vines along the façade. The station's mezzanine includes ticketing, restrooms, and a possible connection to a pedestrian bridge over I-5. The platform is covered almost entirely by an arched tensile structure roof. A windscreen is at the western edge, and is a continuous glass wall. The team is considering adding colored elements to give relief to the gray concrete.

The artists are just starting to work with the team to develop a scope of work and plans for design coordination.

ACTION (by Bassuk)

The Light Rail Review Panel thanks Sound Transit and its design team for its presentation of the 60% design of the Northgate Light Rail Station. By a vote of 0-10, the panel did not approve the design, and also expects to review the art, garage and north plaza again before 90% design review. The commission made the following comments:

Overall

- Develop a plan for the interim condition of the TOD site during and after construction of the station and before the construction of the transit-oriented development.
- Coordinate the design and development of the garage and the associated plaza on the mall site with King County, DPD and SDOT.
- Develop a physical model. Conduct more 3D lighting studies of the station and the station area.

Guideway

- Further explore the doppler pattern or other interesting pattern ideas for the walls that will be seen by transit riders.
- Refine the screening of the service buildings located at the portal. Choose a height for the screening that's most appropriate to the rest of the design. Consider patterns and layers as a method to develop screen concepts. Also, the service buildings will be visible from above, and through the screening, so refine their design as an element of the overall portal.
- Develop more detailed drawings and models of the at-grade section of guideway to express and explore design ideas. Study and refine the design of the guideway's transition points. At the same time, look at the full length of the guideway and develop a more cohesive language for it.
- Refine the design of the retaining wall; further study and refine the details and patterning.
- Consider all users on 1st Ave NE when designing the guideway and walls. Develop eye level perspectives from the perspective of a variety of users.
- Examine whether and how much additional space can be given to a buffer between the cycle track and the acoustic wall along the west side of 1st Ave NE. In places there is zero buffer which may present a hazard to cyclists. Work with SDOT to reexamine 1st Ave NE comprehensively to this end, with the goal to provide the standard 2-foot buffer.
- Further study and refine SDOT's cycle track design, including the track's details and transitions.

Architecture

- Simplify the design, especially as seen in elevation; it appears as a cacophony of pieces. Also develop a design that is more dynamic and energetic. For example, explore more verticality with the glass, rather than the sedimentary quality it now shows. The design as shown is made more static because the glass is very orderly.
- Develop a better, more unusual design for the roof. The roof design dampens the station rather than uses the tensile structure's playful possibilities to its benefit. Better connect the roof to the underlying structure. Study the horizontal and vertical planes and structural elements and how they integrate and create a rhythm with the roof forms. Consider how lighting could be used to attenuate the sculptural form of the roof. Extend the roof to cover the area over platform and stairways, anyplace where people are expected to walk or wait. Consider the roof's acoustics, and the placement of the public address system speakers.
- Consider the view from I-5. This view can be an advertisement for the station and for riding light rail. Create something more expressive.

- Make every effort to move the escalator north to avoid the triangular piece extending over the roadway. If it must remain in its current position, don't wrap the escalator that crosses NE 103rd St. It is an anomaly so treat it specially; don't just treat it like the rest of the building.
- The "dog leg" entry stair structures on the plaza could become more sculptural and inspirational to announce the entries into the station.
- The decision to turn this station into a mezzanine station creates another plane and space to design that has yet to be fully explored. The architecture for it seems too tentative.

Ground plane

- Develop a more unified composition for the open space; the design feels like a cacophony of pieces in the same way the stations feels disparate. The open space is an important spine along the east edge of the station, which must work with the station and, as yet undefined, future development.
- Retain the sculptural quality of the rain gardens.
- Refine and resolve the design of the escalators and stairways. The open space room they create is intriguing, but its design and materials are not yet fully developed and integrated with the station.
- Study and develop a design concept for the underside of the station and guideways.
- Develop the design of the garage facades and the associated plaza, and how they relate to one another, the station, and overall open space concept for the facility.
- Connect the plaza between the parking garage and north entrance toward the south, as one element of the overall series of open space along the east side of the station. Study how pedestrians will cross NE 103rd. Consider the desire lines to and from the station, and use them to inform the programming of the spaces. For example, the garbage area may be exchanged for a use that pedestrians would find more compelling and attractive.
- Add a modest bicycle fixit station.

Artwork

- Need to see art again before 90% review, as there is not enough to show at a 60% review.
- Integrate the art and the architecture; as of yet, there is no interplay between them and the possibilities are great. Artists should work more closely with architects so the art has as much dynamic presence as possible.
- If possible, increase the art budgets as they are small.
- Explore transparency in the artwork, and the interplay of opacity and transparency. Study the role of repetition in creating a form. Transparency and opacity are viewed differently night and day, so the interplay could be important in how the station is viewed at different lighting conditions. The artwork should amplify the dialogue with the form, and is not simply more repetition or too "coordinated" with the architecture.
- Enable the artists to focus on their tasks; allow the artists maximum flexibility in pursuing these tasks.

Panel co-chair Bassuk voted no, as did the other panel members, because so many design elements were either not resolved to the extent they should be at this stage, or were not sufficiently presented. She and the other panel members expressed doubt that the team would resolve these problems by the 90% review without an interim review. She stated the team needs to make significant changes to the design and present it again to the panel.

Panel member Harris voted no because, in addition to the items listed above, she saw a significant lack of unity in the design of the station and of the guideway wall. She stated that the amenities for pedestrians and bicyclists need more definition and resolution, and the team should provide more views from 1st Ave NE.

Panel co-chair Cutler voted no because, in addition to the items stated above, revising the design to include a mezzanine causes a big change to the perception of spatial enclosure at the ground plane and the character of the underside of mezzanine hadn't been developed. Cutler also communicated that the overall architectural composition of the station enclosure lacked a coherent, clear, and symbiotic relationship to the guideway and support structures; even at 60% design, it appeared to be, as other panel members stated, "a visual cacophony."

Panel member Khouri voted no because, as stated above, the presentation and the design are not at 60 percent design.

Panel Members' Questions and Comments

STATION CONTEXT

We need to know where people are coming from and going to.

There's the park and ride, and points to the north and east. 70% come from less than three miles. There are not very good walking connections across the freeway so many people who use the park and ride drive from northwest of the park and ride.

Will the parking garage continue after the construction?

Yes. It replaces the surface parking displaced by the King County TOD redevelopment. Simon, the mall owner, would likely build the garage. They would finish the design and do the construction. Sound Transit would likely lease space in the garage.

Is there bike parking at the garage?

Yes.

What are the interim conditions?

We're not putting parking back in staging area (the land would revert back to KCM for TOD development). We're expecting ridership to grow and parking demand to go down over the long run. The total number of parking spaces will be reduced from 1500 to 1200 as KCM builds out its TOD sites (currently park-and-ride lots).

What is plan if you do need additional parking?

We're working with Simon. Also, we're considering a RPZ zone to minimize spillover parking impacts and KCM will be evaluating providing more local service as they restructure bus routes when the station opens in 2021.

What pedestrian and bike improvements do you anticipate?

We're looking at the whole area to and around the station. This includes bike connections along 5th Ave, NE 92nd St., up into Maple Leaf. Sound Transit will complete an access study by next spring.

How wide will the bridge be?

It will be 12 or 15 feet wide. The City expects the Design Commission will review it.

The garage is a great solution. Can you build it underground? Or alternative solutions, like long term land leasing? What else?

The challenge to underground construction is a high water table. The mall is not interested in building an underground garage due to cost. Sound Transit wants the garage to be open before station is built.

Did you look at any other sites?

Yes. We also looked at the county's existing site, but it displaces commuter parking.

Did you consider retail at the street level of the parking garage?

Yes, but concern about viability.

What coordination is there between Metro, the TOD and the station?

Sound Transit design will be farther along, and the TOD will respond to it. KCM objective is to have bus facility by 2015. We want to integrate them well. The conversation among us is just now starting over the four block area.

The development near the station will be built at either 125 feet, or 70 feet or less.

Concerned about the awkward connections to the cycle track, especially at NE 103rd Street.

Consider the design of the parking garage. It will be highly visible.

Need a contingency plan for parking if the parking demand does not go down once the station is built.

The layover station is important and worth supporting. Think of the layover station as both a node and a buffer.

Consider an underground garage. Figure out other levers to get below ground, such as building a wider garage, which would be possible even with lower water table.

Remember the course of Thornton Creek as part of site master planning.

There is conflict with what this site is going to be; there needs to be a cohesiveness that we're not seeing yet.

STATION

What will the columns that support straddle bands look like?

Columns will be formed to reduce the scale and chamfered on all edges. The biggest enemy of the columns is their scale. We plan to work with them like on the Tukwila segment, where we worked a lot with them.

What is the concept and character of the stepped wall? Is it different textures?

The wall serves to screen service activities, and responds to the sloping site along 1st Ave. The wall panels are ribbed and capped at top with smooth concrete element. We are also using a gabion wall.

The choice of a gabion wall is a big one. Why did you choose it?

We wanted to create a layered condition. The gabion wall appears later on. This is the same strategy we used on the S. Transfer station, and throughout the Sound Transit system. And practically speaking, we've got a cut and a fill; we're using one expression for the retaining wall, and another expression for the cut.

It's appropriate to soften the edge through the walls and screens, but they need to relate to the neighborhood.

Who is developing the pattern on the wall and what is it?

It's an acoustical treatment, and only visible from the train.

Where are pedestrians and bicyclists along 1st Ave.? Their speed should be factored into design of the wall.

We've thought about them, through the proportion of the smooth piece to the ribbed piece.

The ancillary screen joint with the wall seems abrupt. It reflects a sudden change in material. It would help to add the screening in the images you create. I would like to see the idea of patterning along the length of whole long wall. We need more continuous thinking across joints.

Please note these are out of plane, so their relationship is different than seen in elevation. We factored in the cost and that the gates need to slide open. We also want to use screening vegetation, and follow our strategy of layering.

Can the screening go along the whole wall?

The cycle track takes over some of the space. We're tight for space, 12 feet in some places.

Provide more detail on transition points. Consider patterning along long distance of wall.

Like the idea of screening if the building is ugly. Put a pattern on the fence, make it a part of layering. Don't need complete screening. Use design judgment about height of ancillary equipment. Keep interest at pedestrian level. Incorporate the ancillary buildings as part of layering and design those buildings well.

The screening feels like a stock item that is oversized.

There is a wiggle in the wall. Did you look at a jump cut or stagger instead?

There is not enough room in ROW because of the cycle track. There are limits on retain cut. We are already developing a cantilever of the guideway and station to accommodate cycle track.

Look at transition points in the wall, and opportunities for more slipping and sliding of the wall. Look for opportunities to carry the language from one portion of the wall to another.

You've broken the long wall into parts, but by doing that they feel so different there's no common vocabulary. Interject a common vocabulary and make the wall read more as one piece.

Doppler could be a theme.

The story for the wall on the outside is not same story of the doppler wall on the inside. Look for a different story for the outside.

Study whether you could extend tunnel a little further north and under 1st Ave, and therefore could open up more room for the cycle track.

Take into account the perspectives of all users.

Are the power poles not shown?

We're relocating facilities, west to east.

This is 60% design, is there anything more to show than what you've shown? For example, we would need to know materials, lighting studies, patterning, etc.

Support the idea of tunnel under 1st Ave.

Need to study the human-scaled experience of a cyclist moving along the cycle track against the wall.

Produce some eye level perspectives with users and landscaping in space.

What is the plan for the 103rd Street crossing? A wider crossing? Raised paving?

There will not be a lot of pedestrian traffic, probably. The sidewalk is 18 feet wide at the corner; it is a generous corner. We are not sure if buses will be turning here or not. How the bike and pedestrian path is integrated, we don't know as it is not fleshed out yet.

What part of the glazing will the artist be working? There is a lot of glazing.

It will be a communal discussion with the designers. The original idea was a 250 foot wall on the platform. But we're going to be looking at the full site, the wall's transitional points.

Given point at which artists are entering process, I hope you can be flexible.

What is the rationale for the new orientation to the mezzanine?

In part, from your comments at the last meeting, plus we were influenced by decisions about including the garage and the bridge. Designing a lobby at grade was complicated.

What is the underside of the mezzanine?

It will be a finished ceiling, with tubes and mezzanine expressed and the lighting hanging down below.

Do you prefer one bridge or the other?

We have lots of questions that need to be answered before we can have a preference. Is this a transit only idea, or a neighborhood one? How to get bikes on? Wherever the bridge is, the character of link between landing and station should be simple.

We'd like to see more details of the north plaza.

Better integrate the roof of stair with the roof of station. As shown, they are abruptly different.

Provide some covering at top of emergency stair.

Reconsider the size of window mullions and rhythm. The artist can help.

Make the mezzanine level, forms/supports near the ticketing area curve to relate to roof on top.

Expect that the interim use of TOD is more than gravel and weeds. Develop some thought for temporary use.

Ask the artist for help with the transition points, screening issues, and colors. It allows their scope and pallet to be bigger.

Excited to see the bike facilities. How about a bike repair station?

Was Thornton Creek here?

No, but it was a swampy area.

What is the plant palette? Bring back idea of the bog within wet pallets.

We are contemplating using trees, vines and ferns, shrubs, groundcover, grasses, and bamboo. We are not going for the bog, rather we are developing a bracketed structured system in part that you can walk across.

What's driving the location of the escalator at the North Entry? Can whole escalator north move north?

The tail tracks and space limitations dictate the location of the escalator.

When did you decide on developing a parking garage? Fundamental design decisions could have had more time to gestate.

We looked at it this spring. In June, the Sound Transit Board issued an action for this site.

How realistic is it that the large tree near the garage is going to remain?

We're designing the garage to avoid impacting the tree. We can work around it.

What is the ownership of the plaza area between garage and station? What happens if garage doesn't go forward?

It is to be determined. We will rethink the pedestrian pathways if that's the case. We haven't determined the limits of the property. We will know about the garage by the end of this year, and will look at the King County west parcel site if that's a no go.

What is the height clearance of the angled escalator? Make sure you can see the signal head.

The height clearance is 20 feet. You can see the signal.

Describe a little more about the relationship between the rain garden and walkways.

They are level. Water will flow through the walkways. We are working on how the cells are going to be connected.

Be aware if the detention facility is above a vault.

Yes.

A desire line exists from the station diagonally across 103rd to the mall. But the garbage is there. Is there another location for that? That might be better for ground level retail.

The courtyard between the two angular entrances to the station could be a beautiful space. Encourage you to develop a design direction, define what it is, and explore how the enclosing walls are treated. The escalator entrances need to be more soaring and inspirational.

Between 30% design and 60% design, there has been a lot of change. What does 60% means? What does 90% mean? Where and what is changeable, like the escalators?

At 60% we've defined the major structure, program requirements. What we haven't presented are the technical documents. Some areas we're not as far along, like the wall on the portal, it's just not coming together as quickly. The escalators are not changeable at this point.

The roof should reach out and grab all of the ways to get on the landing.

The roof feels static and not expressive; it feels like a terminus. Include some variation in the rib and tensile structure. Could it shift and slide what it cantilevers? Is there flexibility?

Yes.

Who designs the ground plane connection to King County TOD?

It depends on King County. We want to minimize the impact on the King County TOD opportunity.

Where are the public spaces in the TOD?

We understand there will be a larger civic plaza space in the King County TOD. It could take a number of different forms.

(overall)

Pay more attention to interim use of the TOD gravel lot. Make it more than fence and gravel.

We want to see the garage and north pedestrian area prior to 90% design.

(ground plane)

The project feels like a cacophony of different pieces. It is not a composition. Would love to see the ground plane simmer down, and provide a more uniform base. It is disparate in the same way the station feels disparate.

The sculptural elements of the ground plane are wonderful, and the multiple paths are great, but then it hits doglegs of escalators. There is a desire line across 103rd from the escalator to the garage.

Create an urban village feel; make smaller, more detailed moves in the rooms around escalators, and in the north plaza. Add seat walls, ground plane edges, etc.

Further develop the underside of structures and the materiality in plaza.

Worried about the plaza in front of the garage. It seems full of voids and has no reason to be up there.

Consider the intensity of TOD site. The rain garden is an area to linger, rather than to just walk through.

Remember that the upper plaza is much higher than the ground plane of the station. It is difficult to get up into that space.

(station)

The roof's beauty has been dampened by the budget. Free the tensile structure from the underlying structure so the roof does the job it's meant to do. The value of it is gone.

Consider acoustics in a tensile structure. The speakers are loud; look at their placement. In center of barrel structure, they may be too loud.

Try to relate other areas of roofing and planning with each other. Same thing with elevation of forms, pick the vocabulary and go with it.

The station is right next to I-5. The roof structure is the statement to make. This is the thing everyone will see. Create something that is more expressive. It should do much more.

The presentation was difficult to follow, and the plans are fairly conceptual. A lot of what is shown is in plan. A physical model would have been helpful. Add images of the station on a gray day.

The whole thing is made more static because the glass is too orderly. Explore more verticality with the glass, rather than the sedimentary quality it now shows.

Why is one track covered by tensile structure, and not both? Both should be covered.

Disappointed that the escalator on north side can't be moved. It is an anomaly, treat it specially. Don't just treat it like the rest of the building.

(art)

Excited about learning more about the art. Seeing the art further developed at 90% review is not going to cut it, as that will be too late. We should see it sooner.

There is no interplay between art and architecture. The art budgets are kind of small. Work with the architects so the art has more presence.

The art and artists need as much flexibility as is feasible.

Explore transparency in the artwork. Study the role of repetition in creating a form. Hope artwork amplifies dialogue with the form, and is not simply more repetition.

Glass and color palettes should finger out and have a voice in other pieces.

Artists should focus on tasks rather than everywhere throughout the site.