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Mayor

June 30, 2022

Rico Qurindongo
Interim Director, OPCD

To: Seattle City Council

Re: Resolution 32055

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The Seattle Design Commission supports the City's efforts in Resolution 32055 and its recommendations to Sound Transit on which stations it should analyze as preferred alternatives in their Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the West Seattle to Ballard Light Rail Extension (WSBLE) program. We are encouraged by the City establishing five core values to inform its recommendations. These five values elevate the importance of the health, character, and identity of the City's neighborhoods in decisions that Sound Transit will make in relationship to project delivery, timing, and cost. We look forward to a broader conversation on how these values are implemented in station and guideway designs.

1. We appreciate the City's support for a West Seattle alignment that minimizes visual impacts of stations and guideways at West Seattle, Avalon, and Delridge. We also appreciate that the City supports refinements to a proposed Delridge station that applies equity as an organizing principal for transit-dependant communities located to the south and east.
2. We support decisions around a Duwamish waterway crossing that also emphasizes the protection and enhancement of shoreline areas by keeping structural elements out of the near shore environments and in the preservation and enhancement of shoreline public access.
3. We support an at-grade station option for SODO, as it promotes ease of pedestrian movements at this important transfer station. The SODO station will provide an important link to SeaTac Airport for West Seattle residents as well as for a transit-dependant employment base. Removing impediments to people using light rail at transfer stations should guide the user experience for all transfer stations.
4. While the Commission previously stated its initial preference for a 4th Avenue shallow station alternative in the Chinatown International District (CID), we also support further study of a 5th Avenue station. For both options, Union Station must be a transit and cultural centerpiece for the CID. The final decision on the location and characteristics of any station should be made with the utmost care, given how previous capital investments in the area have negatively impacted the identity and functions of this community. Prioritizing equitable outcomes in the CID that honor expectations for more significant relationships between public engagement and station location and design is warranted.
5. We are pleased to see the City's support for a 5th Avenue alignment through downtown Seattle. This alignment appears to provide greater opportunities for more successful station integration with the existing ST tunnel at Westlake.

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6. We look forward to a broader analysis on a future station serving Seattle Center and the Uptown neighborhood. While a station entrance on the Seattle Center campus could bring great benefit to the institution, the short- and long-term implications of selecting a station at Seattle Center are noteworthy. Construction methods and sequencing should be explored to reduce harm to organizations residing at Seattle Center. Without significant commitments by Sound Transit, a station at Seattle Center has the potential to undermine its unique architectural and cultural resources. A 1st Avenue and Mercer Street station has the potential to generate more transit-oriented development, with corresponding public realm enhancements, that would better serve transit riders. Similarly, significant attention needs to be paid to the construction methods for a 1st and Mercer station and their implications on traffic circulation.

7. We appreciate that further study of a South Interbay station is warranted. Any station and alignment choice must navigate a complicated network of vehicular, pedestrian, and non-motorized traffic, how station location supports and impacts nearby local and regional recreation investments, the relationship to existing and future maritime-based commercial activities, and its implications on development opportunities at Port of Seattle properties to the north and west. We appreciate that further study will occur to balance the needs of interests that do not neatly align.

8. We are pleased to see support for a 15th Avenue underground station. The station location and its orientation and integration with the public realm will spur transit investments that will help successfully integrate the facility into Ballard, given planned and future residential and employment densities at or near this location.

Sincerely,

Vinita Sidhu

Vinita Sidhu, Chair