



Northgate Station Access

FACT SHEET

Northgate Station Access — Frequently Asked Questions

June 1, 2012

Sound Transit is preparing to start construction on the North Link light rail extension project from the University of Washington to Northgate, as approved by voters in 2008. Construction in the Northgate area is scheduled to begin in late 2013, and the extension is scheduled to open for service in 2021. Northgate will be the first light rail station located at an existing transit center. Today the Northgate Transit Center serves more than 5,000 riders each weekday and includes 1,522 parking spaces that are fully utilized.

Who is working on Northgate Station access issues?

Sound Transit is working with King County Metro and the City of Seattle on an integrated access plan for Northgate Station that improves access to the station for all modes – buses, bikes, pedestrians and cars – and complements future development goals at Northgate. Following years of environmental review and community involvement, current work is focusing on final plans for mitigating the loss of parking during Sound Transit construction, as required by the project's federal Record of Decision (ROD).

What is the impact on parking and what is the proposed mitigation?

Construction of the Northgate Station is expected to displace 428 park-and-ride stalls managed by King County Metro over a period of about seven years. In addition, station construction is also expected to displace 451 parking stalls at Northgate Mall for which Sound Transit must compensate the mall's owner, Simon Property Group (SPG). In order to comply with federal ROD requirements for mitigating the lost park-and-ride capacity and to provide a way for SPG to replace its lost parking, a shared use parking garage is proposed with a total of 600 - 900 spaces split between transit riders and patrons of Northgate Mall. The preferred site for the proposed garage is on Northgate Mall property near the future station site. The garage would be built before station construction begins to minimize impacts to current transit users and mall customers.

What are the benefits of the parking garage after construction is completed?

Beyond replacing park-and-ride capacity and providing a way for SPG to replace its lost parking, construction of the proposed garage would allow King County Metro to convert about six acres of surface parking lots to transit oriented development (TOD) near the station by consolidating surface parking in a garage. Completing the TOD projects would, in turn, generate additional transit ridership for the Northgate Station.

Some have expressed concerns about an increase of park-and-ride capacity at Northgate. How would the proposal affect available parking?

Under this proposal there would actually be a net **decrease** of about 300 park-and-ride spaces at Northgate after King County redeveloped existing surface lots for TOD projects.

Over time, won't more people get to the light rail station by bus, bike or walking? Why not invest this money on these alternative ways to get to the station?

Sound Transit, King County Metro and the City of Seattle are working together to improve all modes of access to the station. Sound Transit is making a regional investment in building the Northgate Station with improvements including new and wider sidewalks and parking for 200 bikes. The design of the station has also been changed to incorporate other bike access improvements recommended by the Seattle Bicycle Advisory Board. The station will also accommodate a future connection to the I-5 pedestrian bridge.

King County Metro will rebuild the transit center to facilitate seamless transfers between buses and trains. Bus routes will also be redistributed to provide more frequent bus service to the station. The City of Seattle is considering bicycle and pedestrian improvements to also serve the station area. A cycle track along First Avenue Northeast between Northeast 92nd Street and Northgate Way is under study by the Seattle Department of Transportation. A joint grant application by Sound Transit, King County, and the City of Seattle that includes \$1.4 million for Northgate bike and pedestrian improvements and TOD planning, was recently awarded by the federal government.

What is the cost of building the replacement park-and-ride capacity?

Sound Transit estimates structured parking costs at \$30,000 per parking stall. Because the garage costs and use would be shared with the Northgate Mall owners, a conservative estimate would be \$13-\$14 million to build 450 park-and-ride stalls in the garage. The actual final use arrangements and cost of these stalls will be negotiated in the future, if approved by the Sound Transit Board.

Why isn't Sound Transit planning to increase the parking capacity at Northgate?

In the future, significantly greater numbers of commuters will access transit services at Northgate. Today's use by approximately 5,000 weekday riders is projected to increase to 15,000 by 2030. While Sound Transit is planning to mitigate the impact of light rail construction on existing park-and-ride capacity, it is not feasible to meet future transit demand at Northgate and achieve land use goals without shifting focus to non-driving access modes such as expanding rail-bus connections and pedestrian and bicycle access. City of Seattle land use policies do not support construction of new park-and-ride capacity within the city.

Why not increase bus service to the transit center during construction as a way to mitigate the loss of parking?

Sound Transit, King County Metro and the City of Seattle looked at this and other options but determined that these options would be expensive and may not be adequate to ensure continued strong transit use at Northgate during construction. A regional investment in a parking garage would meet construction needs and provide a long term asset that would serve transit users in the future and create other land use benefits for the Northgate area by accommodating King County Metro's TOD projects.

What is the urgency of reaching a decision?

The Sound Transit Board will consider approval of the final North Link project scope schedule and budget in late June. Northgate parking mitigation plans are the last major project scope issue remaining to be resolved. In addition, construction activities in the Northgate Station area are scheduled to begin in late 2013. Implementing a parking mitigation solution needs to begin soon in order for it to be in place before station construction begins.

Will there be a pedestrian bridge across I-5? Could this be built instead of a parking garage?

Possibly and no. While there currently is no funding to design or build a pedestrian and bicycle bridge over I-5, King County Metro has completed a feasibility study. The study estimated the cost of the I-5 bridge between \$16-20 million.

To move forward on the I-5 bridge, a lead agency would need to be identified and a partnership defined to develop a funding plan for the project. Next steps would include completing bridge design and environmental work.

While a bridge across I-5 would improve mobility options and enhance access between neighborhoods cut off by construction of the freeway, a bridge would not substitute for mitigating parking displacement impacts.

Has Sound Transit been “working behind closed doors” to come to a decision about what’s happening at Northgate?

No. The North Link project, which has been planned for over a decade, has had extensive public outreach including the most recent open house, which was held on March 21, 2012. Parking mitigation options, including a parking garage, were discussed at that meeting.

We always encourage the public to get involved with our plans and projects. In addition to public outreach, the three primary agencies involved – Sound Transit, King County Metro, and the City of Seattle – have been engaged in a year-long policy conversation about access at the Northgate Station. This Executive Steering Committee was suggested by policy makers as a way for technical project experts to develop consensus and recommendations on station design and construction issues, transit center redesign issues and TOD planning in the Northgate area.

Our next community meeting about Northgate is at 6 p.m. June 4 at Olympic View Elementary School, 504 N.E. 9th St., Seattle.