Amidst Worsening Climate Crisis, Advocates Unite to Stop Sound Transit from Delaying Voter-Approved Rail Projects

Seattle -- Advocates for the environment, climate, racial justice, and transportation came together today to oppose any delay in delivery of voter-approved mass transit projects, to call on the Sound Transit board to instead adopt plans that keep the schedule promised to voters, and create a framework to fill budget gaps and accelerate projects. Sound Transit is considering plans that would postpone construction of many ST3 routes into the 2040s, which would worsen the climate crisis across Western Washington, stunt our region’s economic recovery, and keep our communities disconnected from opportunity and each other.

We are heartened that some boardmembers expressed interest in a realignment plan that avoids delays and hope that effort is given the time and space to bear fruit. Rushing a vote in July just to delay projects and kick the can down the road does not seem the responsible and prudent decision. #ST3Now

“Sound Transit would be committing a crime against the climate if they move ahead with the proposed plan to delay the rail projects voters approved in 2016. Most carbon emissions in the Puget Sound region come from personal automobiles, and this means mass transit is an essential part of the solution to the climate crisis. Instead of locking us into a decade of delay, Sound Transit should work with state and federal partners to address financial needs and build mass transit as quickly as possible,” said Robert Cruickshank of the Sierra Club.

“Members of the Sound Transit board have stated they are just being realistic about our current situation, and the only option is delay. We believe this is ignoring the expectations of voters, the daily needs of families, as well as the more pressing realities of climate change full of smoke-filled summers and more frequent, deadly heat domes in our pristine region. Given that reality, ST3 delays — waiting another 20+ years for critical projects to Ballard, Everett and on the Eastside to be completed — are unacceptable. The current realignment proposal assumes delay as the premise;the only ‘realistic’ solution is to find ways to accelerate, not delay, these key projects. Sound Transit must consider all policy and revenue solutions to play a relevant role addressing the very real and worsening environmental crisis in which we now find ourselves and to meet the expectations of voters that need these investments completed much sooner than the 2040s,” said Jonathan Hopkins, executive director of Seattle Subway.

“A quarter of our population can’t drive. We absolutely must be expanding reliable, frequent and accessible transit options so that we can fully participate in our communities. We’ve waited long enough,” said Anna Zivarts, director of the Disability Mobility Initiative at Disability Rights Washington.
“The staggering climate emergency demands that we act quickly to scale up transit and tackle our number one source of emissions: cars. Instead, we see many members of the Sound Transit Board prepared to actively delay projects. We must turn back from this path. Cities around the region are planning around the rapid transit ST3 will deliver and hoping to transform from carcentric one-class suburbs to walkable transit-oriented mixed-income cities where people can put down roots and age in place. Delaying transit will have a domino effect, delaying good land use decisions and affordable housing. Let's build momentum instead of abandoning it,” said Doug Trumm, executive director of The Urbanist.

“We urge the region to come together to keep ST3 on schedule and scale up the climate response to meet the pressing need. June's record-breaking heat wave underscores how ill-prepared we are and how quickly climate change is bearing down on us. We can't set transit projects back a decade, and we particularly shouldn't do so in favor of plan revisions that put $1 billion in parking lots ahead of tens of millions in bus-rapid-transit that will connect people to light rail,” said Alice Lockhart with 350 Seattle, a climate justice organization.

“The Graham Street Station and 130th Street Station are urgently needed for our disabled community members. Disabled individuals need more transit options. For a transit agency to start utilizing new trains and then decide to put off fixing and adapting the platforms to 4 years or greater is absurd. Those modifications need to be implemented at the time the new light rails trains are in place,” said Kristina Sawyckyj, Disability & Access Officer at the Transit Riders Union.

“The Graham Street neighborhood is a community that Sound Transit has historically ignored. We have been working together for years with the South Communities Organizing for Racial and Regional Equity and Graham Street Community Action Team in supporting the inclusion of Graham Street in Sound Transit 3. It would be disappointing to see Graham Street station significantly delayed because our community partners have been waiting for the station for a long time. There are many community anchors that have been waiting for the connections and opportunities that come with the light rail. In 2018, the Graham Street Community Action Team created a shared neighborhood vision for an equitable transit-oriented development around the future light rail station. Our long-term goal has always been to plan early, take land out of speculation, create community capacity for local development, and launch community projects that work together to create a vibrant and resilient transit-oriented neighborhood,” said Abdi Yussuf, equitable development organizer with Puget Sound Sage.

“Few things are more important than accelerating the delivery of alternatives to car-based commutes. We urge the Sound Transit Board to consider an alternative proposal that fully delivers for people and communities across the Puget Sound region, supports a vibrant and inclusive economy, and meets the moment to address our global climate crisis head on by keeping these critical transit projects on track and on time,” said Alex Hudson, executive director of Transportation Choices Coalition.
“Instead of speeding up to lock-in a six-year delay, we should be slowing down to keep the Everett Link Extension on-time. For too long Everett has paid into the system with minimum benefit. Another six-year delay to ST3 would not just be another six years without light rail service, it’d be a lost opportunity to grow our economy year-over-year through transit-oriented development, to address housing affordability, and to address climate change. It’s time to slow this train down so ST3 can come in on time,” said Brock Howell, executive director of Everett Station District Alliance.

“Let’s not rush into delay. Puget Sound voters overwhelmingly supported Sound Transit 3 in 2016 and it’s timeline to deliver real, tangible benefits to their lives. Light rail to Redmond is only as useful as the network it connects into. Every day of delay on connections to Snohomish, Pierce, and South King County means another grinding commute to Redmond. Redmond commuters and voters want our leaders to look for creative solutions to deliver projects on schedule. With potential new funding sources on the horizon and a region in the midst of an economic rebound, let’s not rush into making a decision to delay and jeopardize voters’ trust,” said Kirk Hovenkotter, executive director of Move Redmond.

“The people of Pierce County have long waited for their turn in ST3. High ridership of Sound Transit express buses in the South Sound during the COVID-19 pandemic only emphasized the clear need for more and better options for Pierce County commuters. Delay serves to further alienate Pierce County voters, whereas working to deliver the Tacoma Dome Link Extension on time shows a needed commitment to Pierce County and repairing trust. Pierce County deserves equal resources and consideration as King County,” said Tracy Oster, executive director of Downtown: On the Go!

“Bellevue is a city that has greatly benefited from our region’s growth and prosperity. Our days of being a sleepy bedroom community are long behind us - we are a bona fide urban center, and our residents (both present and future) deserve a transportation system that reflects that. ST3 projects, such as new Bellevue light rail stations and regional connections via bus rapid transit, will help ensure the city’s growth occurs in sustainable and equitable ways. The proposed project delays jeopardize Bellevue’s vision of a transit-oriented future and put us at risk of repeating the mistakes of our car-oriented past,” said Chris Randels, founder and chair of Complete Streets Bellevue.

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