

PIERCE COUNTY

Office of the County Council



Dow Constantine
Board of Directors Chair
Sound Transit
Transmitted Via Electronic Mail

March 8, 2023

Re: Delays in light rail connection (ST3) to Pierce County

Dear Chair Constantine & Members of the Sound Transit Board of Directors,

The Pierce County Council is writing to express our strong frustration related to additional delays in getting a light rail connection from King County to Fife and Tacoma - commonly referred to as the Tacoma Dome Light Rail Extension (TDLE). Pierce County residents are paying Sound Transit (ST) taxes and have been for years and we require transportation options to get people to opportunity sooner rather than later.

After a light rail connection was promised to voters of the South Sound, they are in waiting again for another 3 years to 2035. Considering this recent delay, we believe Sound Transit must work to provide improved transportation options to the South Sound now. One in four Pierce County workers travel to other counties for employment each day, and of those, more than 80 percent head north to work in King and Snohomish counties. This adds well over a hundred thousand drivers to the I-5 corridor.

Light rail is a vital connection for Pierce County, but in the absence of that connection, our view is Sound Transit needs to prioritize solutions for public transportation in the South Sound. Initial options we have identified as potential relief points include:

- Increasing opportunities for people to use Sounder Commuter Rail services throughout Pierce County with more daily train runs serving the South Sound. Additional trips through the ST3 funded Sounder improvement plan or redistributing existing trips will require negotiations and approval from Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railroad. We urge Sound Transit to prioritize bringing more frequent Sounder trips to the South Sound as quickly as possible (and deprioritize increasing the capacity of Sounder trains at this time). We urge BNSF to enter these negotiations in good faith to expand regional Sounder rail service and we are ready to support ST in these discussions.
- An extension of Sounder Commuter Rail services to DuPont as quickly as possible.
- Increasing ground transportation options with an expansion of the span and frequency of express bus route services between Pierce County and King County points of interest. We are encouraged that sound transit funded more bus service to and from Pierce County during the pandemic as those routes continued to have the highest ridership in the system. Due to the national operator shortage those service increases have not been realized. Sound Transit should continue to work in earnest with Pierce Transit and their local operator partners to address the driver shortage and implement increased bus service to the South Sound.
- Partnering with Pierce Transit (PT) to increase point-to-point transportation options like dial-a-lift or the PT runner to connect to Sound Transit express bus service stations and Sounder train stations. ST should focus on partnering with communities in their taxing district with no local bus service connecting to ST services, namely Sumner and Orting.

We understand issues arise in projects, especially one in the size and scope of ST3; however, that does not change the fact Pierce County residents need and deserve reliable transportation through the Puget Sound region. Given these needs and the promise of light rail connection, we respectfully request you prioritize improving regional public transportation through the South Sound through these other modes and ideas we have identified as you work to implement TDLE as quickly as possible.

We write this in the spirit of cooperation and urgency for the need of transit options our region requires for its competitiveness and livability. Please do not hesitate to reach out if further discussions may be of assistance.

Best,

Ryan N. Mello
Chair, Pierce County Council