

May 22, 2012

Chair Pat McCarthy and members of the Sound Transit Board of Directors
401 S Jackson Street
Seattle, Washington 98104

Dear Chair McCarthy,

As a coalition of Northgate neighborhood leaders and advocacy organizations, we write to express our concern about the direction Sound Transit is taking on a planned parking garage at Northgate with little public engagement. With such little transparency and input in the planning, we are worried that the agency may not be considering all options available that could better mitigate the temporary loss of parking, increase ridership, and realize the community's vision for Northgate.

To our knowledge, there has been no public presentation or release of the proposed size of a parking structure at Northgate. Based on limited information we have been able to gather, we understand that Sound Transit is proposing a permanent 900-stall parking garage on the southwest corner of the mall property owned by the Simon Property Group. Given this limited information on the proposal, our coalition believes this approach to the Northgate Link Light Rail Station is unlikely to fit the City of Seattle's and the neighborhood's vision, or to align with the regional need for equitably accommodating growth by building healthy communities. Instead of constructing a permanent 900-stall parking garage, our coalition believes Sound Transit should work collaboratively with all stakeholders to find a more creative solution to the temporary need to accommodate displaced parking that will more directly meet the community's vision.

Northgate represents a unique opportunity to transform a traditionally auto-dominated neighborhood into a more walkable, bikeable, and transit-oriented community with greater access to retail, grocery stores, medical services, schools, libraries, parks, and more. Vision 2040 and the Regional Growth Strategy identify Northgate as an important place to accommodate some of the 1.5 million new people projected to live in the region by 2040. With the construction of the new Link Light Rail station and acres of underutilized land, Northgate has a real opportunity to transform into a complete community for thousands of new residents and to benefit the surrounding neighborhoods. Sound Transit's funding priorities at Northgate can help or hinder this future.

The Maple Leaf Community Council uses the phrase, "Community-Oriented Transit Development." This phrase captures the vision of a complete, compact, and connected community. The phrase evokes the notion of keeping past agreements made with the existing community and following a process for community engagement. Unfortunately, we are worried Sound Transit may be falling short of these goals.

We are concerned that a \$40 million, 900-stall parking garage will not realize this vision of "Community-Oriented Transit Development." Rather than investing in the neighborhood's and region's vision for building a vibrant place, our understanding is that Sound Transit plans to build a permanent auto-centric structure for a temporary problem.

The parking garage would adversely affect the community's vision for its future.

Currently, most of the people who park at the Northgate Transit Center live within a 3-mile radius. The 900-stall garage would increase the number of people who drive rather than encouraging more people to walk, bike, ride, and live at Northgate. As a result, the garage could be an opportunity cost in terms of both public dollars and physical space that should be used more efficiently to build a vibrant community and increase Link ridership.

We compliment Sound Transit for already designing the station to accommodate a pedestrian-bicycle bridge across Interstate-5 from North Seattle Community College (NSCC) and UW Medicine directly into the station. We believe funding the bridge should be a top priority. Both the North 92nd Street and the Northgate Way crossings are on the outer edge of what is considered “walkable.” Providing direct access from the station to the west side of I-5 will reunite the neighborhoods and provide station access to thousands of potential light rail riders, including the nearly 7,000 students, faculty, and staff who attend and work at NSCC. The bridge is fundable right now as it was listed as a priority in the 2006 Northgate Coordinated Transportation Investment Plan (CTIP), for which a final environmental impact study was approved in 2009.

In addition to the pedestrian-bicycle bridge, there are many other transportation-related projects in the Northgate Urban Center and Commercial Core that could increase transit ridership significantly more than a parking garage and minimize impacts. These projects include improving bus service headways, building bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, preventing toxic runoff from roads and parking lots, creating more transit access through increased residential and commercial development, and including housing that’s affordable to people who work in the area.

A shift in investments will require a shift in how Sound Transit coordinates its work with Seattle Department of Transportation, Seattle Department of Planning and Development, King County Metro, Puget Sound Regional Council, and the Federal Transit Authority (FTA). For example, the City of Seattle is currently in the process of making several policy decisions that could affect the Northgate area, including a regulatory reform package, comprehensive plan update, and policy adoptions from the Northgate Transit-Oriented Development Urban Study. Sound Transit should make sure that any investment made will align well with the City’s efforts over time through a public and transparent process.

To start shifting how it coordinates its work, increase transparency, and make sure the project fits **the city’s and community’s vision, we recommend Sound Transit take three early actions:**

- If necessary, request from the FTA a waiver from the 1-for-1 replacement parking requirements that affect whether additional permanent parking is built for a temporary problem.
- Commit to funding a substantial percentage of the construction costs of the pedestrian-bicycle bridge and convene a task force of the local agencies, WSDOT, NSCC, UW Medicine, local business and property owners, community leaders, and advocacy organizations to begin a transparent process for designing and building the bridge.
- Work with the Simon Properties Group to address the mall’s needs and contractual obligations for parking monetary compensation, shared parking, and priced parking; and create a plan for

phasing a garage structure's uses to adapt overtime to the neighborhood vision and needs for parking and mixed-use development.

As Sound Transit moves forward at Northgate, the agency should stay committed to the agency's "Transit-Oriented Development Strategic Plan" and to a transparent community engagement process as set forth in the Northgate CTIP. In addition, Sound Transit should align its efforts with the planning efforts of the City of Seattle for transit-oriented development and the neighborhood.

The community and advocacy groups are excited by the potential for Sound Transit's extension of Link Light Rail to Northgate and later to Lynnwood, and we are lined-up in support of the transformation of Northgate. We call on Sound Transit to more immediately embrace a transparent process that helps Northgate support Community-Oriented Transit Development.

Sincerely,

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Cascade Bicycle Club

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