

Center City Connector
Seattle, Washington
Small Starts Project Development
(Rating Assigned November 2019)

Summary Description	
Proposed Project:	Streetcar 1.3 Miles, 4 Stations
Total Capital Cost (\$YOE):	\$285.51 Million
Section 5309 CIG Share (\$YOE):	\$74.99 Million (26.3%)
Annual Operating Cost (opening year 2026):	\$10.41 Million
Current Year Ridership Forecast (2014):	11,000 Daily Linked Trips 3,452,100 Annual Linked Trips
Horizon Year Ridership Forecast (2035):	20,100 Daily Linked Trips 6,338,400 Annual Linked Trips
Overall Project Rating:	High
Project Justification Rating:	Medium-High
Local Financial Commitment Rating:	High

Project Description: The City of Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) proposes a streetcar to link the existing South Lake Union Streetcar and the First Hill Streetcar lines. The line is planned to operate in mixed traffic for 0.4 miles and in an exclusive streetcar lane for 0.9 miles. The project includes a turn-around track, relocation of an existing station, modifications to another existing station, the purchase of 10 low-floor streetcars with off-wire operating capabilities, and expansion of the existing operation and maintenance facility. The project also includes transit signal priority and queue-jumps; intersection and sidewalk improvements; and off-board fare collection systems. The service is planned to operate every five minutes during daytime hours on weekdays and weekends. During both weekday and weekend evenings, service is planned to operate every 7.5 minutes.

Project Purpose: The project is intended to improve transit service quality and reliability downtown and to support local circulation for people arriving in the Center City on bus routes, bus rapid transit lines, regional light rail, commuter rail lines, passenger ferries, and streetcars. The project provides connections with Amtrak and intercity bus services, and serves relatively dense development, including both employment and residential uses.

Project Development History, Status and Next Steps: The project entered Small Starts Project Development in July 2014. The City selected a locally preferred alternative in July 2014, which was added to the region's fiscally constrained long range transportation plan in November 2014. The City completed the environmental review process with receipt of a Finding of No Significant Impact from FTA in February 2017. The City anticipates receipt of a Small Starts Grant Agreement in early 2022, and the start of revenue service in March 2026.

Significant Changes Since Last Evaluation (November 2018): The capital cost increased from \$252.17 million to \$285.51 million based on increased escalation costs due to an extended project schedule. The CIG funding request remained the same, and the CIG share decreased from 42.4 to 26.3 percent.

Locally Proposed Financial Plan

<u>Source of Funds</u>	<u>Total Funds (\$million)</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>
Federal:		
Section 5309 Small Starts	\$74.99	26.3%
FHWA Flexible Funds (Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Program)	\$7.30	2.6%
Section 5339 Alternatives Analysis	\$0.90	0.3%
Local:		
City of Seattle Municipal General Obligation Bonds	\$136.33	47.7%
City of Seattle Municipal Utility Reimbursement Revenues	\$64.99	22.8%
Seattle City Light Cash Contribution	\$1.00	0.3%
Total:	\$285.51	100.0%

NOTE: The financial plan reflected in this table has been developed by the project sponsor and does not reflect a commitment by DOT or FTA. The sum of the figures may differ from the total as listed due to rounding.

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LAND USE RATING: High

The land use rating reflects population density within one-half mile of proposed stations, employment served by the line, and the share of legally binding affordability restricted (LBAR) housing in the station areas compared to the share in the surrounding county.

- Average population density across all station areas is 19,100 persons per square mile, which rates High on FTA benchmarks. Total corridor employment is 196,000, which corresponds to a Medium-High rating. On-street parking in the core central business district (CBD) area averages \$26 per day, corresponding to a High rating per FTA benchmarks. The ratio of the proportion of LBAR housing units within proposed station areas to the proportion in the county served by the project is 7.45, rating High by FTA benchmarks.
- The Center City Connector corridor, which essentially encompasses downtown Seattle, is lined with high-density development including mid- to high-rise mixed-use office and residential buildings. Existing land uses along the corridor include office buildings, parking garages, retail stores/services, hotels, government services, multifamily residential, and civic, cultural, and entertainment uses. Many of the buildings are mixed-use, with ground floor retail. In the outer parts of the corridor, away from the downtown core, there are also some warehouses, surface parking lots, and a small amount of vacant land.
- The pedestrian environment is well developed throughout the corridor, with nearly complete sidewalk coverage as well as marked and signalized pedestrian crossings.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RATING: High

Transit-Supportive Plans and Policies: High

- *Transit-Supportive Corridor Policies:* Seattle has a very strong planning emphasis on transit-oriented and compact development. The City's current comprehensive plan (2005) directs the majority of growth to Urban Centers and Urban Villages, with the greatest percentage of that growth directed at the Urban Centers of greater downtown. The percentages could be further increased per the draft comprehensive plan update that is expected to be adopted in mid-2016. Neighborhood plans support high densities along the alignment and include various recommendations for pedestrian and streetscape improvements. Seattle's Design Review Guidelines address the downtown streetscape to reinforce positive urban form and a strong pedestrian environment. The City has continued to program capital improvements to address pedestrian deficiencies. Parking policies include residential permit zones, on-street priced parking, and prioritizing curb space for transit.
- *Supportive Zoning Regulations Near Transit Stations:* The Center City Connector passes through some of the city's most intensively zoned land use districts. Base floor area ratios (FAR) typically range from three to seven in the corridor, but these can be increased to as much as five to 20 through the use of incentives and transfer of development rights. Seattle makes extensive use of incentive zoning; bonus FAR can be provided for public amenities such as rail transit station access, pedestrian improvements, open space, affordable housing, child care facilities, human services, and green street improvements, and uses such as residential and ground-floor retail are often exempted from FAR calculations. The downtown land use code also relies upon location-specific overlays to regulate street level uses and building design attributes. Parking maximums are in place for all non-residential development at one parking space per 1,000 square feet.
- *Tools to Implement Land Use Policies:* Regional and local government agencies have been leading transit-supportive planning and outreach for some time. These efforts have included station area planning efforts led by Sound Transit and the City of Seattle for the existing and planned light rail system. Seattle has a multifamily tax exemption program that can be applied for developments with an affordable housing component in transit station areas. A plan-level environmental impact review can be conducted for major projects to streamline state-level review requirements.

Performance and Impacts of Policies: High

- *Performance of Land Use Policies:* Recent development activity in the Center City has been robust. Of the 10,000-unit residential growth target set for the Downtown Urban Center between 2005 and 2024, 54 percent had been constructed and 89 percent permitted as of the last quarter of 2013. There are currently 53 projects in development along the corridor. Most are mixed-use projects with ground floor retail and upper level office, hotel, or residential use.
- *Potential Impact of Transit Investment on Regional Land Use:* Although the Seattle CBD is largely built-up, there are still a significant number of vacant or redevelopable parcels in the corridor, including older or low quality buildings, vacant lots, or surface parking. The City's development capacity model shows a potential for 11.5 million square feet of commercial development and 29,000 residential units over 10 years considering current market conditions.

Tools to Maintain or Increase Share of Affordable Housing: Medium

- Seattle has a range of plans and policies in place related to support affordable housing, using both public and private market tools. The City is working to create new policy goals that will direct the vast majority of new affordable housing into transit communities. The City's comprehensive plan includes targets for the number of new housing units by income level. Seattle makes use of incentive zoning, allowing additional residential or non-residential floor area beyond base height or FAR limits to be achieved in certain zones, including downtown, for a variety of incentives including provision of affordable housing. While projects are underway in existing streetcar corridors, no examples were provided of current or proposed projects in the Connector corridor incorporating an affordable housing element.

