

D to M Street Sounder Project
Questions and Answers, Version 1
Aug. 20, 2009

Q. How big is the berm – how tall and how wide at the base?

A. For most of the 1.2-mile route, the berm is 20 – 40 feet wide. The width depends on the height.

- The berm is highest and widest in the “bowl” between East B Street and A Street, under the I-705 underpass.
- The top of the berm in the bowl area runs just below the elevation of East 26th Street and above East 25th Street. The track alignment climbs so it can clear existing A Street mid-block by 8 feet.
- The embankment height is about 17-18 feet above the existing parking lot, and about 75 feet wide at the deepest part of the bowl.
- At the Freighthouse Square, the rails are at ground level. At the proposed overpass at Pacific Avenue, they are approximately 7-8 feet above the existing sidewalk.

SIDENOTE: The issue of berm width may be getting confused with the corridor right-of-way width, which varies throughout the 1.2-mile corridor. The right-of-way at street crossings is 50 feet. In most other areas, the right-of-way is 80 feet. However, the berm only takes up about 20 – 40 feet of the right-of-way. The right-of-way is 80 feet because, at one time, a double track design was considered. A double track is not included in Sound Transit’s or Amtrak’s 20 year plans.

Q. Will the berm block views?

A. No. The existing view corridors would remain.

- A child standing on the sidewalk on South 26th would be able to see over the rails to the Thea Foss Waterway. In addition, the berm would not exceed the height of existing structures, such as the Pink Elephant Car Wash.
- The berm and post-and-beam alternatives would be the same height.

Q. Does the cost of the berm include the costs for testing any soils that would be used to make the berm?

A. Yes, as well as geotechnical studies of the underlying soils.

Q. Which is more expensive – post-and-beam or a berm?

A. Post-and-beam is at least \$4 million more expensive.

- Re-designing the route for post-and-beam would also add 6-8 months to the project's timeline, adding even more cost.
- Delaying construction could jeopardize grant dollars that are tied to specific construction dates. \$28 million in grants has been secured to date and at least \$12 million of that has tight performance timelines.

Q. If the cost difference between the two options is small, why not do what the citizens want?

A. Four million dollars in taxpayer money is not insignificant. In addition, the earth berm is the superior alternative because:

- The earth berm offers better flexibility for future development.
- The earth berm can be landscaped and provide open space, implementing the Gateway Concept adopted by the City Council.
- The earth berm is safer: it does not facilitate transient camping or loitering like the post-and-beam design, which would provide shelter under the tracks.

Q. Have City leaders stopped listening if they already made a decision?

A. City leaders will always listen to the citizens of Tacoma.

- Sound Transit and the City held dozens of meetings, ranging from open houses to one-on-one meetings with individual business owners on this project.
- After listening, designs were changed to make the project better. And it is better—dramatically so.
- This project is long overdue and, as noted elsewhere, any additional delay could be expensive by jeopardizing grant dollars.

Q. Is post-and-beam construction the best option for economic development purposes?

A. No. While the post-and-beam may be better for low-rise developments with shallow foundations, the earth berm offers greater flexibility for mid-to high-rise development with deeper foundations adjacent to the rail line.

In addition, Sound Transit and the City of Tacoma are partners in future development:

- Future development depends on available right-of-way. Under the project's 2008 Term Sheet, the City will develop and provide guidelines for redevelopment of property once the project is constructed. Sound Transit will participate in the development of the guidelines from the perspective of ongoing rail operations and maintenance requirements.
- Sound Transit agreed to provide the City, on mutually agreeable terms, air rights over any track and related property within the rail corridor owned by Sound Transit.
- Sound Transit will consider specific future developments that request any use of the 80-foot right-of-way, including portions of the berm.

Q. Since the Sounder crossing of Pacific Avenue first started being discussed three years ago, what kinds of refinements to the project have been considered and integrated into the design?

A. Many changes have been made that make the project better.

- Originally, the Sounder regional rail extension would have crossed Pacific Avenue at grade through the 26th Street intersection.
- In 2005, Sound Transit and the City began looking at other options, including running along the north side of South Tacoma Way and crossing Pacific Avenue with an overpass.
- In late 2007, with the endorsement of the Council, the Sound Transit Board selected the overpass alignment as the preferred design alternative, even though it added some \$75 million to the cost of the project and another two years of design.
- In 2008, after considering the recommendations developed by the five month long review of the project by the City-led Project Advisory Committee, the Tacoma City Council asked that South C Street be kept open to all traffic, that A Street be kept open for pedestrian traffic, that both the Pacific and A Street overpasses include a back span treatment to enhance appearance, and that post-and-beam be used where City and Sound Transit staff consider it appropriate.
- Sound Transit has incorporated all of those recommendations into the project.

Q. Why does Tacoma get inferior products and decisions related to the Sounder going through our City compared to the construction of Sound Transit projects in other communities?

A. Although it is clear some community members hold this viewpoint, the numbers show that Tacoma has received similar benefits and decisions compared to other communities.

- Tacoma was the first city in the region to get Sounder service in 2000 and it included a revitalized Tacoma Dome Station.
- In 2003, Tacoma was the first city to receive light rail service. And it is free. Passengers pay to ride light rail in Seattle.
- The price tag on the D-M Street project alone nearly doubled, from \$76 million to \$151 million, to pay for the improvements.
- Also, importantly, the berm is superior to the post-and-beam in terms of future development, safety and security, cost, and consistency with the Gateway Concept endorsed by the Tacoma City Council.

Q. What is a general status of the project timeline?

A. Final design started in March 2009 and is scheduled to be completed by the end of this year. Construction is expected to begin in spring 2010 and be completed in spring 2012.

Q. What other issues need to be decided before construction begins?

A. Sound Transit and City staff are working to consider how passage for urban wildlife, such as raccoons and possums, can be included at the B Street gulch and also the landscaping treatment for the Gateway Concept.

Q. What suggestions from citizens have been accommodated already by Sound Transit?

A. As stated earlier, Sound Transit changed the plan to include an overpass over Pacific Avenue, even though it added some \$75 million to the cost of the project and another two years of design.

- Sound Transit complied with City and citizen suggestions by changing the design to keep South C Street open to all traffic and A Street open for pedestrian traffic.
- Sound Transit complied with City and citizen suggestions that both the Pacific and A Street overpasses include a back span treatment to

enhance appearance, and that post-and-beam be used where City and Sound Transit staff consider appropriate.

- Sound Transit is working with the City of Tacoma to extend the Water Ditch trail and with a biologist to address the passage of urban wildlife through the B Street gulch.

Q. At this point in the process, what can the City of Tacoma do to influence the design of the project?

A. The city of Tacoma, with citizen input, has already had a major influence in the design of the project. Design plans were changed significantly, and they are being carried forward to completion with the requested changes incorporated.

Q. Don't earth berms weigh a lot and could greatly affect the flow of ground water in the aquifer causing unexpected flooding? The B Street gulch is part of a large urban watershed and water flows underground and downhill through it and eventually into Puget Sound.

A. Earth berms will not impact the water shed or groundwater flow. Surface water that would flow to Puget Sound will be managed by installing culverts.

- Groundwater beneath the B Street gulch flows in an aquifer located about 17 to more than 30 feet below the ravine's bottom.
- The soil in this zone is ancient, very dense sand and gravel. In its history, this glacial soil unit has experienced loads much greater (i.e. thousands of feet of ice) than those imposed by the proposed embankment.
- The aquifer's carrying capacity and risk of flooding would remain unchanged.

Q. Hasn't the B Street gulch been identified as an earthquake hazard area?

A. The potential for damage from seismic events, including settlement, will be incorporated into the design.

- Seismic settlement (induced by liquefaction or ground shaking) would be experienced only during a major earthquake, and the

impact would be felt over the entire region. Following a major event, an earth berm would be easier to repair.

- Based on soils testing, saturated soils beneath the ravine are not considered susceptible to liquefaction.