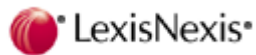


Top Transit News

Sound Transit Should Study Rail Alternatives

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No one disputes that Sound Transit faces a tough challenge designing a new commuter rail route from Tacoma to Lakewood. No one claims that Tacoma architects who have suggested alternative routes across Pacific Avenue and up South Tacoma Way have answers that will work. But Sound Transit owes it to Tacoma to take the architects' proposed alternatives seriously enough to study them.

That's all Tacoma City Councilwoman Julie Anderson, who represents the city on Sound Transit's board of directors, will be asking today at a meeting of the agency's finance committee.

Anderson will ask the committee to approve spending \$20,000 to \$30,000 or so to include a preliminary assessment of two community-based alternatives in Sound Transit's study of its "preferred alternative" route.

It's a fair and reasonable request, and Pierce County Executive John Ladenburg, who happens to be Sound Transit chairman, should add his weight behind it.

The challenge for Sound Transit is getting its rail line from from East D Street at Freighthouse Square, across Pacific Avenue and up South Tacoma Way to South M Street, where the grade would return to level. Sound Transit calls this the "D Street to M Street" segment.

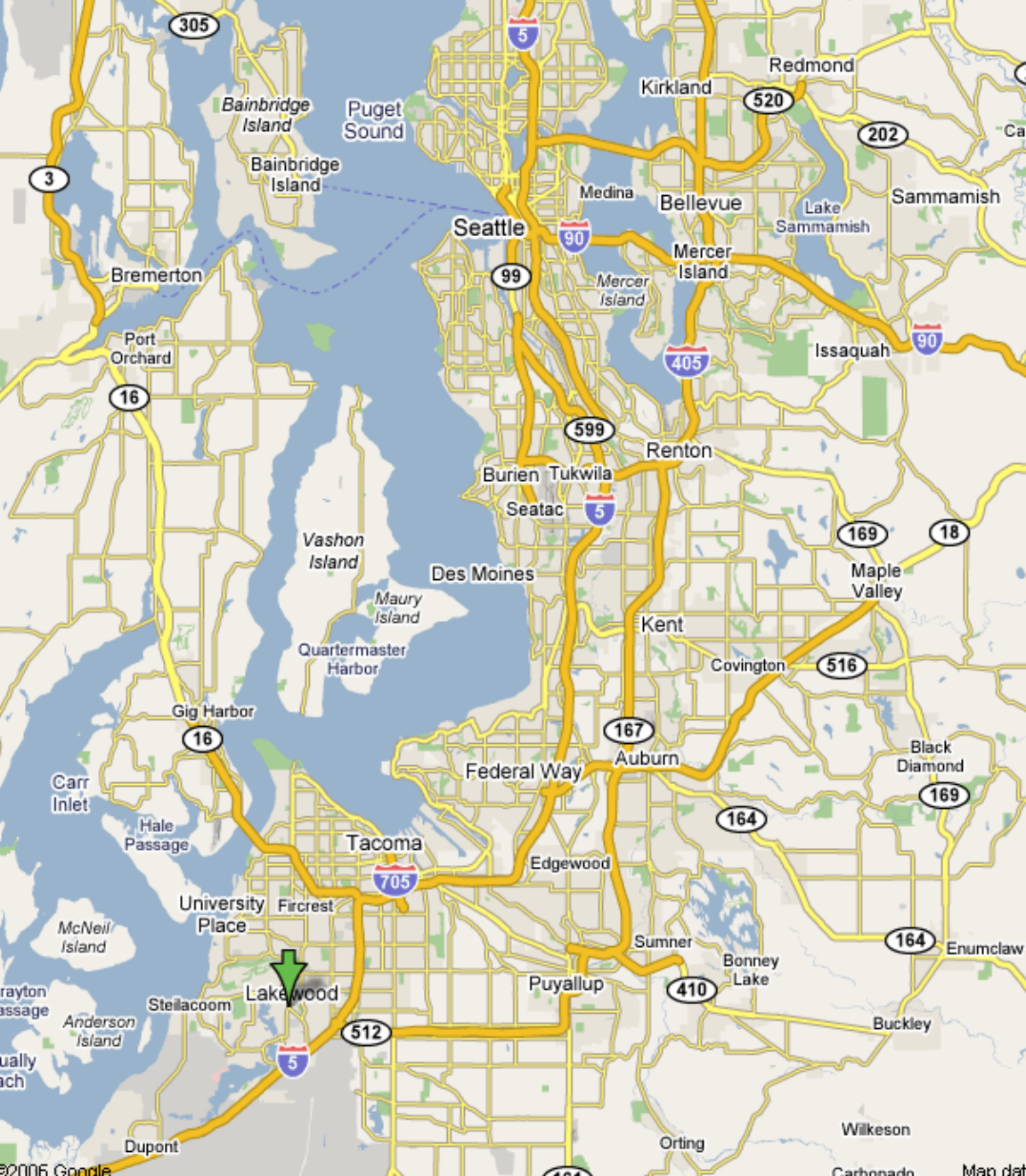
The segment is fraught with difficulties because where Pacific Avenue meets South Tacoma Way is a busy and complicated intersection. A grade-level rail crossing would seriously disrupt traffic.

Sound Transit is planning to lower Pacific Avenue so it would pass underneath an overpass for the rail line. While that arrangement solves one problem, it would adversely impact a number of businesses in the area and isolate the Tacoma Rescue Mission. The mission would be cut off from South Tacoma Way by an elevated rail bed. And it's expensive. The cost of that segment and mitigation would easily top \$20 million - enough to give Sound Transit leaders heartburn.

A team of Tacoma architects looking for creative alternatives that might cause less disruption have shown the City Council and Sound Transit managers several possible alternatives, two of which the agency's engineers think merit a closer look.

But some Sound Transit board members declared during a briefing last week that the agency ought to save money and time and stick to its single-route study, with a final decision being made early next year.

That means it's up to the finance committee today to at least assure that the architects' alternatives get more than a cursory look. If those alternatives are demonstrably impractical, so be it. But Sound Transit should do enough homework to prove it before dismissing them out of hand.



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