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FEASIBILITY STUDY'S EASTSIDE RAIL DOLLAR PROJECTIONS TOO HIGH

Cascadia Center Praises Puget Sound Regional Council and Sound Transit Effort, Rebutts Implementation Costs

SEATTLE, WASH. (Nov. 19, 2008)—When the Puget Sound Regional Council and Sound Transit present their draft feasibility findings for commuter rail cost and ridership estimates this morning in Seattle, they might have some persuading to do. The Cascadia Center of Discovery Institute, which has analyzed the Eastside's BNSF corridor extensively, says the cost estimates in the draft Phase II Feasibility Report are much higher than necessary to make the corridor operational.

"PSRC and Sound Transit are conducting a very thoughtful assessment of the Eastside corridor," says Bruce Agnew, Cascadia Center's director. "We're generally pleased with the draft results, but we think the cost estimate outlined in the Phase II draft is higher than it needs to be, which unfortunately leaves the door wide open for misinterpretation."

The draft Phase II Feasibility Report estimates that it could cost \$1.23 billion to fully build out the corridor that would have an initial ridership of about 5,000 riders per day. Cascadia Center estimates the costs for the entire corridor, which runs from Snohomish in the north to Renton in the south, wouldn't exceed \$300 million. The cost of rehabilitating the existing corridor should "easily be less than one third of the Feasibility Report estimate," says Agnew.

The \$1.23 billion Feasibility Report figure includes full replacement of sub-grade, structures, track, ties, signals and crossing—not all of which may be necessary. According to the study, the estimate "represents a full menu of potential project elements that may all not necessarily be included in a final, constructed project." The study released Monday also estimates that a companion trail in the corridor could range from \$276-\$360 million depending on its width. That number is much higher than the national average for trails. The Washington, D.C.-based Rails-to-Trails Conservancy estimates in their "Trails for the 21st Century" publication that the typical 12-foot trail costs in the U.S. range from \$227,000 to just over \$1 million per mile.

Cascadia Center has compared four rail systems similar to the Eastside corridor and which were recently built on rehabilitated freight rail tracks in New Jersey, Oregon, Texas and California. Two of those systems (New Jersey's River Line and San Diego, Calif.'s Oceanside-Escondido line) are in operation. The other two (Portland, Ore.'s Westside Express and Austin, Texas' Metrorail) will be operational early next year. Those systems' per mile costs range from \$3.5 to nearly \$22 million. Some of those systems have qualified for federal assistance and have ridership numbers (actual and estimated) similar to the Eastside's projections. Cascadia Center says that a rail system comparison chart in the draft Phase II Feasibility Report might be confusing because it compares the costs of different types of rail systems—not interurban commuter rail that could be developed on the Eastside.

"The current cost estimates in the draft Phase II study are extravagant," Agnew says. "But, interestingly, even if the \$1.23 billion estimate turned out to be accurate, the full build out of the Eastside corridor would easily fall within the range of other new systems at \$26-\$28 million per mile. We urge PSRC and Sound Transit to continue to give serious consideration to how the corridor can be operational but at a more reasonable cost."

The final feasibility study report is due to the state legislature in February 2009.

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CASCADIA CENTER OF DISCOVERY INSTITUTE is known for its leadership in transportation and development issues in the Cascadia Corridor, Puget Sound and the U.S.-Canadian cross-border realm. Funded in large part by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Cascadia is proud of its reputation as an independent voice for solutions to regional and national challenges, a voice shared through policy analyses, testimony to government bodies, and through forums and conferences designed to solve complex policy matters. More at: www.cascadiaproject.org



Interurban Commuter Rail System Comparisons

	NJ Transit-River Line	Portland Westside Express	Austin Metrorail	N. County San Diego Oceanside/Escondido	Eastside Rail Corridor
Length	34 mi. plus 7 passing sidings	14.7 mi. plus 3 passing sidings	32 mi. plus 3 passing sidings	22 mi. plus 3 passing sidings	42 mi. plus 5 passing sidings
Stations	20	5	9	15	16
Vehicles	20	4	6	12	16
Speed (mph)	65 max	60 top, 37 average	75 top	72 top, 55 max	60 max
Ridership Pass/day	10,000 actual	3,000-4,000 projected	1,700-2,000 projected	7,600 actual	5,000 projected
Cost	\$450M * (\$13.2M per mile)	\$117.3M (\$59M fed) (\$8M per mile)	\$112M (\$3.5M per mile)	\$484M** (\$150M fed) \$22M per mile	\$1.23B (\$29M per mile)
Opening Date	2004	Feb. 2009	3/30/2009	Mar. 2008	

* Design, build, operate and maintain (DBOM) construction by private consortium

- Additional \$152M to operate for 10 years
- Plus interest for 10 years on NJ development bonds
- 6 major crossings of Delaware River tributaries
- NJ Transit has added additional park and rides, station areas and bus service since opening
- Operates like light rail on city streets in Camden & Trenton

** Includes 2.7 mi. of new ROW to serve directly onto Cal State San Marcos campus